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Pre- and Post-Civil Right Changes and Generational Conflicts
in Four Novels by Ernest J. Gaines

Občansko-právní Změny před a po Americké Občanské Válce
a Generační Konflikty ve Čtyřech Románech Ernesta J. Gainese

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Tímto bych chtěla ze srdce poděkovat panu
PhDr. Christopheru Koyovi, M.A., Ph.D.,
za jeho odbornou pomoc, cenné rady, trpělivost a ochotu.
Dále děkuji celé své rodině za důvěru a podporu během studia.

Abstract

This diploma thesis deals with the generational conflicts predominantly within the African-American population and the Civil Rights changes before and after the American Civil War as they appear in four novels written by Ernest James Gaines, an African-American writer. It analyzes the differences in opinions, behavior and life values between young and old African-American generations, their limited opportunities, the fight for freedom (or reluctance to do so), and confronting injustice. As well as the personal conflicts the thesis illustrates the slow and almost imperceptible changes within the American Civil Right system which, step by step, led the black people to become full-bodied citizens of the United States of America.

Anotace

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá generačními konflikty týkajícími se převážně afroamerického obyvatelstva a občansko-právních změn před a po Americké občanské válce tak, jak se objevují ve čtyřech románech Ernesta Jamese Gainese, amerického spisovatele afrického původu. Práce analyzuje rozdíly v názorech, chování a životní hodnoty mladé a starší afroamerické generace, jejich omezené možnosti a boj za svobodu (nebo i neochotu tak činit) tvář v tvář nespravedlnosti. Taktéž jako osobní konflikty, práce ilustruje pomalé a téměř nepatrné změny v americkém občanském právním systému, který krok za krokem vedl k tomu, aby se černoši stali plnohodnotnými občany Spojených států amerických.

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1.0. Introduction

This diploma thesis deals with the generational conflicts predominantly within the African-American population and the Civil Rights changes before and after the American Civil War (1861 – 1965) as they appear in four novels written by Ernest James Gaines, an African-American writer, a partly victim and at the same time a witness of the racial segregation and injustice in the United States of America. Although all the novels selected to my diploma thesis are concerned with various topics and people, they still possess some common elements.

I have always inclined to literature as my favorite subject. When I was obliged to select the theme for my diploma thesis, I knew it would be a topic from the literary field. In the lessons of the beginnings of the American literature, I have been enchanted by the slave narratives as for their reality so for the creators who found the courage to tell the world the truth about their difficult life, and not only theirs. This kind of literature shocked the white society in the 19th century and supported the abolitionist movement against slavery. Thus I did not hesitate when I was introduced to my current theme.

I hoped to find out in this diploma thesis the differences in opinions, behavior and life values between young and old African-American generations that led into heartbreaking familiar conflicts and disappointment. At the same time, I aimed to show the slow and imperceptible changes within the American Civil Right system that almost nobody was aware of them, the real treatment of black people, their limited opportunities, their inner personal struggles, hopelessness, their fight for freedom, justice, rights and appreciation, and also class differences inside the black race.

At the very beginning of the diploma thesis, I introduced briefly the author of the four novels my thesis analyzes. Ernest J. Gaines has found inspiration in his own life on a southern plantation and in California, and in different persons he has met in his life. This is the reason his works are so real, powerful and convincing.

The main part of the study is devoted to the analyses of each novel. The first novel put to the exploration is “Catherine Carmier”, “The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman”, then “A Gathering of Old Men” and the work is concluded by “A Lesson before Dying”. In each analysis I shortly introduce the novel’s plot to show what the work is about. Then I explore the motifs of the stories and to focus on the generational conflicts and Civil Right changes, the main topic of the thesis, in the conclusion at the very end of each analysis.

The most important thoughts and facts are summarized in the conclusion of my thesis. The conclusion does not describe the generational conflicts and civil right changes according to each of the novels, which the chapter analysis of each work does, but rather shows the common and general elements they have together. The primary and secondary literature I used to support my discoveries is placed at the very end of the thesis.

1.1. About the author Ernest James Gaines

All stories Ernest J. Gaines has written are set around the River Lake plantation in Pointe Coupee Parish in Louisiana where he was born in 1933. His parents left for California where they worked. At that time many young people left the plantations and moved to large cities because there was not enough work for them after the mechanization of farms. Gaines stayed on the plantation and was raised by his crippled aunt who was confined to wheelchair and never walked in her life, but still worked very much. His Aunt Augusteen Jefferson later became a moral model for his well-known novel *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* to whom he also dedicated this work.

When Gaines was just an eight-year old child, he started working in the field, picking cotton, because he came from a sharecropper family. “I went into the fields when I was about the age of eight, or maybe nine. I think my first job was picking up potatoes.” (pg. 7; Lowe, 1995) On the plantation

he attended a church school which did not last the whole year but five or six months because of harvesting. After the World War II, his parents sent for him and he left the South to be educated. In the South, there was no school for young black men. Gaines missed the southern plantation a lot. "My body went to California in 1948 but my soul stayed there in the South." (Gaines, Radio Interview, 2007) He spent lot of time reading in the library where he noticed that there were no stories about black people from American plantations. "[...] I wanted to read about the rural South." (pg. 59; Lowe, 1995) "So, initially I read the Russians because of their interest in peasant life." (pg. 28; Lowe, 1995) The lack of stories about the environment in which Gaines grew up led into his decision to become a writer, since he felt he could make an original contribution to American literature.

Firstly he wrote few short stories for the college magazine. In 1957 Gaines obtained a degree in literature at San Francisco State University and gained a writing fellowship to Stanford University. He published his first novel, *Catherine Carmier*, in 1964. "With *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* in 1971, Gaines began to have some success." (pg. 280; Lowe, 1995) *A Gathering of Old Men* comes from 1983 and his most recent novel from 1993 is called *A Lesson before Dying*. There are many novels and short stories written by E.J. Gaines, but I have chosen the four dealing with my Diploma thesis.

Ernest J. Gaines admits that his work and style has been influenced by many worldwide authors. "Hemingway and Faulkner are my two heroes, I suppose, in American literature." (pg. 108; Love, 1995) Gaines has created Bayonne, a fictional region in Louisiana, after Faulkner's idea of Yoknapatawpha. He was also impressed by Faulkner's usage of language in his novels. „But I think Faulkner has influenced me more than any other writer...“(pg. 44; Lowe, 1995) Gaines' earlier works were inspired by Russian authors. "My *Catherine Carmier* is almost written on the structure of *Fathers and Sons*," (pg. 60; Lowe, 1995) the masterpiece by Ivan Turgenev. Also the Greek tragedy has its own place in Gaines' works. "The Greek tragedies were always limited in space and time. Most of my work, at least

before Miss Jane Pittman, if it did not place within a few hours it took place within a few days.” (pg. 29; Lowe, 1995)

Gaines was awarded many prizes for his powerful works. Currently, Gaines and his wife live in Louisiana where Gaines teaches creative writing at the University of Louisiana.

2.0. *Catherine Carmier*

“People like Catherine Carmier cannot determine their way of living, it is fated that they must live a certain way.” Ernest J. Gaines

2.1. Introduction

The title of the novel indicates a woman called Catherine would be important character, the heroine, in the novel’s plot. Written from the point of view of a young man, the girl becomes his sad and heartbreaking experience. *Catherine Carmier* is a complicated story set in the Louisiana countryside about a forbidden and impossible love.

White people are partly pushed out from the plot of *Catherine Carmier*. The conflict takes place within one race, the black race where racially-mixed Creoles, unaccepted by whites, look down on the darker blacks. Except for love and hate inside black race, the novel offers a view on dysfunctional family relationships and alienation thanks to a ten-year absence.

2.2. Plot Overview

Part I

After ten years of living and studying in San Francisco, California, Jackson Bradley, a black twenty-two-year old man, returns to countryside near Bayonne where he used to live with his Aunt Charlotte, his benefactor. Although he comes back in order to think about his future and then to leave, his aunt has lived in a ten-year hope, waiting for her boy to return and stay at home forever.

At the same time, in the same bus, a Creole girl called Lillian Carmier comes home unwillingly to visit her family. When she was a child, she had been sent away to be educated and brought up as a lady. Jackson is also awaited by Brother, a friend of his, while Lillian is watched for by her elder sister Catherine. When the two almost strangers get off the bus, Jackson meets with Catherine and their forgotten flame of love is blown up again.

Jackson's aunt welcomes him with love and tears on her face together with Mary Louise, Jackson's child's girlfriend, who still loves him. Jackson is surprised when hearing what has changed in the village. The Cajuns have taken over the land and the only colored farmer was Catherine's father, Raoul Carmier. When Lily comes home, their meeting is cold and she tells them it is her last visit because her relationships with her parents were minimal. The only familiar one she loves is her sister Catherine and that is why she has been trying to persuade her to leave together with her small son Nelson.

Della Carmier, Catherine's and Lillian's mother is depressed by the relationship with her younger daughter. At the same time she is haunted by the memory of her son Mark who died ten years ago when a tree fell on him. Only Raoul knows if it was an accident or a murder because Mark was not his legitimate son. Mark was born from Della's love affair with a black man. She was unfaithful to her husband because she felt alone because Raoul had prohibited her from meeting with the black people from the community.

Jackson does not feel comfortable in the countryside because his ten-year absence has torn his bonds from his aunt and the friends. From his former teacher, Madame Bayonne, Jackson learns that the Carmiers are the last colored farmers struggling against the Cajuns, and she also warns him about Catherine. Since Jackson has come, he is trying to tell Aunt Charlotte that he will not stay but he is a coward. One morning Jackson confesses that he does not attend church. Charlotte is disappointed in him and stops talking to him.

Part II

One day Jackson sees Catherine with her child. Jackson learns that she is not married because Raoul ran Bernard, Nelson's father, out. Jackson starts meeting with Catherine secretly and having sexual relations with her. She feels bad about it and suddenly she stops seeing Jackson. On the third evening, a furious Jackson comes to their yard, quarrels with Catherine and finishes their relationship.

Enraged from the quarrel, Jackson tells his aunt about his intention to leave and Charlotte falls ill. All of Charlotte's friends put the blame on him. Charlotte, disappointed by Jackson, decides to devote her life to God. A few days later, Jackson receives a letter from Lilian about a dance in Bayonne on Sunday night, asking him to come.

Part III

Raoul takes Catherine and Lilian to the dance in Bayonne and stays in his sister's house waiting for them to come back by midnight. Jackson appears at the dance and meets with Catherine. They go outside together and Jackson asks her to leave with him.

The Cajuns have paid two blacks to let Raoul know about Catherine and Jackson with the intention to hurt him. Raoul does not believe them when they say to him about the young couple near the dance hall, but then he takes his car and his revolver and drives to catch them, but finds nothing. He thinks she might leave with Jackson and hurries home where he finds Catherine taking out her suitcases. Raoul wants to stop her and fights with Jackson who defeats him.

When Catherine sees her father so weak, she promises Jackson to come to him as soon as her father does not need her. However, she never does so.

2.3. Analysis of Motifs in the Novel

Catherine Carmier, published in 1964, is the first Gaines's novel, whereby Gaines, influenced by William Faulkner, creates a fictional region

called Bayonne where he sets all his works. This territory is based on the Louisiana plantation and its surroundings where he was born and spent his childhood.

The plot of the novel is divided into three parts and set in the times of Civil Rights movement when whites and the Cajuns feared the beginning of demonstrations provoked by the discontent and rebellious blacks. It is obvious already from the first chapter of the "Part One" when the entire plantation was informed about the homecoming of Jackson Bradley. Brother, Jackson's former best friend, was questioned by two curious Cajuns because "white people were suspicious and afraid of strange Negroes; and they were more suspicious and more afraid if they knew that those Negroes came from the North". (pg. 6; Gaines, 1993) Additionally, Mr. Gaines acknowledges the set of the time: "*Catherine Carmier* takes place in sixty two." (pg. 188; Lowe, 1995)

The blacks who came from the northern states were often educated and "infected" with the revolutionary ideas about civil equality, justice and rights that sprouted in the almost "non-racist" North which meant a dangerous threat for whites. Those blacks would disturb the long-lasting established system of white social superiority which kept the blacks humiliated. By propagating these "unwanted" opinions of equality, leaders appealed to other blacks from the plantation communities to stand and fight for their rights.

Although *Catherine Carmier* is considered a love story, the first part of the novel (consisting in twenty-two chapters) describes very little about their relationship. It largely illustrates the relationships not only within families but also within the black community, feelings, pride and at the same time also disappointments, and the changed situation on the plantation.

Jackson, the main protagonist of the novel, returns to the countryside plantation where he was born and raised by his Aunt Charlotte after his parents left to work in California. The reason he comes back after ten years of absence is to think about his future possibilities because he has just graduated from the university. He does not desire to return to the South

because he is haunted inside by the injustice, but the North has disappointed him, too. "No, the South was not home, it had not been home for a long time now. But he had chosen the South because he knew people there, and because he had to go somewhere to think for a while." (pg. 95; Gaines, 1993)

The North always represented hope for black people and they pictured it as a paradise, a fair world where whites and blacks were equal and lived together, in peace and mutual respect. "But he had found out that it [the North] had its faults as well as the South. Only the faults there did not strike you as directly and as quickly, [...]." (pg. 91; Gaines, 1993) Just like the southerners, the northerners discriminated against them. At the beginning, he did not notice it but little by little he started to pay attention to it. His family, formed by Jackson's mother and his stepfather, had to live in worse conditions just because of their black skin.

He was not told that he could not come into the restaurant to eat. But when he did come inside, he was not served as promptly and with the same courtesy as were the others. When he went into a store to buy a pair of pants or a pair of socks, he was treated in the same manner as he had been in the restaurant. And when he and his parents were looking in the papers for another place to rent, he remembered how his mother's finger had made an imprint under each place that said "colored," [...]. The imprint under that word, because it was made in San Francisco, would be imprinted on his mind the rest of his life. (pg.92, 93; Gaines, 1993)

The discrimination was not so strong and visible as in the South but Jackson felt it and was not able to accept it; and Brother notices it almost immediately after picking Jackson up at the bus stop with words: "He just won't let go." (pg. 26; Gaines, 1993). Brother is one of those who had forgotten about the injustice and moved on with their lives but on the contrary, Jackson is still strongly bothered by this racial injustice, so he rejects the humiliation and remains angry, but feels hopeless about it. The desperation haunts him everywhere and his heart demands justice.

Madame Bayonne, Jackson's former teacher from the plantation who is not too popular among local people for her eccentricity, understands him well. She represents a kind of guide to Jackson on the southern plantation. Madame Bayonne has known him since he was a small child and yet he has been looking for something. "I know what you're looking for. Dignity, truth – you want to make something out of a senseless world." (pg. 81; Gaines, 1993) But Jackson does not know where to look for it. He feels betrayed by the promises about the North. "They promised us, Madame Bayonne, they promised us. They beckoned and beckoned and beckoned. But when we went up there, we found all a pile of lies. There was no truth in any of it. No truth at all." (pg. 80, 81; Gaines, 1993)

When he comes to the South, he finds out that his arrival is not the best solution for deciding about his future life. He discovers that the bonds to his aunt, to Brother and to other people, have suffered serious damage caused by his ten-year separation. He is not able to feel the same way as he did before. There is a deep chasm between him and the entire community partly for he cannot understand how they could reconcile with the dehumanizing system in the South while he cannot stand it in the North.

The lack of feeling is made much deeper by the confrontation with his aunt. Charlotte, the representative of the old generation, is a deeply religious woman who boundlessly loves her nephew. She is enthusiastic about Jackson's return but still she fears that she might lose him for the sake of the current situation when "most of the young men and women his age were leaving the country for the city" (pg. 35; Gaines, 1993) because of the lack of work on the plantation.

Although Charlotte is very proud of Jackson (for he is the first person from her family who has got university education), she is awaiting a kind of retaliation for her sacrifice. Like other old women in Gaines's novels, Charlotte feels the necessity to control and command Jackson. It is obvious from her behavior when Jackson asks for a beer. "[...] she was still against his drinking the beer" (pg. 69; Gaines, 1993) which forces him to have a coke, or when she is unpacking Jackson's suitcase and discovers a deck of

playing cards. Her manners sound reasonable because she justifies it by telling Jackson that some members of her family were gamblers and drunkards.

Charlotte is too obsessed by her nephew that she becomes selfish. She interrogates Mary Louise, Jackson's child's girlfriend, if she still loves him and if she thinks he still loves her. But Charlotte just assures herself that Mary Louise is not any threat to her. "She had sacrificed too much of her life to educate him to let anyone take him from her. Now that he was back, there would be no one but the two of them." (pg. 34; Gaines, 1993)

When Jackson acknowledges that he has stopped attending the church, his aunt is shocked. Her faith is, after Jackson, the second most important thing in her life and she has got no comprehension for that. She even smacks Jackson for saying: "I haven't forgotten God. But Christ, the church, I don't believe in that bourgeois farce-". (pg. 100; Gaines, 1993) He has left his belief because when he felt hopeless about the situation of black people in the United States, he did not "find solace in the church as he had done when he lived in the South." (pg. 94; Gaines, 1993)

Aunt Charlotte has based her life on planning Jackson's future and she does not expect opposition from him. That is why she becomes strongly disillusioned when Jackson confesses her his intention to leave again. The miserable aunt claims his promise he made before he left to California. Jackson tries to defend himself by saying that he was only a child and it was a long time ago. But a promise is a promise according to Charlotte. When Jackson tries to explain the trouble with Aunt Charlotte to Madame Bayonne who is a wise old woman, she answers him:

People like that never change. She remembered you said a long time ago that you would come back. She doesn't pay any attention to what is happening around her. These things mean nothing. The only important thing in her life was that you were coming back here one day. [...] But you did say it. And she has been living in that dream ever since. (pg. 70; Gaines, 1993)

Jackson's hopeless feelings are supported by getting to know the reality about the plantation. Since he left, the Cajuns have taken over the land. They kept asking for more each year and the owner, Bud Grover, took the land from the black people and gave it to the Cajuns. "They have wrangled and wrangled until they have gotten everybody else to quit farming." (pg. 73; Gaines, 1993) Jackson knows that the black people were as good as the Cajuns in sharecropping but that was the matter of race. When the farms of African-Americans became too small to support Grover, he quit them and the Cajuns received the rest of the land. Some people have stayed working for the Cajuns but because they had good equipment and tractors, they have needed a smaller number of workers. That is the reason many blacks, especially young, have left for the city.

Old blacks stay because they have the privilege of staying for free if they want. They are not obliged to pay rent; they do not have their own farms but are privileged to keep a garden "as long as you keep your nose clean". (pg. 78; Gaines, 1993) It means as long as they keep their mouths closed and do not complain. They are not interested in moving away because of their age. They are reconciled with their humiliating position in American society and prefer to live the rests of their lives in peace.

In spite of the Cajuns' superiority in southern agriculture, there is still the last colored man who does not want to give up farming. Raoul Carmier, Catherine's and Lillian's father, carries on struggling against the racism on the plantation but for his personal reasons although he knows it is killing him. The entire community is aware of the Cajuns playing with him. "They're letting him run for a while – the way you play with a fish before jerking him out of the water." (pg. 74; Gaines, 1993)

The main reason Raoul continues working is his pride that complicates his life, not only in the fields where hard work drains his body, but also in his relationships toward his wife and daughters. The Carmiers embody one of the most important motifs in the novel which is the class difference within the black race because of the light skin and mixed blood.

Raoul Carmier is a strong man who feels very proud of his white ancestors. He comes from the Creole origin. Creoles were “descendants of early French and Spanish settlers” (pg. 482; Wolff, 2006) mixed with American Indians. They were often light-skinned and Catholics. They might have also some black ancestry but Creoles almost always deny that and make a special point to separate themselves from African Americans. Raoul goes on working hard to keep up with the Cajuns, white farmers, and at the same time to set himself apart from blacks because he despises them. “The white man will not let Raoul compete with him because of that drop of Negro blood, and at the same time he has put the Negro in such a position that Raoul would rather die than compete with him.” (pg. 117; Gaines, 1993)

Raoul’s position in society was not chosen by him, and so he is another victim of the past. In the past, one of his ancestors concluded that because of his light skin he deserved better treatment but “thought he was as white as any white man, he still had a drop of Negro blood in him, and because of that single drop of blood, it would be impossible to compete side by side with the white man.” (pg. 116; Gaines, 1993) That is why this Creole family has become attached to the land. The land has given them everything they needed to survive and has become a place where they were not forced to compete with others. Raoul is just bearing a myth from the past. “His love for his land, his hatred for the white man, the contempt with which he looks upon the black man has passed from one generation to the other.” (pg. 116; Gaines, 1993)

According to the Creole tradition, Raoul separates his family from the black community and this lack of social relations leads into deep estrangement between him and his wife Della. The Carmiers comprises of a dysfunctional family in rural Louisiana.

Della Carmier was a dark and a very sociable woman but after she married Raoul and moved to his house, he forbade her to associate with other blacks. “One day she was talking to you, the other day she was not. Everyone knew what had caused the change – Raoul; and everyone accepted it. Only she could not.” (pg. 114; Gaines, 1993) Raoul was still

working to demonstrate his qualities to white people and Della, in her loneliness, was looking for someone to satisfy her needs. She found Bayou Water to save her from the inner solitude she felt. However Bayou Water ran away after he found out she was pregnant.

Della did not want Bayou Water. She did not love Bayou Water. But she needed Bayou Water. Not necessarily Bayou Water, but someone. Though Raoul had made her stop leaning on that gate, he did not think one moment about staying there and being with her himself. [...] Raoul has been Della's husband only by law. Other than that, it's been the land. Not Della he loved when he married her – the land. Della was brought there to cook his food, to bear his children, to see that his clothes were kept half clean. (pg. 115, 116; Gaines, 1993)

From Della's infidelity, a dark son was born and called Mark. Della already had a girl, Catherine, with Raoul who grew up together with Mark. The coexistence with her younger brother and the fact that she spent part of her childhood together with Jackson, although in secret, influenced her relationship toward black people. She does not feel superior and likes talking with them like her mother once did but the black people from the community are cold towards her because they fear her father.

When Raoul discovered that Mark was not his son, he had become very disappointed by his wife and has found love and sureness only in his elder daughter Catherine. He has become obsessed by her. Madame Bayonne explains the situation of the Carmiers to Jackson: "From the day he found out that Della's second child was not his, Catherine has been the only person in the world to mean anything to him at all." (pg. 114; Gaines, 1993) Mr. Gaines clarifies the relationship between Raoul and Catherine in the book of his conversations. "Raoul depends on Catherine but not for sexuality, and surely she has no desire for him. After his wife becomes unfaithful, she's just dead, and his whole life is for his daughter." (pg. 161; Lowe, 1995)

Closely before Jackson Bradley left the plantation, he remembers that Mark was killed. Some people believed it was a murder; some thought it was an accident. "One day while Raoul and the boy were sawing down a tree in the woods, the tree suddenly made a false turn, crushing the boy into the ground." (pg. 16; Gaines, 1993) This tragic event has ruined Della who has become a ghost in the house and ever since Catherine had done the housework around the yard. Della loved Mark with all her heart and his death still lingers in the air because Raoul will never let her forget about it and she does not want to wipe the memories of her son out.

When the third child, Lillian was born, "she was less than a month old when she was taken to New Orleans by one of Raoul's sisters to be brought up as a lady." (pg. 16; Gaines, 1993) Although Raoul knew that Lillian was his own daughter, he has sent her away in order to punish Della for what she had done with Bayou Water. Raoul did not care about Lily because his only loved daughter has been Catherine. "Della is no more than a servant around that house, and that other one [Lillian] doesn't mean anything to him at all." (pg. 114; Gaines, 1993)

The isolation Lillian has suffered from her family has caused her to have practically no relationship with her parents, which is proved by their limited conversations and her rejection to welcome her parents coming back from the field. Lily cannot forget that they have "erased" her from their lives. "They're strangers to me. They're more than strangers to me. They're two people I can't stand to be alone with. [...] I didn't walk out of this house – remember that. I was taken away from here – sent away from here – traded off like a dog." (pg. 47; Gaines, 1993)

Lillian tends to leave the plantation and the entire Creole world and never come back but she loves Catherine. In spite of their positive relationship, she does not agree with the way Catherine lives "imprisoned" with her son Nelson in countryside without a future and tries to persuade her to leave. She is angry about Catherine's loneliness because her father will never allow her to fall in love nor even to leave. Yet the problem is that Catherine boundlessly loves and admires her father Raoul. It is something

Lillian can never understand because her family bonds are disturbed, and almost do not exist.

Lillian is furious about her father's outdated manners because although she inclines to whites she knows they would never accept them. She cannot see her father struggling in a lost fight. "Daddy's world is over with. The farming out there – one man trying to buck against that whole family of Cajuns – is outdated." (pg. 40; Gaines, 1993)

She has inherited pride and superior position to blacks from her father as well as from the people who raised her. And although she is not absolutely black or white, she prefers whites.

I'm not black, Cathy. I hate black. I hate black worse than the whites hate it. I have black friends, but only at a distance. I feel for my mother, but only at a distance. I don't let my black friends come close to me. I don't let her come close to me. [...] I just can't open my heart out to them. I haven't opened my heart out to that white world either. But I'm going there because I must go somewhere. I can't stand in the middle of the road any longer. [...] Daddy and his sisters can't understand this. They want us to be Creoles. Creoles. What a joke. Today you're one way or the other; you're white or you're black. There is no in-between. (pg. 48; Gaines, 1993)

Catherine believes that the explanation of Mark's tragic death would clear up the numb situation in their family and change Lillian's life. But Della is against it because she is afraid, Lily would hate her and Raoul even more and it would be too risky. Della fears that Lillian would understand it like the people in the quarters who believed Mark's death was a murder although Catherine persuades her to tell Lillian that it was an accident. "I don't ever want you to tell her. No. Because if you told her about him, then you'll have to tell her how he died." (pg. 56; Gaines, 1993)

Della is partly convinced inside that Mark's sad end was not only an accident. But she keeps quiet for she loves Raoul and does not want to hurt him. She is reconciled with the loss of her only son.

When Catherine informs her mother about Jackson's return, Della intuits that the old, forbidden and forgotten feeling is awakened in Catherine's

heart again. She warns her daughter: "Don't you be the one now. Don't you be the one to hurt him." (pg. 59; Gaines, 1993) She might refer to her foregone affair by which she has already hurt him and she knows that Catherine's relationship with that dark young man would do the same. She remembers the two children lovers playing together.

Della is aware that her husband's only weakness is his daughter, like Achilles' heel. He cannot let Catherine go and wants her to stay all her life. He prefers her to be a single mother without a father for her son than to share her love with another man. He is a tragic and selfish figure that banished his own wife.

The second part of the novel is largely interested in Jackson's developing relationship with the beautiful Carmier girl. In sixteen chapters, Gaines describes how they meet at night in fear that someone might catch them. The only person who supports them is Catherine's sister. Although she does not like blacks, Lillian loves Catherine too much to impede their love. Catherine knows that their affair is not right but she cannot stop her feelings.

However, poor Catherine goes through an inner dilemma. She is in love with Jackson but she feels culpable concerning her father. "Every time I look at a man, I feel like a bitch." (pg. 132; Gaines, 1993) She admires and loves her father for he does not give up his fight. He is the strongest man in the world for her; the last colored man holding out against the Cajuns and not prepared to let them take over his fields. "He was going to give them hell before their tractors plowed dirt in his face." (pg. 134; Gaines, 1993) But still she cannot decide. "It was impossible to belong to both at the same time, and it was just as impossible to belong to one and not to the other." (pg. 136; Gaines, 1993)

One day, Raoul did not come home at the same time he used to and Catherine became worried about him. She feared he might have been at least injured or dead for their long-standing rivalry with the Cajuns. "Maybe he was hurt, suffering back there alone. He would not call for help from either the blacks or whites. He was too proud for that." (pg. 151;

Gaines, 1993) She remembered that her Grandfather Robert Carmier had disappeared after he had had a conflict with one of the Cajun farmers. "They had proved this when her grandfather stood up against them. She knew they would not hesitate to do the same thing to Raoul." (pg. 135; Gaines, 1993) She took the car and shot out from the yard rushing into the fields crying.

She found her father healthy working in the field as he always did. Her heart was jumping for joy. She hugged him telling him: "Oh, Daddy," she said, laying her head on his chest. "Oh, Daddy. Do you love me, Daddy? Do you love me?" He held her close and awkwardly. "I love you so much, Daddy. I love you so much." (pg. 154; Gaines, 1993) It is the time she decides to stop seeing Jackson and let him wait for her three days.

After three days, confused Jackson comes to the Carmier's yard. He thinks the reason of their misfortune is Raoul but Catherine is not able to admit it and does not answer him. Jackson becomes very angry screaming at her. "How about us? Don't you think we should have a chance? [...] Is that all you wanted? Was that it? Just once in bed? [...] Come on, Catherine. One more hour. Come on. Right here on the ground. [...] I ought to break your neck. (pg. 160; Gaines, 1993)

After this unpleasant breakup indignant Jackson comes home and tells his aunt that he is going to leave. Aunt Charlotte falls ill because he saw him the same day quarreling with Catherine Carmier. Charlotte has always been against their relationship because she has been afraid of Raoul. But these two terrible pieces of information has made her sick.

After that Jackson experiences the worst days of his life on the plantation. His aunt, sick because of him, does not speak to him at all. Miss Selina, who takes care of Charlotte, despises him, for she knows he is the source of Charlotte's suffering and ignores him. In addition to all that, the old people who comes to visit Aunt Charlotte put the blame on him, some of them just by their displeasing looks, some by words. He felt "they were like trees, like rocks, like the ocean, these old people. Never understanding, never giving." (pg. 171; Gaines, 1993)

Although he feels wrath towards Catherine, he worries about their ended relationship. Soon after their breakup, he sees her with Raoul at the store and surprisingly, he does not feel hatred but he loves her more than ever. Curiously, he does not feel loathe towards her father. On the contrary, he admires him although Raoul is the only obstacle between him and Catherine.

The last event forces Aunt Charlotte to ask Reverend Armstrong for help. She tries to explain to him her strong relationship with Jackson:

All my life I ain't never had nothing. Nothing. No kinda learning. No kinda – nothing. Worked hard all my life; and for nobody but him. Look like I got that right. [...] I helt him when he was a little baby. Next to my bosom. His mon was in the field working – cutting cane. I helt him – skinny's he could be. Holding him one hand and trying to cook with the other. I felt his little heart beat 'gainst my bosom. 'Member how he used to grab a handful of my hair – and all the time I'm trying to cook there. I just didn't born him, Reverend. That's all. I just didn't born him. [...] Watched him grow up there – skinny's a weed. Watched him go to school – the first one to take him to church. Saw that he got religion – baptized. Now... (pg. 180, 181; Gaines, 1993)

But Reverend explains her that she does not want to love Jackson, but to have him, to possess him, and it is not the Christian way. Reverend Armstrong shows her the way of God, to reconcile herself with the fact that Jackson is not a child any more but makes his own decisions. Aunt Charlotte then devotes the rest of her life to the church.

Jackson decides not to leave his room until his departure from the plantation but suddenly he gets a letter from Lillian, Catherine's sister. She writes him about a dance in Bayonne asking him to come because she wants him to meet with Catherine again and to support their relationship. She hopes Catherine would leave the plantation.

The third part of the novel, consisting in nine chapters, takes place in a single day and the culmination of the plot in an evening. Before Raoul takes his two daughters to the dance in Bayonne, Lily tries to

persuade Catherine for the last time to leave that place with her forever, unsuccessfully. In Bayonne, Catherine and Lillian leave the house of Raoul's sister with their cousin Jeanette while Raoul waits for them playing cards with his sister Elvira who intends to explain to him that he should let Catherine go. "No, she's not the answer. She's not. And no matter how much you love her, she can't take the place of a woman. [...] Raoul, let her go. [...] Give her a chance before it's too late." (pg. 212; Gaines, 1993)

At the dance, Catherine meets Jackson and leaves the hall with him. They kiss outside while Jackson tries to convince Catherine to leave with him. She would prefer him to stay but for him, it is impossible as well as for her to leave her family. Finally he persuades her but her answers are not too clear and convincing, but doubtful instead. "Yes, yes, yes, was in her heart. But she would not say it now. She could not say it. What about the others?" (pg. 222; Gaines, 1993) She is feeling frightened but he is pulling her into his car taking her home to prepare her suitcases.

The Cajuns tries to make use of Catherine's relationship with the black man because they are aware of Raoul's weakness. They pay two Negroes to pursue Catherine and to tell Raoul about her. The main reason they are doing it is for Raoul to catch the lovers red-handed. Firstly Raoul does not believe the Negroes but he is too mistrustful to let it be. While he is driving to the hall, he is thinking about his gun and Jackson and suddenly he starts to think about Mark.

Contrary to what the others believed, he loved that boy. Ten thousand times he had wanted to pull the boy to him, to hold him against his chest, to cry, to whisper, "I love you, I love you"; but something always kept him from doing so. How could he explain what it was? He did not know what it was. It was there with him all the time. "Hate him," the thing was saying to him. "Look what she's done. Hate him. Look what she's done. Hate him, hate him." And all the time he wanted to love the boy. He wanted to pass his hand over his skin, over his hair. He wanted to feel the small bones in his hands and arms. (pg. 228; Gaines, 1993)

His thoughts represent a kind of confession to what he did to Mark. He abused the opportunity with the tree they were sewing together that day in spite of his “love” towards him. And although he wanted to love that boy like he was his own son, his pride did not allow him to forgive Della for her terrible deed that she was unfaithful to him. His pride appears again. He knew Mark’s death would be the nightmarish punishment for her. Yet he has also been suffering all the time for he killed a child, pretending it was an accident. He had to do that because the young boy would always remind him of the love affair his wife had with Bayou Water. That is also the reason he has fixed himself to Catherine. He has needed someone to love him purely and to appease his sorrow.

When Raoul does not find Jackson with Catherine, he thinks: “She would have to go home first. She would have to get her things – the child.” (pg. 231; Gaines, 1993) and drives home where Catherine experiences the inner struggle. “I will not see Bayonne again, I will not see the trees again, I will not see the river again, I will not see him, my father, again, [...] I will not see none of what I’m seeing now again. (pg. 231; Gaines, 1993) But she continues packing her clothes and when she hears the car outside she carries the suitcase out where Raoul is standing with a gun asking Catherine with disbelief if she is leaving.

Then the fight starts between Jackson and Raoul. Della is watching it all the time and finds out that Raoul killed Mark from his words: “Boy, I don’t want any more blood on my hand, I don’t want any more gnawing at my heart.” (pg. 236; Gaines, 1993) Still, she does not hate her husband even though he murdered her only son. Contrarily, she feels pity because she knows Raoul has been bearing that crime on his shoulders for those long years.

So he did kill Marky, she was thinking. She nodded her head. So he did kill him. And all these years, I thought it was an accident. So that’s why he wanted her there – to soothe the wound, Raoul? to stop the gnawing? Oh, Raoul, Raoul – how you must have suffered all these years. And I thought I was

suffering. Oh, my poor, poor husband; my poor, poor man.
(pg. 242; Gaines, 1993)

Jackson finally defeats Raoul who is shocked that his strength has betrayed him. After few minutes when Catherine takes care of her father, Raoul says her to go with Jackson. "Go with him. It's over with." (pg. 244; Gaines, 1993) But she defends herself to stay. "I love my daddy. I don't mind being the prop. [...] It's not over with. [...] You have stood a long time, Daddy. I won't ever let you down. (pg. 244, 245; Gaines, 1993) Jackson interferes and asks Catherine to leave with him but she rejects promising that one day she will come. "Not now. But I will come. I swear. [...] Just have faith in me." (pg. 245; Gaines, 1993)

The only person who feels pleased is Della because after twenty years she knows her husband needs her and for the first time, he fell in front of Catherine. "No, I'm not proud to see my man get beaten. No woman wants that. But what happened tonight is the best for everybody." (pg. 247; Gaines, 1993) Della believes that now the way is open for Catherine to leave and promises to make her come to Jackson. At the end of the story Della reconciles with the death of her son Mark and accepts that he died by accident. Jackson stays in front of their house hoping that Catherine, his love, will come back. "But she never did." (pg. 248; Gaines, 1993)

However, the two young people could never remain together because they were opposites and could not understand each other. Jackson was influenced by his ten-year absence from the South, his family and friends. His bonds with others were disturbed and, because he hated the South, it was not difficult for him to leave. Yet he could never comprehend Catherine who grew up in a place she liked with persons she loved. "Catherine seems unable to separate her love for Jackson and her loyalty to her father." (pg. 31; Lowe, 1995) Catherine did not struggle against the unjust southern system, but she kept living content. She was loved and she also loved.

Jackson's behavior exuded selfishness because he was not asked to leave the only things he had. He rejected any sacrifice for her or to stay with her. He preferred her to go with him. He did not think about anybody else than himself and Catherine which frightened her when he promised her to love her forever. "I will love you with all my heart. [...] It will be just us always." (pg. 232, Gaines, 1993) She was used to care about the others; about her father, her mother and Lillian.

Additionally, Catherine experienced the decline of the marriage of their parents which resulted in her loss of faith in infinite love. "Us? us? us? and nobody else but us. Is that what you want? Oh, Jackson, that is not life. [...] How long can it be like that? How long? Can't you see that's what happened between them? Can't you see there must be others – something else in our lives, can't you see?" (pg. 232, 233; Gaines, 1993) Catherine is aware that her parents, although living together, are in the fact very lonely and she cannot leave them because she knows "that if she stays, she can put some sun in both their lives." (pg. 161; Lowe, 1995)

Catherine is a tragic character because she cannot control her conditions. "People who have truly deep feelings are always tragic. [...] cannot determine their way of living, it is fated that they must live a certain way." (pg. 31; Lowe, 1995) She could never escape from the wall of feelings she cherishes for all those she loves.

2.4. Generational Conflicts and Changes

Catherine Carmier offers varied illustrations of generational misunderstandings and also the incomprehension between two different worlds which in fact seem to be too similar. *Catherine Carmier* is a sorrowful story about two lovers whose love can never be realized on the long term, and about a married couple where neither the husband nor the wife can forgive the pain they have caused each other. The persisting conflict complicates their lives and even the lives of their children.

In the novel, the conflict between Jackson and his Aunt Charlotte represents the confrontation between the old and young black generations.

From their behavior, the following differences can be drawn. The young generation has lost its faith. The church cannot help them to find solace for the unjust southern and even the northern worlds that bother and disappoint them. Young blacks demand change and look for justice and dignity which appears like an impossible task. They cannot reconcile themselves with the oppression and absence of law and keep searching for the truth. They desire education and equal opportunities for their future and further more they want to decide about it on their own without sacrificing themselves.

These attributes which the young generation possesses encounter an obstacle from the old generation which needs to supervise all that the young people do. Old black people like Aunt Charlotte control and command their loved young descendants and ask for obedience. The old generation believes that their sacrifice would be repaid to them without resistance. They think that they have to plan the future for their children who are no longer babies. Of course, they feel disappointed if these plans get out of their control.

In comparison with the young generation, the old people are very religious and spend many hours in the church where they find consolation from the unpleasant situation, and as such, religion is the only hope they have. To force their young relatives to stay with them, they communicate with them in a tough way but they rarely show their true feeling. If they do so, they feel embarrassed because it means showing their weakness. In spite of the unjust situation on the plantations in the South, the old generation is not able to leave their homes. They prefer to pray in the church for a better future and spend the rest of their lives peacefully.

Next to the young black generation, a representative of the young Creole generation appears in the novel. Lillian, like Jackson, is fed up with the unjust way of the life she has to lead. She hates blacks and does not consider herself as black but at the same time she refuses the Creole world. She desires to be accepted by the white society with equal rights. She is also angry that her parents had decided about her future when she could not defend herself. The reason she supports Catherine's relationship with

Jackson is because “she saw Jackson’s taking Catherine as revenge for all three of them – not only on her family but on the whole system.” (pg. 161; Lowe, 1995)

Concerning the Civil Right changes, in *Catherine Carmier*, the system of civil rights remains outdated and almost unchanged. The author does not show any visible change, for black people are still oppressed and disadvantaged by white southerners, which is clearly described in the case when the Cajuns pushed black farmers out from their fields. African-Americans then have to leave because of the loss of labor opportunities.

The only support black people have is the right to spend their old age in the place where they used to live without paying the rent and with the permission to own a little garden.

This time, compared to the previous novels, Gaines arranges a minor view at the situation for black people in the North which is not too optimistic when the North has otherwise been represented as a better place to live. Nevertheless, in comparison with the southern states, the North is still considered a heavenly place.

3.0. *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*

“To the memory of my beloved aunt, Miss Augusteen Jefferson, who did not walk a day in her life but who taught me the importance of standing.”

E.J.Gaines

3.1. Introduction

The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman is a brilliantly described novel from the point of view of an Afro-American woman born into slavery and died in the times of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. “Miss Jane Pittman is a folk autobiography. Miss Jane must tell things from memory.” (pg. 94; Lowe, 1995) The word “autobiography” might confuse the reader who could consider the work as a real slave narrative because of its

faithfully crafted portrayal of life, the experiences of a former slave, and historical references which interweave into a more than one-hundred-year-old documentation.

As well as other stories by Gaines, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* provides a masterful portrait of the southern style of life, the African-American fight for freedom, and for rights. Gaines describes a stubborn and tireless effort to live in dignity by Miss Jane whose character wisely speaks through Ernest J. Gaines's words in this fictional oral interview.

3.2. Plot overview

The story divided into four books (The War Years, Reconstruction, The Plantation and The Quarters) starts with the introduction as the preface of the editor, a local schoolteacher, who asks Jane Pittman to tell him the story of her life. His curiosity is justified by his specialization in history, his attempts to understand it perfectly and to be able to explain things to his students. Although Jane refuses a few times, after the teacher's insisting, Jane agrees to relate her life experience and in the summer of 1962 the autobiography begins. Miss Jane Pittman is over a hundred years old and sometimes she cannot remember some events of her past. Thus there is still a person who continues instead of her. Miss Jane dies about eight months after the last interview.

Book I: The War Years

A girl named Ticey, which was Jane's previous slave name, was born on a plantation in Louisiana some seven years before the Civil War. She could not remember her day of birth. She was an orphan. She did not know who her father was and her mother was beaten to death by her master when Jane was a child. When the Civil War was approaching, Jane worked in the Big House looking after the white children. At the end of the war, some Union soldiers passed the plantation and asked for water. Then Ticey served them and Corporal Brown changed her name to Jane Brown,

promising her near freedom. After the soldiers left, Jane was beaten and sent to work in the fields to chop cotton because she brushed aside her mistress who was still calling her Ticey.

When the day of the Emancipation Proclamation, a great document of human freedom, came, all the slaves were set free and Jane, with a group of Afro-Americans led by an ex-slave woman called Big Laura with a small baby girl in her arms and a boy Ned by the hand, left the plantation heading north. The next morning they were attacked by "Patrollers" (who had made sure that blacks stayed on plantations to work for whites) and massacred. The only survivors were approximately ten-year-old girl Jane and younger boy Ned who wore two rocks with him, the rocks his mother had made fire with that same morning she had been killed. Jane was determined to reach Ohio and find Corporal Brown to provide them a safe place.

On their way to better life, they met all kinds of people who gave them something to eat, to drink, drove them few miles, but also white people who blamed them for the disaster of the Civil War. Jane and Ned were exhausted when they heard that after so many days of walking they were still in Louisiana. Finally, they met a man called Job who put them up for the night and the following morning he took them to a plantation run by Mr. Bone where Jane started to work for the next ten or twelve years.

Book II: Reconstruction

Initially Jane and Ned were content with their life on Mr. Bone's plantation. Ned was taught by the plantation teacher who was very popular among the workers and they had no problems with the secret racist groups as Ku-Klux-Klan or White Brotherhood because Mr. Bone was a member of the Republican Party that controlled the South. Suddenly the plantation was bought back by Colonel Eugene I. Dye, a southerner who hated blacks, and the situation reverted back to slavery, segregation and violence. Mr. Bone paid his workers off but Jane decided to stay and work there. The secret groups started killing more than ever and black people started leaving.

When Ned was about seventeen or eighteen, he changed his name to Edward Stephen Douglass, after Frederick Douglass, and joined the committee to show the way the blacks were treated and to help them to get to New Orleans. This fact endangered their lives and Ned had to leave or to be brutally slaughtered by the Ku-Klux-Klan. Jane rejected to go with Ned. After his departure, Jane began to meet with Joe Pittman, a widower with two girls. They lived together without marriage, like in slavery times, because they were not religious but Jane took his last name for hers.

All blacks were driven out of Kansas because white people did not want them and there was no work for them but the white people from the farm where Ned worked liked him and sent him to school. He became a teacher and then he joined the U.S. Army to fight in Cuba. When he came back, he started to teach again.

Jane with Joe decided to move to a new place but Colonel Dye tried to complicate their leaving by asking for money. Joe borrowed money from Mr. Clyde, his future master who gave him a job breaking horses while Jane took care of Clyde's children. Jane had an enemy, a black servant named Molly in her sixties, who tried to get rid of Jane. Finally Molly left. The couple was very happy with their new home, although Jane could not have children because she was sterile. As they were growing older, Jane worried about Joe because in his age because the horses were now too dangerous. Jane had nightmares about his death so she consulted them with a voodoo woman. One day Joe did not come back alive.

Later Jane met another man, a fisherman called Felton Burkes who left her very soon without saying a word. Suddenly, Ned came back with his wife, Vivian, and three children, bought a house and started to build a school. His opinions about the rights of blacks frightened the local whites who hired Albert Cluveau, a friend of Jane, to shoot Ned. Ned was buried near the school he had tried to build. Vivian moved back to Kansas because she was afraid for the life of her children and herself. Jane told the shooter that the chariot of hell would come for him and that everybody would hear him screaming. Ten years later Cluveau died a painful death.

Book III: The Plantation

After Cluveau died, Jane moved to the Samson plantation where she worked as a cook and that summer she joined the church. It was twelve or thirteen years after Ned had been killed. Robert Samson, the plantation owner, had an illegitimate mulatto son called Timmy; and little Robert called Tee Bob with his wife Miss Amma Dean. Because of Timmy's obstinacy, his father sent him away from the plantation.

A few teachers appeared on the plantation during Jane's stay. The fourth teacher who came was Mary Agnes LeFabre, a Creole girl from New Orleans. Pretty and almost white, she was expelled from her Creole community. Tee Bob fell in love with her when he saw her for the first time. One day Tee Bob confessed to a friend of his, called Jimmy Caya, that he loved a colored woman. Jimmy tried to explain to Tee Bob of his and her position in society but young Samson saw in it just a lack of misunderstanding. Encouraged by whiskey, Tee Bob entered into Mary Agnes's house and told her about his deep feelings toward her. Mary Agnes knew her place and refused Tee Bob who after their conversation committed suicide. Everybody on the plantation thought Mary Agnes had been ravished. Robert Samson, Tee Bob's father, wanted Mary Agnes to be killed but finally abandoned that idea.

Book IV: The Quarters

Five years later, Jane Pittman moved down the quarters where she spent time with her friend Lena who was bringing up a little boy called Jimmy. He had no father but probably it was a white man. His mother had left for work in the city. Jimmy was considered the "one", the salvation for all. The same year the desegregating bill passed in Washington in 1964, Jimmy left the quarters. He went to New Orleans to live with his mother and to attend school. Jimmy, inspired by Martin Luther King, got involved in the Civil Rights Movement. He came back to the plantation and tried to persuade the community to fight. Jane with other people decided to support

Jimmy's protest in Bayonne. On their way, they were informed by Robert Samson that Jimmy had been shot but because they believed that a part of Jimmy was waiting for them, they continued.

3.3. Analysis of Motifs in the Novel

The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman is a purely and simply narrated novel but contains a large number of historical references within which his fictional heroine Jane Pittman moves and struggles. Ernest J. Gaines practically imitates a classic slave narrative in this novel because it is purportedly the transcription of Jane's words. She recounts her past in the first person and likewise slave narratives, she describes slavery, the cruelty of white masters, suffering and, in the figurative sense of word, also escape. Mr. Gaines holds the position of abolitionists, fighters against slavery, who illustrated through slave narratives the real world and conditions in which the captured Afro-Americans had to live.

The author also mentions Frederick Douglass, an important personality of the abolitionist movement of the 19th century, when Ned changes his name to Ned Douglass. "He changed his name now – Ned Douglass. Before, he was Ned Brown – after me. [...] Then he changed it to Douglass, after Mr. Frederick Douglass. He was go'n be a great leader like Mr. Douglass was." (pg. 73; Gaines, 1986) Frederick Douglass was a former slave who escaped from slavery and wrote his autobiography, a slave narrative, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* in 1845.

The Book I, called "The War Years", is divided into ten short chapters that illustrate slavery, freedom and searching for a new place to live. This title do not describe just the years of the Civil War (1861-1865) when the southern Confederacy struggled against the antislavery Union of the North, but also the personal fight of the young black girl to survive during and after the times of slavery.

Miss Jane Pittman was a born slave but the first blow of freedom came with the northern Yankee soldiers whom she served water on the

plantation during the Civil War. “And I’m go’n call you something else ‘sides Ticey. Ticey is a slave name, and I don’t like slavery. I’m go’n call you Jane. [...] Miss Jane Brown.” (pg. 8; Gaines, 1986) When Corporal Brown changed her name from the typical slave name Ticey to the name of his girl’s name in Ohio, it was an important act for Jane, and later for other ex-slaves. She received a new identity and made the first step toward liberty.

All slaves were officially freed on January 1, 1863 when President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, a new legal document that canceled slavery and gave human rights to black people.

Now, therefore I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested as Commander-in-Chief, of the Army and Navy of the United States in time of actual armed rebellion against the authority and government of the United States [...] I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons. (pg. 261; Lincoln: “Emancipation Proclamation”, 1992)

After the slaves were released by their former master, they started to change their names. For the first time, they could choose something on their own, thus the new name was their first symbolic act of resistance against the slavery system and freedom reception. Everybody gets his name when one is born. To receive the name signifies to be reborn and to start the new free life. At first the freed slaves felt happy for their found liberty but suddenly they came to realize that they did not know which way to turn, what to do with their freedom, where to go now, nor what to eat and drink. They became free but absolutely destitute.

The group of former slaves that decided to leave the plantation was attacked by patrollers the following morning. “Patrollers was poor white trash that used to find the runaway slaves for the masters. Them and the soldiers from the Secesh Army was the ones who made up the Ku Klux Klan

later on.” (pg. 21; Gaines, 1986) This event portraits the cruel treatment of white racists toward blacks after slavery had ended and were even massacred by them, although the Emancipation Proclamation had been issued. It means that the white people were breaking the law just for revenge.

After Big Laura is murdered with her small baby and others, Jane “adopts” Ned, Big Laura’s small son. Ned carries flint with him. The young boy keeps the two rocks of flint permanently. It reminds him of the death of his mother and later inspires him to fight against the oppressive system and injustices his people had to suffer for centuries. As he gets older, he uses language and education, the metaphorical fires.

The second part of the novel describes in fourteen chapters Reconstruction, a time of economic, political and social change in the United States which lasted until 1877. The victory of the Union Army that terminated American slavery caused serious problems: for example the issue of Afro-American social status or the labor system in the South. The northern states were overwhelmingly industrial but the southern landscape was covered by plantations full of cotton and tobacco and had become dependent on its black slave workers. On one hand, Southerners did not want to lose their laborers but on the other hand, they were not willing to pay them for their labor.

Two of the utopian goals of the Reconstruction were to reunite the southern and northern states and to give equal rights to all American population. The ill-conceived plan led to problem of racial justice. The treatment of blacks was controlled by the northern political parties and the army just like in the case of Jane’s first work on Mr. Bone’s plantation. Mr. Bone was a Republican who offered his workers fair conditions. During the election in the 1870s, The Republican party lost its influence in the South and the former plantation owners got their property back. That was the reason Colonel Dye bought back his plantation from Mr. Bone. The southern white population placed the blame of their misfortune on the ex-slaves

which justified in their minds a return to the system of racial segregation, and white supremacy was restored in the South.

Ex-slaves started to leave plantations where they felt oppressed. White southerners were content that they got rid of those black animals that had caused numerous problems and the black people who dared claim their rights were brutally eliminated by the Ku Klux Klan, a racist organization founded by veterans of the Confederate Army. Miss Jane Pittman describes it in her way:

[...] Mr. Frederick Douglass said give the South a chance. [...] But when people saw they was treated just as bad now as before the war they said to heck with Mr. Frederick Douglass and started leaving. The old masters didn't think too much of it at first. They was glad the niggers was leaving. [...] And now seeing this the old masters did start worrying. Who was go'n pick the cotton now? Who was go'n cut the cane? [...] Now, the old masters came back and tried to force the people to stay. (pg. 72; Gaines, 1986)

This bloody ending was brewing for Ned who joined the committee to help people leave safely. Of course, powerful personalities like Ned were unwanted on the plantation because they tried to awaken blacks to "fight" for their rights and that might cause rebellions.

The second reason to send away such people was that the plantation owners came to realize that they were losing black workers whom they needed in the fields. The historical events perfectly correspond with the testimony of Miss Jane Pittman, although it is fictional. When Joe Pittman decided to leave Colonel Dye, a former Confederate soldier, because he found a better job on a different plantation, Colonel Dye caused him trouble and Joe had to buy himself out because Colonel Dye threatened Joe with the violence of Ku Klux Klan. "Kluxes don't stop killing a nigger just because you say hold it," the colonel said. "Now you pay me my hundred and fifty dollars or get away from my door." (pg. 81; Gaines, 1986)

Joe's and Jane's "marriage" is another proof those old times came back. Many slaves were not religious and lived together without a

wedding ceremony. “We didn’t get married. I didn’t believe in the church then, and Joe never did. We just agreed to live together, like people did in the slavery time. Slaves didn’t get married in churches, they jumped over the broom handle.” (pg. 78; Gaines, 1986)

When Joe asked Jane to live with him, she was afraid to confess to him that she was sterile. “I went to a doctor and he told me the same thing: “You barren, all right.” He told me it had happened when I was nothing but a tot. Said I had got hit or whipped in a way that had hurt me inside. Said this might be one reason I didn’t grow too much either.” (pg. 77; Gaines, 1986) Jane’s sterility gives evidence that the cruel white masters were indifferent even if they were beating a little girl.

Their better life began when they finally moved to the new ranch. Jane and Joe got a good job there but as they were growing old, Jane started worrying about Joe because his job breaking horses was too dangerous for an older man. She began to dream that a black stallion that would kill Joe. Jane felt helpless, so she visited a voodoo woman. It was the only step Jane could do because she was not Christian and voodoo is a religion brought by slaves from Africa to Louisiana and Florida states. It is understandable that she found what was closer to her. Voodoo is connected with spirits, animals and natural phenomena. Thus it could explain also why the blacks were so bound to the earth.

Ned came back to the plantation after Joe’s death but from the very beginning he was observed by whites for his inconvenient oppositional opinions. The man who was paid to shoot Ned was Albert Cluveau, an old and poor Cajun. Cluveau was a friend of Jane until he agreed to kill Ned for being accepted by other whites. “After Cluveau killed the son of his closest friend, he gradually goes mad.” (pg. 96; Lowe, 1995) Disappointed Jane stopped him on his way to tell him: “Mr. Albert Cluveau, when the Chariot of Hell come rattling for you, the people will hear you screaming all over the parish. Now, you just ride on.” (pg. 121; Gaines, 1986) Cluveau must have believed that voodoo is powerful because till his last day he was convinced that Jane had put a curse upon him.

Clouveau's death terminates the second part of the book and the third one called "The Plantation" starts. Within eleven chapters, Jane illustrates her years on the Samson Plantation and the tragic destiny of the young Tee Bob Samson. The majority of this part relates the sad story of Tee Bob. Jane also made an important step for herself when she, twelve or thirteen years after Ned had been killed, joined the church. She had been fighting her conscience from the times she had been a slave but after Ned's death even more. So she needed to find solace in God.

Tee Bob's tragedy started when a beautiful Creole girl appeared on the Plantation as a new teacher. Mary Agnes LeFabre came from a long line of Creoles in New Orleans. Her black ancestor had sexual relations with a man called LeFabre.

Her grandmother had been one of those ladies for white men. They used to give these great balls before the war, and the white man used to go there to choose their colored women. They didn't marry these women, but sometime they kept them the rest of their life. The one who took this girl's grandmother was called LeFabre. [...] When he died he left them money and property - even slaves. (pg. 158; Gaines, 1986)

In the early times of slavery, it was ordinary that white men who came from Europe to live on plantations left their wives and children on the continent because this kind of living was not comfortable for them. Their families would join them years later but during the time they were alone controlling the plantation, they found black women for sexual relations and had children with them. The colonists chose the women at special balls where the girls were offered them by their own black parents in order to gain money.

Creoles lived in their communities under strict rules. No one who had a Creole background could enter the association. "Creole Place was for the mulattoes there; everybody else keep out." (pg. 162; Gaines, 1986) Mary Agnes could not reconcile herself to "what her own people had done her own people". (pg. 158; Gaines, 1986) It could be a reference to the past

when mothers sold their daughters to white rich men or the slaveholding past of her family. That is the reason she left her community and came to the Samson Plantation. She desired to forget about the past and stay with African-American people, the people of her origin, and not like the Creoles who believed to be mostly fair-skinned and inclined to whites. She was expelled from her community because when you left once, you could never come back. That was the rule.

Tee Bob, the only character who rejected the old social rules, fell in love with a mulatto girl. He maintained a superior position for his origin and the color of his skin but probably because he had grown up with his half black brother Timmy; he did not hold the racist opinions. Firstly, he was disappointed with his brother's departure. He could not understand why he had to be expelled from the family. The second disillusion came when no one supported his love of Mary Agnes. His parents, his friend Jimmy Caya and even Mary Agnes were blinded by the social opinions of the South that he could not accept. "Tee Bob was a victim [of the past]. He had no strength, he was not tough and hard." (pg. 62; Lowe, 1995)

When he opened his heart to Jimmy Caya, Tee Bob met with a deep misunderstanding. Jimmy Caya tried to explain him what his ancestors had been explaining for many years. Just from his speech and the insulting he referred to Mary Agnes showed how young men were brought up in the South.

Don't you know who you are? Don't you know what she is? [...] The woman is a nigger, Robert. A nigger. She just look white. But Africa is in her veins, and that make her nigger, Robert. [...] If you want her you go to that house and take her. If you want her at that school, make them children go out in the yard and wait. Take her in that ditch if you can't wait to get her home. But she's there for that and nothing else. (pg. 173; Gaines, 1986)

Tee Bob did not take Jimmy's words seriously and although Tee Bob's parents were preparing a meeting with his future wife, Tee Bob

visited Mary Agnes and told her how he felt. Even though he offered her his name, she knew well her place and refused him with words: “We can’t have nothing together, Robert.” (pg. 176; Gaines, 1986) Then he swung her across the room and made off. The people from the plantation thought Mary Agnes had been raped although they believed Tee Bob “too decent for that”. (pg. 177; Gaines, 1986) After that he committed suicide because he was not allowed to step outside of the absurd rules of his culture.

When Robert Samson, his wife and Mr. Jules Raynard, Tee Bob’s parrain (godfather), found Tee Bob’s dead body, they started discussing who caused his death. Robert Samson put the blame on Mary Agnes and asked for her death, but Mr. Raynard stopped him, warning him that he would accuse him of murder. Jules Raynard justified his deed in a conversation with Jane by these words:

We caused one death already this evening. Jimmy was right. We all killed him. We tried to make him follow a set of rules our people gived us long ago. But these rules just ain’t old enough, Jane. [...] Somewhere in the past, Jane. Way, way back, men like Robert could love women like Mary Agnes. But somewhere along the way somebody wrote a new set of rules condemning all that. I had to live by them, Robert at that house now had to live by them, and Clarence Caya had to live by them. Clarence Caya told Jimmy to live by them, and Jimmy obeyed. But Tee Bob couldn’t obey. That’s why we got rid of him. All us. Me, you, the girl – all us. (pg. 193; Gaines, 1986)

As just the second book terminates with death, the third does the same. The fourth, called “The Quarters” is not an exception but at least, there is birth at its very beginning. The fourth book also differs from the previous three books in its division. The last book is not divided into chapters; it is kept like a separated story that conducts a survey of the life of Jimmy Aaron, the “one”.

“Anytime a child is born, the old people look in his face and ask him if he’s the One.” (pg. 199; Gaines, 1986) Jane explains that her people were always looking for somebody to lead them in hard times of their lives.

They did the same when Jimmy Aaron was born down the quarters. Jane helped him into the world. Perhaps, his father was a white man. "The Daddy had done what they told him a hundred years before to do, and he had forgot it just like a hundred years ago they had told him to forget." (pg. 200; Gaines, 1986) Jimmy's mother, Shirley Aaron, left for the city to work like young people did. The author applies his own life experience like in *A Lesson before Dying*, for his parents also worked far from him in California and Mr. Gaines was brought up in Louisiana by his aunt just like Jimmy Aaron who was raised by Lena, his aunt and Jane's good friend.

God always sent them someone who managed to make them proud of their black race. "In the Depression it was tough on everybody, but twice as hard on the colored, and He sent us Joe." (pg. 203; Gaines, 1986) The author mentions the African-American world heavyweight boxing champion from 1937 to 1949, Joe Louis, who was considered to be the greatest of all time. Gaines adverts to Joe's lost match against a German Max Schmeling in 1936. "Of course S'melin' beat him the first time. But that was just to teach us a lesson. [...] Now the second fight was different." (pg. 203; Gaines, 1986) The later rematch, remembered as one of the major events in boxing, in 1938 when Joe Louis beat him. "You could look a week and you could still see the niggers grinning about that fight." (pg. 204; Gaines, 1986)

Another "chosen" hero was a black baseball player called Jackie Robinson. "Now after the war He sent us Jackie." (pg. 204; Gaines, 1986) Jackie Robinson was the first black player in the major leagues, who played with the New York Dodgers. His presence brought the end of racial segregation in professional baseball and also contributed to the Civil Rights Movement.

Jane and Lena raised Jimmy responsibly and guided him to religion. They wanted him to avoid playing cards or listening to the radio because it was considered sinful. As he aged, he confessed: "Miss Jane, I got something like a tiger in my chest, [...]. I want run in the woods and beat

m head against the trees.” (pg. 215; Gaines, 1986) Perhaps it was his first awareness of the social injustice and the tiger wanted to fight against it.

Jimmy left the plantation the year the Desegregation Bill passed in Washington to live with his mother in New Orleans and attend school. Three or four years later began “that Civil Rights trouble”. (pg. 218; Gaines, 1986) White people started to realize that blacks were acquiring more rights and getting strong. The southerners rejected allowing it without a fight. Miss Jane Pittman refers to cruel events connected with the beginning of the Civil Rights movement she can remember.

Look what they did that young lady at that Alabama school. Look what they did them little children there in Tennessee and there in Arkansas. [...] Any of them braver than Miss Lucy? What a charming young lady. What a beautiful face. What lovely eyes. And them little children? I still remember the little faces looking through the car windows at the dogs standing on two feet barking on them. Oh, my God. [...] Cussed them little children and still they went. Threwed rocks and bricks at them and still they stood up. And look how they treated Reverend King – how they bombed his house and jailed him. [...] I will and I do call them a pack of vicious dogs. Look how they bombed Mr. Shuttleworth’s home – and on Christmas at that. (pg. 218; Gaines, 1986)

Robert Samson was scared of demonstrations breaking out all around and appealed to everybody from the community not to join any of them. The people who could get mixed up in some kind of demonstration would be expelled from the plantation as it happened to Yoko. Later, Jimmy returned to the quarters to make the people stand and fight for the rights and justice they had never had, and join him in Bayonne. But the elders frightened that they might have been fired from the plantation refused.

All we want to do is live our life quietly as we can and die peacefully as the Lord will allow us. We would like to die in our homes, have our funerals in our church, be buried in that graveyard where all our people and love ones are. The man up there owns that graveyard, Jimmy. He owns the house we live in, he owns the little garden where we grow our food. The

church where we at right now, he owns this; he even owns the bell that calls our people to meeting. And the day he tells us to leave, we got to go, and we got to leave bell and church. (pg. 226; Gaines, 1986)

Jimmy felt very disappointed by the cowardice of his own community but Miss Jane made him understand when she explained him that the people had a “scar on their brains”. (pg. 229; Gaines, 1986) The scar, a mark of fear from the times of slavery, is not easy to remove. She encouraged him with her words. “Talk with them, Jimmy. Talk and talk and talk. [...] The nigger, Jimmy, must one day wake up and push the black quilt off his back. (pg. 229; Gaines, 1986) These words astonished Jimmy and a friend of his so they asked Jane to travel over the parish with them and talk to the people to inspire them. Finally, Jane agreed because she knew the community respected her. She even promised to join Jimmy’s demonstration in Bayonne, although she was aware of her age. “And maybe, now, because my arms too weak to push the quilt down the bed I tell myself I’m brave enough to go to Bayonne. But do what in Bayonne when the least little breeze will blow me down?” (pg. 237; Gaines, 1986)

Their plan was to demonstrate against segregated fountains and toilets for blacks. In the courthouses, there were public fountains just for whites; a black person could not drink from them. The same law applied to the toilets. Every colored person had to go down to the basement, it did not matter what the weather was. Additionally, the toilets were so filthy, dirty, full of water and bad smell, so nobody wanted to use them and it was very difficult to find a place where the owners would let them use the toilet.

The demonstration in the courtyard in Bayonne was based on the provocation that a fifteen-year-old colored girl was going to drink from that fountain for whites. “The reason they didn’t choose a boy, they was afraid that loon up there might beat the boy and arrest him. They wanted somebody in jail because they wanted to march on the courthouse the next Monday.” (pg. 233; Gaines, 1986) The girl was arrested on Friday and Jimmy with Jane got two days to persuade people to join them in Bayonne.

On Monday morning, the man called Brady who had promised to take Jane to Bayonne got drunk. For him, it was the only way to make an excuse because in fact he was afraid Robert Samson would kick him off the plantation. Lena, Jimmy's aunt who was all the time against his political activity, decided to go with Jane and support her nephew. Lena felt the need to stay close to Jimmy because she subconsciously knew he was going to die. On their way to Olivia's who promised to give them a lift to Bayonne, they saw how many people had made up their minds to joined in the protest. "But the longer I stood there looking, the more I saw coming toward me. Men, women, children." (pg. 243; Gaines, 1986) Jane cried tears of pride and joy because she understood that they had overcome their fear. "But the number of people I saw coming toward me was something I never would 'a' dreamed of." (pg. 243; Gaines, 1986)

Then Robert Samson came to stop them with the bad news that Jimmy had been shot at eight o'clock in the morning, hoping that all people would come back home. But Jane did not fall back. "Just a little piece of him is dead. The rest of him is waiting for us in Bayonne." (pg. 245; Gaines, 1986) Jimmy's strength, youth and spirit forced them to finish his message.

After that, the relationship between Robert Samson and Jane changed. Not visibly, but inside her. When she described what had happened in previous books, she always referred to the plantation owner as Mr. Samson or Mr. Robert Samson. Black people were always addressed by their first name no matter how old they were. The surname signified the importance of the person and his mark of respectability. African-Americans received no respect and no importance. At the very end of her life story, she called him simply Robert, a salutation that signified equality between them.

Miss Jane Pittman was a mentally and physically strong woman who maintained a happy spirit in spite of her hard life. Because she lived more than one hundred years she suffered from seeing many beloved persons die. Although her life was so difficult and in a kind of way very sad, she never complained and stayed dignified. She never cared for possessions; she always lived in poverty but content. Even though she lost

the possibility to physically have children because of the sterility produced as the result of the cruel treatment in slavery, she became a mother figure. Many young and old blacks respected her, including Jimmy Aaron who, because of this knowledge and his confidence in her, he asked her to help him organize the protest in Bayonne she realized would take place after his death. She remained not too serious and this attitude helped her to succeed in her long life.

E.J. Gaines based the strong mentality of Miss Jane Pittman on his Aunt Augusteen Jefferson who raised him and to whom he dedicated this novel. It is obvious from his narrations about her. Although Miss Augusteen never walked because she was crippled, “she never felt sorry for herself a day in her life. I never heard her complaining about her problems.” (pg. 59; Lowe, 1995) Miss Jane Pittman is a character who is not a victim of the past and “works harmoniously with time. Miss Jane Pittman learns that time itself is change and that it is only by accepting it as such that man can order the present.” (pg. 25; Lowe, 1995)

Like in other Gaines’s stories, the old generation had been oppressed and humiliated. Old blacks lived their lives in fear with a hopeless vision of the future. For this reason the old generation would never get involved in such dangerous activities like protests and demonstrations. On the contrary, young blacks are much more ravenous like Jimmy’s tiger in his chest. They are angry about the harm, injustice and the lack of rights. Additionally, they are exhausted from seeing their fathers, mothers and other old people from the community humiliated, defenseless. These reasons drove them to demand change, to stop the absurd racism born in the heads of white people. Young people are sometimes very stubborn and do not show fear because they never personally experienced what their poor ancestors did.

Miss Jane Pittman would be ranged between these two groups although she pertains to the old generation but since she was a child, she possessed obstinacy in her heart. For example, when she refused to allow her mistress to call her “Tacey” after Corporal Brown had renamed her. In

the end, it was her who awakened the community and the evolution of black Americans to fight for freedom and equality.

Although the novel focuses primarily on Jane and her life, the main motif demonstrates the existence of other people she met and their destinies. "So as the book progresses, she gets older and less directly involved." (pg. 304; Lowe, 1995) In essence the novel presents the experience of all black Americans. Some people received featureless roles while others had well-marked roles in her life. The plot seems to be predominantly feminine, but like in other Gaines's novels, masculinity and the idea of manhood penetrate throughout the story.

There is always an important man in every book of the novel: Ned Douglass, Joe Pittman, Tee Bob and Jimmy. Each of the black men dies in their efforts to achieve their manhood in the white-dominated South. Ned Douglass, Jane's "adopted" son, is shot because he attempted to be beneficial to the black community when he tried to build a school and openly exhorted blacks to their right to the land. "This earth is yours and don't let that man out there take it from you. It's yours because your people's bones lays in it; it's yours because their sweat and their blood done drenched this earth. [...] Your people's bones and their dust make this place yours more than anything else." (pg. 107; Gaines, 1986) Ned was very brave, because although he knew he might have been killed for his actions, he did not give up pursuing change in society.

Joe Pittman's obsession with horses helped him to prove his manhood that he and his black ancestors had lost in the past. His job made him feel strong, important and a first-rate man within this unjust southern society. He wanted to be appreciated for his abilities. He was respected for his skills even by his white employer. Unfortunately, this pleasure led to his premature death. "He probably rides for many reasons. That's man's way. To prove something. Day in, day out he must prove he is a man. Poor fool. (pg. 93; Gaines, 1986) When Jane came to ask about her dream and fear of Joe's life, the voodoo woman explained to her, that breaking horses was the only way to express his masculinity.

Horses may also represent nature together with flood that is Jane's time line to distinguish the many events in her life. She always refers to an incident whether it happened before or after the floods in Louisiana. The flood and water symbolize the nature that cannot be controlled and broken by humans.

Ernest James Gaines comments on his emphasis on the river and explain its importance in the lives of the southern people: "Well, I think there's something about the river [...] just like there's something about the land. I grew up on False River in Pointe Coupee Parish and, of course, the river played a very big part in the lives of people at that time. We got about as much food from the river as we got from the land." (pg. 39; Lowe, 1995)

Not only black men needed to demonstrate their manhood. The white plantation masters showed their masculinity by controlling the workers through violence. Not only black men were victims of white men's necessity of feeling superior, but also black women who were often seduced or brutally raped by them.

The last dead man was young Jimmy who, influenced by the deeds of Martin Luther King, organized political protests against the segregation of blacks and whites in the time of the Civil Right Movement. "He told us he had come there for our help. He said we knowed what was happening all over the South, and it ought to be happening here, too. [...] He had met Reverend King, he had gone to his house, he had gone to his church, he had even gone to jail with him." (pg. 223; Gaines, 1986) Everyone believed Jimmy was the "one" and finally, it was truth. He saved his people from their fear to brave with white oppression.

The male characters and the fictional editor's words in the introduction of the novel claim, that this piece of literature is collective.

In closing I wish to thank all the wonderful people who were at Miss Jane's house through those long months of interviewing her, because this is not only Miss Jane's autobiography, it is theirs as well. This is what both Mary and Miss Jane meant when they said you could not tie all the ends together in one

neat direction. Miss Jane's story is all of their stories, and their stories are Miss Jane's. (pg. viii; Gaines, 1986)

3.4. Generational Conflicts and Changes

In relation to the age in which Jane lived, two personalities of different generations appear in the novel; Ned and Jimmy Aaron. Although Jane was born in slavery, she somehow does not possess the typical black behavior of the older generation. It might be caused by the fact that she was emancipated as a twelve-year-old girl who had a warlike spirit from the very beginning of the story and who has been influenced by the young rebels, firstly by Ned and some sixty years later by Jimmy. According to her way of thinking and openness to changes, Jane represents a kind of bridge between the old and young generations, even though she pertains to the old one.

Just as in the previous two novels, the old generation was afraid of the white power that could absolutely destroy their lives by depriving them of the only things they had – their home and their land in the United States. Their ancestors once lost it at the turn of the 15th to the 19th centuries when they had been torn away from their original African roots. The current inhabitants of the plantation did not want to leave what had become their new home.

The greatest problem was that the majority of houses they have lived in, the gardens where they have been growing food, the furniture they have used every day; belonged to the white plantation owners who could easily confiscate it and fire them. That was the reason they tried to avoid making an enemy of their white employers and refused to join any revolt or demonstration.

The young generation is represented primarily by two young men. Although Ned is not so young in comparison with Jane who raised him, he is one of the first black people who followed the ideas of Martin Luther King and tried to defend the right of the blacks to the land they occupied.

Because Ned's personality was not too aggressive against the unjust situation, he chose a milder way of fighting through the oral appeal.

On the contrary, Jimmy Aaron had been suffocated by the constant oppression, injustice and degradation from the part of white citizens, just like the majority of his contemporaries. They all were fed up by the racial discrimination in the United States of America and became very angry and furious and prepared to use violence to protect entitlement to fair life. Jimmy relied on the power of black folk.

4.0. *A Gathering of Old Men*

"The whole book meant one thing to me, that day of standing up."

Ernest J. Gaines

4.1. Introduction

A Gathering of Old Men is a novel consisting of twenty chapters, set on a sugarcane plantation in Louisiana in the 1970s where one of the Cajun farmers is murdered by a black man. The events that occur after the dead man is found picture powerfully the racial tension among the whites and the blacks, who for the first time in their life taste power and pride; the past suffering, and the changes in social and legal status.

The plot of the story allows us to penetrate into the past of the black workers and also into their minds and senses as well as to understand the virtues of the white folk; family and honor. Ernest J. Gaines describes some of his own experience since he was born on the River Lake Plantation and also had to work as a little child. In *A Gathering of Old Men* Gaines lets his people talk. That makes the story a powerful testimony of a difficult life.

"Courage and its opposite, cowardice, are important elements both of tragedy and *Gathering*."(pg. 118; Lambert, 2010) Terrence Tucker comments on Gaines's style separating him from many of his black literary forefathers with "shifting narrators from chapter to chapter, Gaines de-

centers his novel to include the voices of men who have been silent throughout the twentieth century.” (pg. 114, Tucker, 2011)

4.2. Plot overview

The story begins with the discovery of Beau Boutan’s dead body on the Marshall Plantation in Bayonne. Because Beau was a cruel white Cajun farmer, Candy Marshall, the partial owner of the plantation, believes that Mathu, an old black man, killed Beau. This assumption is supported by the fact that Beau has been murdered and found outside Mathu’s house. However, she has decided to make every effort to protect him because he brought her up after her parents died. Candy Marshall summons everybody from the plantation to come to Mathu’s house with shotguns and empty shells. She thinks that the local Sheriff would not be able to find the real murder among such a number of men. Eighteen armed men meet outside Mathu’s house ready to confess their guilt.

They all are waiting for Fix Boutan, the father of the dead man and a well-known brutal Cajun, because they believe he will be due to revenge but the one who arrives is Sheriff Mapes with his deputy and Lou Dimmes, Candy’s boyfriend. Mapes is aware that if Fix comes, he will lynch the blacks. He orders his deputy to keep Fix off the Marshall plantation in order to avoid it and starts questioning. Candy confesses to the murder but the Sheriff is convinced of Mathu’s guilt for Beau’s death because Mathu is the only black man who has ever been opposed to the whites although they all had suitable reasons to kill him as well. Beau persecuted Charlie with a gun and Charlie was looking for help on the Marshall Plantation. Beau was requested not to walk in the Marshall’s territory but he didn’t obey and he was shot. Mapes believes that Charlie is too weak to commit any murder.

Every man confesses to the murder, which makes Mapes upset so he strikes two of the men in order to force them to tell the truth but he was unsuccessful.

When Gil Boutan learns of Beau’s death, he visits the Marshall Plantation where he sees eighteen old men with shotguns. When he

reaches his home Fix and all members of the family and family friends are discussing whether they should go to the Marshall plantation and seek revenge or not. Gil announces his father about the old men waiting for them with guns but asks him not to interfere in Mapes's work and let justice take its course. Gil's words are criticized by Luke Will, a local brute. Fix accuses Gil for being interested only in football because Gil is a football player at Louisiana State University and dreams of becoming "All American". Any involvement in something against the law would destroy his athletic career as well as the career of Cal, his black team-mate at "LSU". Cal and Gil, although they have different color of the skin, their success depends on each other. Fix decides not to avenge his son's death but Luke Will calls some men to help him without old Boutan's agreement.

When Mapes learns that Fix will not come, he is satisfied. All blacks ask Mapes for personal space. He agrees and they gather inside the Mathu's house and discuss what to do. Candy becomes flustered when her old friends prohibit her to join them. Mathu is ready to be arrested when Charlie returns and confesses that he shot Beau. He asked Mathu to take the blame because he was scared of electric chair but he felt he should tell the truth and be a man.

Unfortunately, Luke Will decided to take the law in his own hands. He and his men ask Mapes to give Charlie over to them so that they can lynch him. Mapes refuses, Will shoots him and with the others start to shoot the blacks. The old men shoot as well because they are prepared for the battle. Charlie feels like a man after he confessed to the murder and shoots Luke. Charlie is also shot. All the people from the black community came to touch his dead body; firstly the men, then women and children. "The community's act not only connects them to Charlie, but also serves as a way of remembering their ancestors, an act [...] of the community's stories and legacy." (pg. 123; Tucker, 2011)

Two days later, there are three funerals: Beau's, Luke's and Charlie's. The trial takes place the following week. Both, the black men and the white men, are put on probation for the next five years.

4.3. Analysis of the novel

This novel interestingly illustrates the changing relationships between the whites and the blacks. The style in which Ernest J. Gaines has written this moving novel should be appreciated because of his original use of multiple narrators although the story possesses elements of Greek tragedy following the standard formula of the classical theatre. The originality also consists in the fact that the story takes place in one day and almost one place.

Although the story is set in the 1970s, more than one hundred years after the Civil War had ended and slavery abolished and indeed, after much Civil Rights legislation had been passed in the mid 1960s, the Cajuns, the descendants of French-speaking settlers from Acadia, continue to treat their black “employees” as if they were still their slaves. The time seems to have stopped since the Civil War. The plantation owners live in the past. They are unwilling to accept that the times of lynching and brutal revenge on black people are gone, that the law and justice equal for all came with the victory of the northerners in 1865 and indeed, the passage of the Civil Rights Laws one hundred years later.

The back story to this simple murder, however, is really what *Gathering* is all about: the murder of a white man by a black man immediately exacerbates the racial tensions that saturate the fragile social mosaic of this isolated southern locality that has remained unchanged by the reforms of the civil rights movement. [...] The novel highlights the complexity of the social and racial equation in 1970s Louisiana [...]. (pg. 107; Lambert, 2010)

The suitable example of a cruel Cajun farmer in the novel is William Fix Boutan who represents the authority based on violence and also all planters from “old times”. The maltreatment of the slaves knew no bounds and the old blacks living in Bayonne remember that. Beau, his brutal son, has been killed while applying these old-fashioned and violent rules. A

friend of the Boutan family, Luke Will, is another great exemplar of a white man with outdated manners and ideas who seeks trouble and domination over blacks through violence.

Candy Marshall, a partial owner of the Marshall Plantation, represents a positive personality among white plantation owners because she favors the old black men. In fact, her possessiveness is covered by the veil of loyalty toward Mathu, who raised her after her parents had died. Probably, she does not realize her behavior when she tries to protect her people without noticing that she also restricts their freedom. When they disallow her to join their gathering in Mathu's house it is "the old men's first deliberate act of civil disobedience. It is a first concrete step toward the old men's self-liberation as a unified group. (pg. 109; Lambert, 2010)

The two other partial owners of the Marshall Plantation embody absolutely no interest in what is happening on their piece of land. Jack Marshall stands behind during the entire novel because he is a drunkard.

Not just the farmers but also the old black workers are not convinced of the change of time and race relations. When one of them kills Beau they all gather together, prepared to fight, and expect Fix to come and seek revenge. "The old men as a group is the protagonist. The central motif is that they had not acted manfully in the past, and here was God giving them a second chance to stand up one day." (pg. 167; Lowe, 1995) They do not trust the white dispensers of justice but rather believe they would be punished much more strictly than the white sinners since that has been their experience all their lives.

At the beginning when Mapes arrives to the Marshall Plantation it seems that they are afraid rightfully since he uses violence, an outdated technique, to force them to confess who the real murderer is. As well as Fix and Beau, the Sheriff built and fastened his reputation by subjugating the others. On the other hand, Mapes sympathizes and respects Mathu. "Mapes was a lot of things. He was big, mean, and brutal. But Mapes respected a man. Mathu was a man, and Mapes respected Mathu. But he didn't think much of the rest of us, and he didn't respect us." (pg. 84; Gaines, 1993)

When he questions them and they narrate to him what had happened to their acquaintances or friends in conjunction with the Boutan family, he does not complain. “[...] Mapes surrenders to the demand of the old men to be listened to.” (pg. 112; Lambert, 2010)

Their unpleasant memories show that the Cajun farmers had been unjust, ruthless and severe over many decades.

A son was killed just because of the word from white “trash”; a poisoned child. So they beat him. They took stalks of cane and they beat him and beat him and beat him. I was there, and I didn’t move[...] I saw my brother win that race. But he wasn’t supposed to win, he was supposed to lose[...] He was supposed to lose years ago, and because he didn’t lose like a nigger is supposed to lose, they beat him[...] And I didn’t do nothing but stand there and watch them beat my brother down to the ground[...] we had all seen our brother, sister, mama, daddy insulted once and didn’t do a thing about it[...] Out of fear of a little pain to my own body, I beat my own brother with a stalk of cane as much as the white folks did. (pg. 96, 97, 98; Gaines, 1993)

Now Mapes could see that everybody could have a suitable motive to murder Beau Boutan. “Their alibi, just like Candy’s, may not be very strong, but they all have a good story to tell; [...]. (pg. 110; Lambert, 2010) The poor old men have been suffering till today because they did not help to their acquaintances or friends when they needed it. The curse of the past which is following them but today they enjoy the importance, pride, and power of becoming brave enough to oppose their masters for the first time in their lives by staying together.

The feeling of irritation for their lost friends and work is attributed to the Cajun farmers. Because of the appropriation of the land where the black people had been working hard when the white folks came with the revolutionary mechanization supported by the Civil War and the northerners, all of “Satan’s” machines deprived the poor blacks of their means of subsistence. Mechanization brought the reduction of the need for labor and

most of the inhabitants of the plantation had to choose whether to starve to death or to move away and look for a better place to live.

Thirty, forty of us going out in the field with cane knives, hoes, plows—name it. Sunup to sundown, hard, miserable work, but we managed to get it done. We stuck together, shared what little we had, and love and respected each other. But just look at things today. Where the people? Where the roses?...Where the people used to sing and pray in the church? I'll tell you. Under them trees back there, that's where. And where they used to stay, the weeds got it now, just waiting for the tractor to come plow it up. (pg. 92, 93; Gaines, 1993)

The imaginary world of Johnny Paul has created becomes the world of authenticity for those who can see it – that is, those Johnny Paul has convened. Mapes, Johnny Paul makes clear, is not welcome and he is turned, together with the white world he represents, into something unreal. The Marshall plantation – as a synecdoche of the tyrannical white world – becomes an absurd nightmare, a dystopia characterized by weeds, desolation, and lifelessness. The plantation contrasts with the world that springs from Johnny Paul's mind. (pg. 113; Lambert, 2010)

With the mechanization represented by the tractor, the whites have destroyed the sugar cane fields where the black workers toiled all days. They express the bitterness that the plantation died out when the Marshalls gave the best land to the Cajuns, who had never set foot on the land before, were given the bottomland near the swamps. "The Marshalls' unequal division of the land reiterates the tradition of white privilege, but it maintains an economic hierarchy that keeps both groups dependent on the Marshall." (pg.117; Tucker, 2011) When the plantation died, their previous way of life passed away with it. "Johnny Paul invokes the memory of generations of black labor that the tractor threatens to erase, both literally and metaphorically." (pg. 116; Tucker, 2011)

Beau's death symbolizes light satisfaction for the local black population. Finally, someone has been punished for maltreating, subjugating and tyrannizing them. The dead man was not the only racist

farmer liable for the misfortune in their lives but it does not matter. Although he has been killed before the story begins, he represented all white despots who have ever enslaved their lives after the Civil War. His role in the novel is symbolic. He is connected with the change of agricultural system when he arrives in the tractor hunting Charlie, his worker. The agricultural shift was followed by the loss of work, friends, and former life.

Mathu, the potential murder and the most respected black man in his eighties, despises his black friends for being cowards for a long time. He is the only black man who has ever shown opposition to his master. Mathu takes the view that he is socially higher than the other blacks for his pure, unblended black blood running in his veins for which he feels very proud. He is considered to be a real man who is particular about his respect and honor.

There ain't no more to prove. Y'all done already proved it. [...] I never thought I woulda seen this day[...] Rooster with a gun, Dirty Red with a gun-Chimley, Billy[...] Till a few minutes ago, I felt the same way that man out there feel about y'all-you never would 'mount to anything. But I was wrong[...] And I thank y'all. And I look up to you. Every man in here. And this is the proudest day of my life[...] I ain't nothing but a mean, bitter old man[...] Hating them out there on that river, hating y'all here in the quarters. Put myself above all-proud to be African. You know why proud to be African? 'Cause they won't let me be a citizen here in this country. [...] hated y'all 'cause you never tried. Just a mean-hearted old man. All I ever been, till this hour. (pg. 181, 182; Gaines, 1993)

Mathu's words said during their gathering in his house express true pride in the attendants who have stood by him when he learnt that he was in danger of being arrested. They proved that they were no longer silent sheep enduring the oppression, subjugation, violence and injustice and they have become real men who deserve to be respected and honored for they have plucked up their courage.

Charlie, the man who really killed Beau Boutan, came back because he had a conscience about his unkind action that he had escaped

and had left Mathu to take the blame for him just because he wasn't brave enough to bear the responsibility. The sentence with which he decided to make his confession was the following: "One of y'all standing round ain't doing nothing, go find the law." (pg. 183; Gaines, 1993) After he confessed his deed, he rose in the eyes of his fellows, Mathu's and even in Mapes's eyes. Charlie had become a real man. He has acknowledged his manhood and well-deserved respect.

With the pronounced truth, Charlie seems to have been brought back to life. The consciousness that he has gained appreciation and respect and has demonstrated that he has turned into an honest man has woken up the decision among the community's blacks not to be subjugated or maltreated again. He as well as the other blacks is prepared to die defending freedom. Mathu, the proud black, now came to respect Charlie. "Mathu pushed it on him, and grinned. He was proud of Charlie. Charlie swung back toward the door with the gun ready." (pg. 194; Gaines, 1993)

This sudden insurrection has brought a kind of awakening into the minds of many black people living on the plantation. Mathu has found out that the fellows he considered to be cowards unable to resist the cruel oppressors have become brave persons pleading for those whom they love and respect. The black men have learnt that the time of being maltreated, subjugated and insulted has finished and Sheriff Mapes has persuaded them that he did not prefer the whites or the black in front of the justice. When Luke Will attacked "the gathering", Mapes abstained.

When the conflict has been solved by the shoot-out, Candy offered Mathu a ride home but he refused. "His refusal, and decision to ride with Clatoo, not only completes the negation of white privilege [...]; it also uses Mathu's newfound respect for the other African American men as a clear stepping stone toward a progressive and inclusive southern identity and landscape." (pg. 122; Tucker, 2011)

At the trial, the black fellows discovered other important matters of fact; the law is now equal for all. They were surprised by that. The judge

said he was putting all of them on probation for the next five years, or until their deaths-whichever came first. He said that meant he was taking away their privilege of carrying any kind of firing arm, rifle, shotgun, or pistol, or being within ten feet of anyone else with such weapons. (pg. 213; Gaines, 1993)

The Cajun farmers have realized, thanks to the young generation, such as Gil that the days of lynching and injustice have really gone and only the institutions are allowed to take the law into their hands.

The future is up the young generation. Its youth, freshness and revolutionary ideas stand in contrast to the old men and their old-fashioned opinions. This pattern for the future oriented personality would be Gil Boutan, an educated young man who refuses to follow the violent traditions of his father and sympathizes with the belief of harmonious co-existence between the whites and the blacks. His theory is supported by football where he depends on another man called Cal, a black player. Together Gil and Cal are well-known as "Salt and Pepper" which describe them ideally as teammates as well according to the color of their skins; Gil is a white man and Cal is a dark man, and according to the relationship between salt and pepper. One cannot exist without another, particularly in their strategy on offense in the football game.

Their success relies on their cooperation with one another. The racial interdependence does not concern only in a football game but generally in all population. The blacks and the whites need the cooperation to be successful and the United States of America needs the North and the South to work together to make a peaceful and prosperous country for all its inhabitants. "The presence and agency of both populations demands a fundamental adjustment not only of the traditional mythic vision of the South, but of a present and future that rejects the white backlash that emerged in the South in the latter half of the twentieth century." (pg. 119; Tucker, 2011)

Ernest J. Gaines comments on the two football players and the necessity of their cooperation:

Another one of the themes running around this story is the idea of working together. The football players are very important in the novel. The only way you can really do things and the only way we are going to be Americans is that we have to work together. While many of the other characters in the novel are trapped in the past, the only ones who live in the present are Salt and Pepper. They're the ones living in the present and they're the ones who must make this America work. We've got to block for each other and do all kinds of things to get to the goal. The football players are a symbol for how we must do this together. (pg. 250; Lowe, 1995)

A Gathering of Old Men describes such historical problems which are unimaginable for us who are living in absolutely different and liberal world.

4.4. Generational Conflicts and Changes

The way of justice and racial acceptance for the African Americans citizens had been very difficult, long and slow in the United States of America. Each change was so imperceptible that nobody noticed it, neither whites nor blacks. That is why so many older black people living on plantations in the South gave up their belief in better future for them and for their descendants. The past experience had affected them and left "scars on their brains" (pg. 229; Gaines, 1986) like Miss Jane Pittman would explain in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*.

A Gathering of Old Men provides an African American testimony about the irreal changes in social and legal status although everybody almost overlooks them. When the Cajun farmer is murdered, the old black workers are waiting for his father Fix Boutan to come and seek revenge. The first proof that the situation has changed is that the African Americans gathered together in order to stick up for a friend and complicate the police investigation for the first time in their lives. The most serious fact is that they are armed and prepared to fight and die for their truth. In other words, they have become militant and united.

The title of the novel faithfully indicates that the story describes predominantly the conflict among an older generation, both black and white;

and their unconsciousness or better to say the incapacity to accept that more than a hundred year had passed from the slavery times and that the time of peace and justice had finally come.

The old blacks are very surprised by Boutan's absence. His former reaction would be violent like it always was for decades but here the author allows the young voices to talk. The young generation is represented just by two young men nicknamed Salt and Pepper, white and black football players and teammates at Louisiana State University. Gil Boutan alias Salt, the only young that appears "on stage", refuses the violent solution of the tragedy although the victim was his own brother. The defender of racial tolerance, harmony and even friendship, Gil knows from football that respect and cooperation are important not just in a game but also in life.

The legal status and its changes are represented firstly by sheriff Mapes and later at trial. Mapes, although belonging to the old white generation, does not allow the color of skin to influence his investigation. At the beginning of the story Mapes evinces the typical white southern behavior when he strikes the two old black men. Yet, after hearing the oral storytelling from the members of gathering and Charlie's confession to the murder, his relationship towards blacks is changed and he shows detachment by his abstinence from the shoot-out.

At the trial, the black workers and the white brutes were treated with the same measure and got the same penalty. The blacks became convinced of the changed legal system, so that they comprehended that now they were full-bodied American citizens with equal rights. The white men found out that they were more allowed to take the law into their hands.

5.0. A Lesson before Dying

"I try to create characters with character to help develop my own character and maybe the character of the reader who might read me." E.J.Gaines

5.1. Introduction

Already with its powerful title, the book exudes tragic overtones, yet, the novel is much more breath-taking that we might surmise. The story provokes deep thinking about our past, about the bestial behavior towards our human race that have remained in existence for centuries and caused hundreds of unjust deaths just for the color of the skin.

Critics have praised *A Lesson before Dying*, the story of a young Black man wrongly condemned to Louisiana's electric chair by a White jury in 1948 and a teacher who tries to help him meet death. (pg. 295; Lowe, 1995)

An unfair loss of life of an African-American man, searching for a dignified death, not for justice that is lost in the hate of the allegedly superior white race, and the pursuit of the preciousness of life that consists of the main theme, are facets of this emotional story written by Ernest J. Gaines, who faithfully describes the ignorant treatment of black people in the 1940s.

The innovation in literary fiction that is brought by the author is the creation of a new representation of a black teacher, who learns about the meaning of life and death, justice and injustice, and love and indifference. Teachers have been portrayed in many more or less true-to-life representations, both positively and negatively, by writers in the 19th and 20th centuries, but Gaines's realistic view and psychological analysis of the teacher makes the novel amazing and powerful.

5.2. Plot overview

A Lesson before Dying is narrated by Grant Wiggins, a young Northern-educated, African-American teacher, who teaches on a plantation church school in rural Louisiana. The plot takes place in the 1940s, the time of racism and segregation before the Civil Rights movement. Grant's aunt, Tante Lou, demanded that Grant help a young, barely literate black boy with a learning disability named Jefferson, while awaiting his death by electrocution for a murder he witnessed, but did not commit.

That day, Jefferson was on his way to go fishing when two acquaintances stopped him, promising to take him to the river but first to drop by a liquor store. However, the two guys were short of money and asked the storeowner, an older white man, to sell them several bottles of alcohol for which they would pay him later. Unsurprisingly, the storeowner refused. The two blacks started arguing with him and then drew guns and pulled the trigger but the storeowner was prepared and did the same. Finally, the three men died and Jefferson remained terrified in the liquor store where the police arrested him.

Although Jefferson is innocent, the decision about his death sentence is accepted immediately by the black inhabitants of the plantation. Jefferson's innocence consists in the fact that he did not commit murder but on the other hand, he appeared guilty when he stole money and alcohol from the store because he panicked after witnessing the triple murder. This minor set of crimes was used as evidence against him. The teacher's role does not consist in defending the young unfortunate and save him from dying unjustly but in teaching him how to die with dignity which Jefferson lost during the trial when his own attorney said:

Do you see a man sitting here? [...] Do you see a modicum of intelligence? Do you see anyone who could plan a murder, a robbery[...] A cornered animal to strike quickly out of fear, a trait inherited from his ancestors in the deepest jungle of blackest Africa – yes, yes, that he can do – but to plan? [...] What justice would there be to take this life? Justice, gentlemen? Why, I would just as soon put a hog in the electric chair as this. (pg. 7, 8; Gaines, 1993)

Miss Emily, Jefferson's godmother, is deeply offended by the words of the lawyer and wishes her boy to die like a man, not like a hog. With Tante Lou's pressure, they manage to manipulate Grant to visit the young, poor fellow in his cell, even though the young teacher does not want to get involved in the case at all.

When this old lady approaches him about teaching this guy [Jefferson] to be a human being, a man [Grant], at first says no, but somehow she convinces him to do it, to accept the challenge of his life, to teach this guy who could die in a month or two, or six months. (pg. 198; Lowe, 1995)

The first step to gain the permission to visit the condemned boy is to ask Henri Pichot who had Miss Emily as his servant and who had essentially been raised by Miss Emily. Pichot's brother-in-law, a sheriff, can decide whether a black teacher is allowed to meet with Jefferson. "He seemed annoyed that he had been disturbed while he had company." (pg. 20; Gaines, 1993) The southern white man distrusts Grant's abilities, not just because of his black origins but also because of his northern education. Henri Pichot shows Grant his intellectual and racial dominance. "So Henri Pichot, who cared nothing in the world for me, tolerated me because of my aunt." (pg. 21; Gaines, 1993) Although the sheriff is not too willing, Grant eventually obtains the approval by humbly submitting to the superiority of the white man.

Grant is desperate and nervous about his new task for he wonders how to live his own life properly and yet is asked to teach someone how to die with dignity. Grant feels it is too much for him to bear. The only confessor Grant has is Vivian, his patient Creole girlfriend, who lives in Bayonne, thirteen miles from the plantation where Tante Lou's home is set. Vivian Baptist works also as a teacher. She is a Catholic mother of two children who is about to get divorced. She listens to Grant and understands him.

The teacher's visits in Jefferson's cell are frustrating because Jefferson is still staring at the ceiling and deeply hurt by the words the attorney said about him at the trial. He has taken his words to heart and now he believes he is an only hog set to be slaughtered. It takes number of visits before Jefferson, who is full of hate and who has lost his reason to live, to eat, to drink, to sleep, is able and willing to talk a little with Grant.

A few months after the trial, the date of execution is set on the second Friday after Easter, April eight between noon and three. Jefferson becomes a little more communicative and asks for example, that Grant bring him a gallon of ice cream for his last supper. On his next meetings, the teacher brings the young convict a small radio and a notebook with a request to note down whatever comes to his mind. Grant is very surprised to see Jefferson filling the notebook with his thoughts.

Unfortunately, while the two black men, “teacher and student”, start to get along with each other, Grant’s relationships with Vivian and Reverend Ambrose also intensify. Vivian is tired of Grant’s egocentrism and Reverend Ambrose is not content with the fact that Jefferson is visited by someone who does not believe in God because the only thing a dying man needs is faith in Christ, not the radio exhaling sin music, jazz music.

The Jazz music origins are attributed to the beginning of the 20th century in African-American communities which became very popular for its traits carried from West African black folk music and because it represented freedom and spontaneity to Jefferson, especially by its key element which was improvisation. However, jazz music was considered sin music by the older generation also for its provocative lyrics which celebrated dancing, drinking alcohol and sex and drugs.

During the last dinner with Jefferson, Grant gives him a passionate and sincere speech about heroes, about his life he does not like, about how much the people need Jefferson, including Grant, and both of them begin to cry. On the next visit they also talk a lot.

On the day of execution, Grant stays at school with children because he is not strong enough to see the last moment of Jefferson’s life. He makes the children kneel and wait in honor of Jefferson. When the deadly deed is done, Paul, the deputy from the prison, comes to see Grant and hands him Jefferson’s notebook with words that Jefferson walked as a man and was the bravest one in there.

The notebook containing the last thoughts of the innocent young fellow indicated how grateful Jefferson was for Mr. Wiggins’s friendship;

how glad he was when all children came to visit him; when his godmother told him she loved him; and that he felt he was a strong man.

5.3. How *A Lesson before Dying* Was Written

Ernest J. Gaines came up with the idea for *A Lesson before Dying* when he was teaching at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette around 1983 or 1984. Originally, he decided to write a contemporary novel but later he changed his mind and set the story in the 1940s, a period he knew very well from his childhood and where he was most comfortable.

When he lived in San Francisco, Mr. Gaines had lived near a prison and when there was an execution he had nightmares about it. Sometimes it was him who was executed, sometimes his brother or his friend. Later he decided to write about it and started to research about executions, read about them in books, short stories etc. One of his colleagues, Paul Nolan, who, after hearing the plot about “a young man being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and he was charged with murder” (pg. 53, Gaines, 2005), remembered a similar case which had happened about 1946 or 1947. The real case dealt with a seventeen-year-old boy sentenced to be electrocuted and Ernest started to be interested in it for the additional realistic historical material he would use in order to write accurately about that time.

Mr. Gaines found a number of similarities in the case of the 1940s and his own suggestion. “When I started *A Lesson before Dying*, I knew that Jefferson would be sentenced to die” (pg. 59; Gaines, 1993), but with the difference that “my young man would maintain his innocence to the end.” (pg. 54; Gaines, 1993)

Thanks to his lessons of creative writing at the University of Louisiana, Gaines had a chance to draw people from outside the university, and always got attorneys. One of his students, an attorney, knew a condemned man on death row and the writer asked him questions about the emotions and behavior of the man sentenced to death, about the image of the state prison, of the electric chair and its weight, material it was made of

etc. Another colleague of his arranged a meeting with a sheriff of a small town to whom Gaines could query about what life in the jail consisted of at that time, Gaines was told that the sheriff was totally in charge in the prison and made all the decisions.

Later, Gaines, again thanks to one of his students, met the lawyer who had actually defended the young man in court from the case Paul Nolan had drawn his attention to. The old attorney disclosed the mysteries about the traveling electric chair from one parish to the other in a special truck, the noisy generator that accompanied the chair because of the unpredictability of the Louisiana weather, the time of execution and other questions regarding power voltage for the electrocution.

Among the most important ideas in the novel, the radio and the notebook were not planned by Gaines at the very beginning of the story. It turned out to be the only viable means of communication between the teacher and the condemned that with his pencil and the notebook writes down his thoughts and “tries to define his humanity – in the few days he has left to live”.(pg. 61; Gaines, 2005)

According to Ernest J. Gaines writing is a kind of discovery for him because he always comes up with few crucial ideas and does not know what is going to happen in his book. “If I knew everything when I began a novel, I’m afraid it would be boring to write.”(pg. 62; Gaines, 2005)

5.4. Analysis of Motifs in the Novel

Although it might seem that the young condemned man is the protagonist of the plot because of his plight, the novel describes the development of Grant Wiggins who narrates the story. Grant, a teacher, has a bitter personality because of less opportunity as a black man. He had been influenced from his childhood by his primary school teacher, Matthew Antoine.

A man of mixed race ancestry, Mr. Antoine felt himself to be superior to blacks but inferior to whites. He believed that blacks in southern society are condemned to fail even if they try to do their best. This

pessimistic attitude has become deeply rooted in Grant's head and probably that is the reason he does nothing with his situation. Grant is haunted by his past. "But I had been running in place ever since, unable to accept what used to be my life, unable to leave it." (pg. 102; Gaines, 1993) He is depressed by his memories of his childhood when he was working in the field and white people treated him as an animal, as the blacks were considered to be.

In addition, when Grant studied in the North, he had the possibility to get to know the life there. He became aware of the fact that in comparison with the life in the North, the life in the South is much more difficult and unjust for a black person. However, the southern blacks only know this kind of life. This knowledge weighs on Grant and makes him feel miserable in the South. Furthermore, it separates him from his older relatives and makes him less religious.

Grant shares his inescapability from the past with his beautiful Creole girlfriend Vivian, who is pursued by her past matrimonial problems. She is in the process of divorcing her husband and hides her relationship with Grant because she is afraid that her husband could take advantage of her affair in court and take their children away from her. Grant tries to persuade her to move to another place but she realizes that the past with its problems will not disappear just by running away but that people need to face the racism and other troubles. The young teacher thinks that society will never change and that everyone who attempts to confront it will be destroyed by the power of the superior white force in society. He needs more time to recognize that Vivian is right.

Grant has already escaped temporarily from the South when he studied at a university in the North where the blacks do not get discriminated like they belong to the bottom of the society; however he has come back to the detested part of the country, because of his aunt, Tante Lou, who did her best to enable Grant to study.

Tante Lou is a deeply religious woman and this powerful faith motivates her to believe that the world can become better one day. God

represents hope and the only freedom in the life of the black people, especially for the older generation. She preserves a kind of dignity; she is proud and strict but never shows her feelings to other persons. She disapproves of Grant's atheism. The way she persuades people to do what she wants is to manipulate them. She forced Grant to ask Mr. Pichot, who at first shows little interest in helping her, to get the permission to visit Jefferson in prison, to wait in his house with degradation, to be patient with the young poor convict and to teach him how to die with dignity even when he did not know how to live. She even manipulates the white man by reminding him every useless thing she did for his family when she was working there. She keeps the servant mentality.

All the pressure Tante Lou puts on her nephew's shoulders is a profound demonstration of her friendship with Miss Emma, Jefferson's godmother. That Jefferson deserves to die with dignity, with his head up, like a man, that is extremely important to her. Like Tante Lou, Miss Emma is a very strong, religious and loving woman.

It might be interesting or strange that neither Grant nor Jefferson have a father or mother depicted in this novel. In this case Ernest J. Gaines projects something from his own autobiography in the novel because his parents had left him in the South with his crippled aunt, who could not walk at all, to raise him while his mother and father were working in California in order to save money to be able to support their children and give them proper education. When he was fifteen, Gaines moved to California when he lived with his parents and attended high school there. In these times it was no exception to leave the family and work in a different place to get money.

Grant is closed to and alienated from the people he loves. He is an egocentric man who feels that to help his community with the hundreds of years of the legacy of racism is futile and impossible. Yet he does nothing against it and absorbs the rage he feels, turns bitter and pessimistic. Although he is disgusted and annoyed because he is manipulated into participating in Jefferson's difficulties, he is not able to refuse his aunt's

demand. He obediently undergoes all the degrading meetings with the whites who, although surprised by his higher education (higher than they themselves have), they still consider him racially inferior.

Finally, when Grant gets the permission to visit the young condemned man he can see firsthand that the attorney's words: "What justice would there be to take this life? Justice, gentlemen? Why, I would just as soon put a hog in the electric chair as this" (pg. 8; Gaines, 1993), have hurt Jefferson deeply. As a simple and barely literate young black man, Jefferson has spent all his life working without protest on the plantation. He is a good person, content with his low position in the world. The white attorney who defended him used his social superiority and tried to save him from execution by degrading him as a mindless hog. This misrepresentation of him influenced Jefferson so much that he was haunted by the idea so much. He started to believe that he is no better than the dirty animal without the possibility of thinking.

When the teacher along with Miss Emma and Reverend Ambrose visit Jefferson in his cell for the first time, the young black convict is unapproachable, angrily refuses to speak or to eat because he cannot see any reason to do so. Why make any effort when there is only death waiting? He cynically imitates a hog's behavior. Grant is helpless but still visits Jefferson although in silence.

When the date is set on the second Friday after Easter, April 8th between noon and three, Grant's head is full of one question. "How do people come up with a date and a time to take life from another man? Who made them God?" (pg. 157; Gaines, 1993) The answer is of course impossible to give. The young teacher becomes angry.

They sentence you to death because you were at the wrong place at the wrong time, with no proof that you had anything at all to do with the crime other than being there when it happened. Yet six months later they come and unlock your cage and tell you, We, us, white folks all, have decided it's time for you to die, because this is the convenient date and time. (pg. 158; Gaines, 1993)

In the next visit in the cell, Grant makes efforts to communicate with the young boy who asks him for a gallon of ice cream which may be the first flash of Jefferson's awakening from his hopeless feelings. To win Jefferson's favor, Grant buys him a portable radio to help him kill the time in jail. The young condemned is enthusiastic about the small device and spends all the time listening to jazz music.

However because of this radio, Grant gets into trouble with Reverend Ambrose and religion. When Miss Emma, Tante Lou and Reverend Ambrose visit Jefferson, Jefferson lacks all interest in communicating with them and occupies himself just with the radio. While Reverend and Tante Lou consider the jazz music to be sinful music and believe Jefferson needs God, Grant is an atheist. For the Christians, it is complicated to change Jefferson. Grant is content and happy, however, that he has finally reached Jefferson because the radio makes him to think of other things, not only about death. Grant believes Reverend Ambrose is angry because he did not reach Jefferson but an only black atheist.

Soon thereafter, Miss Emma prepares a special dinner for Jefferson. The three religious persons, Grant and Jefferson meet in the day room, but Jefferson refuses to eat. This is something offensive for Miss Emma because the food she sends to Jefferson expresses her love and care for him. Grant is aware of it; He asks Jefferson to walk with him for awhile and gives him a powerful speech provoking tears.

[...] I want you to show them the difference between what they think you are and what you can be. [...] White people believe that they're better than anyone else on earth – and that's a myth. The last thing they ever want is to see a black man stand, and think, and show that common humanity that is in us all. [...] They would no longer have justification for having made us slaves and keeping us in the condition we are in. [...] I want you to chip away at that myth by standing. [...] I want you to show them that you are as much a man – more a man than they can ever be. [...] You have the chance of being bigger than anyone who has ever lived on that plantation or

come from this little town. You can do it if you try. (pg. 191 – 193; Gaines, 1993)

The day before the execution, Grant asked Jefferson to write down his feelings and thoughts in a notebook he gave him. The notebook and the pencil represent his efforts to prove his humanity through writing and reading, although his style of writing is simple – “He does not erase. He does not capitalize. He uses no punctuation marks.”(pg. 61, Gaines, 2005) His thought nevertheless is going to survive. According to Jefferson’s writing, it can be seen very clearly that Jefferson had a learning disability.

i jus cant sleep no mo cause evertime i shet my eyes i see that door an fore i git ther i wake up an i dont go back to sleep cause i dont want walk to that door no mo cause i dont know what back o ther if its wher they gon put that cher or if it spose to mean def or the grave or heven i dont know i wonder if boo went to heven cause i know he didn git religin firs (pg. 228, Gaines, 1993)

Jefferson’s speech in his diary implies the inner transformation of his personality from a hog to a man, but from the psychological point of view there are more visible processes. At the very beginning, the number of notes Jefferson writes “not only illustrates the frustration he carries as the recipient of an unjust penal system, they also speak to the issue of paternal discord”. (pg. 23; Brown, 2009) Although he was oppressed by the expectations from his plantation community, Jefferson finally accepts to bear the burden for everyone, to play his new role. “From twenty-one years of near-invisibility, Jefferson now becomes the most visible resident in the community.” (pg. 23; Brown, 2009)

After hearing the raw words of the white attorney, Jefferson lost his masculinity and assumed the label the southern justice assigned him – “a hog, a thing, a fool”. “Jefferson is publicly dehumanized.” (pg. 25; Brown, 2009) He was not allowed to speak at the trial but the notebook gave him the first opportunity to give “voice” to his own feelings and to use words “to acknowledge his humanity, reconstruct his identity, and position himself as

a community hero.” (pg. 26; Brown, 2009) The faith the plantation inhabitants put on his shoulders made Jefferson a proud and important member of the community.

Later in the diary, Jefferson was able to recognize “the inappropriate choice he made that led to his incarceration”. (pg. 35; Brown, 2009) Another ability Jefferson discovered in his own personality was his love for his godmother because he did not know perfectly what it meant to love somebody. “Jefferson’s diary, [...] gives Jefferson the opportunity to not only save himself by the strength of his own words, but also to permit himself to teach others the power of facing one’s fears”. (pg. 41; Brown, 2009)

The end of the diary symbolized the end of his life, the declaration of his presence in the world, and the successful transformation from a cornered animal to a strong, self-respected and dignified man who, despite the poor vocabulary, grammar, incorrect punctuation and spelling, wrote about his worst days waiting for death. The most important fact is that all he wrote was written by his heart.

Thanks to Paul, a deputy from the prison, Grant can read Jefferson’s last thoughts. Jefferson expressed gratitude that all Grant’s school children had come to see him; when his godmother had told him she loved him; and that the last dinner had been the best dinner ever; how grateful he was for Mr. Wiggins’s friendship and help; and that he was a strong man because “the story is not whether Jefferson is innocent or guilty but how he feels about himself at the end.” (pg. 60; Gaines, 2005)

The next to last chapter is devoted to the preparation for Jefferson’s execution and the transport of the electric chair, represents the unjust violent punishment by the white society towards black people. “He would teach Jefferson to live for a while and to die with dignity. Jefferson in turn would help him to find himself.” (pg. 58; Gaines, 2005) At the end of the novel, it is clear that Grant and Jefferson taught each other. Grant learned to love and care for someone else than just himself and Jefferson’s strength showed him that blacks are able to beat white “superiority”, although slowly,

and he encouraged him. Jefferson understood that by standing, by showing his humanity, he could make his community proud of him and to defeat white society that had not only unjustly sentenced him to death, but regarded him as less than human.

The day and the time of the execution reminds Grant of the death of Jesus Christ because He died also on Friday at three o'clock pm. Jesus, who was innocent, redeemed us sinners by his martyrdom. Jefferson also is portrayed by Gaines as a representative of a new African American redeemer who, although innocent, dies unjustly to save us. Probably the association of Jefferson with Christ moved Grant to help him to find the way to the dignified death.

Also Jefferson referred to Jesus Christ when he understood that Grant and the community expected him to realize their monumental request and to die with dignity. "Me, Mr. Wiggins. Me. Me to take the cross." (pg. 224, Gaines, 1993) The cross meant the weight of the task Jefferson was requested to bear. Later in the diary "his abandonment at birth underscores his effort to move forward" (pg. 31; Brown, 2009) because it was a painful memory he had to live with.

In spite of their many differences in education and social class, these two black Southerners have something in common with each other. Although they are on the opposite sides of the jail, they both are prisoners. Grant is a prisoner of his own environment. "Grant hates teaching. He hates the South. He hates everything around him." (pg. 57; Gaines, 2005) Other common burdens they bear are their presidential names and the connection between them. The election of these two surnames shows the similarity in the destiny of the two black men and the two great men of the American history of the 19th century. However the author comments his election in this way: "I used two Presidents' names, and I don't know how they came up." (pg. 301; Lowe, 1995)

Thomas Jefferson (1743 – 1826), the 3rd president of the United States of America in (1801 – 1809), was an intellectual with an enormous scale of interests and skills, ranging from education and science to

architecture and music. He was the founder of the University of Virginia. His character absolutely contradicts the personality of Gaines's Jefferson, the condemned twenty-one-year old man, who was barely literate and very simple but if we take cognizance of the color of their skin, the intelligence does not play the main role.

The most important act Thomas Jefferson drafted was the world-famous "Declaration of Independence" in 1776. When the young boy realizes that the way he die can be important for all the black community, he starts to trust his own power and worth. A man can be intelligently a community leader even though he cannot write well. When Jefferson's day came, he walked with his head up in full humanity, like a completely free man, independent of the allegedly superior white society, representing the oppressed community of the Afro-Americans. Death is also a kind of independence.

The 3rd president was not always successful in his duties. Likewise, Jefferson's behavior after the trial, when he was called "a hog" he was unable to think rationally. It also may be understood as a step back when he handed his life in the hands of God. Thomas Jefferson, in his position of the president, passed a legislation to end the Atlantic slave trade. Gaines's Jefferson ended the stereotypes about cowardly blacks by showing his dignity on the chair.

Grant Wiggins was named after the 18th American president Ulysses S. Grant (1822 – 1885) who, unlike Thomas Jefferson, participated in the Civil War as a hero for the North and, along with General Sherman, won the Civil War to free black slaves, and was elected President in the second half of the 19th century (1869 – 1877). The cabinet of President Grant was weak and his domestic policy was confused. These words reliably describe the teacher's personality. His hope was weak; his thoughts confused, he was full of hate locked inside of him which made him become pessimistic and bitter.

Before Ulysses S. Grant became the US President, he had been commanding all Union armies after other Northern generals were

unsuccessful in the Civil War. Grant fought against the Southern Army which had won most battles up to that most important in the war, changed the war and brought victory for the North. Grant Wiggins also had to fight against the superior white race that had won most conflicts, against the stereotypes about black people, against his own environment, against the rage he had been full of, but he eventually succeeded, like U. S. Grant.

The last duty all presidents are obliged to face and bear are the problems facing their own society. Jefferson and Grant did the same. Like the two great men of the American history who made various efforts against slavery, the two colored men fought against something similar, something that was unjust and inhumane, but degrading to the black race. It was something President Grant denied almost hundred years ago: “[...] slavery must be destroyed. We felt that it was a stain to the Union that men should be bought and sold like cattle.” (pg. 416; Young, 1879)

5.5. Generational Differences in Confronting Racism

In the 1940s, eighty years after the American Civil War, everyone would suppose, that in the modern world, the words racism and injustice would no longer have any place. However, racial prejudice formed through slavery in the South, which is essentially what the war was about and to conquer their army was for General Grant.

In that time, the white world ruled the black world and white people reminded the blacks of their superior position in society every day for ages. Black people sometimes had their own bars, churches, schools etc. where blacks could enter and blacks could be served. “Segregation was enforced on trains, in parks, in schools, in restaurants, in theaters and swimming pools – even in cemeteries!” (pg. 57, O’Callaghan, 1990) This demonstration of segregation was based on laws which the southern states passed to protect their higher position in society. After the Civil War, white southerners were not able to tolerate any changes which weakened their control of the South. “They were especially horrified at the idea of giving equal rights to their former black slaves.” (pg. 54; O’Callaghan, 1990)

[...] the professions for blacks to enter were extremely limited. You could be a teacher and teach black children. You could be an undertaker, a barber, an insurance collector from other blacks. You could own a small grocery store or a nightclub. But you could not be an attorney or a doctor. You could not be a banker or a politician [...]. (pg. 58; Gaines, E.J.; 2005)

The resolution of segregation and profession discrimination appeared much later under the reign of the president Lyndon Johnson in 1964 who “had signed into law the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed not only segregation in public accommodations, but job discrimination against blacks and women”. (pg. 934; Norton, 1982) That means that the oppressed black citizens had to wait about thirty years to get the freedom of choice.

Grant, aware of this fact, of the reality that he had little freedom of choice as to what his job should be, because the best and higher positions were always given to white people, felt himself to be in a hopeless situation and was angry with the society. “I teach because it is the only thing that an educated black man can do in the South today.” (pg. 191; Gaines, 1993)

Not just their education and profession were restricted but also their communication with whites. A custom that remained in existence since the times of slavery was that a black person could never enter a house owned by a white man through the front door but they were forced to enter the back door like a servant. If they were even allowed to enter the back door, they had to wait hours until they were received by a white man to talk because firstly, white people had to finish their lunch or drink their coffee, and let them thereby know who was important. The white showed their superiority by treating them in this inferior manner. This routine continued in the United States until the 1960s.

This kind of discrimination existed for an old stereotype. The white writers of the U.S. Constitution actually wrote that blacks were to be counted less than whites in determining Congressional representation. An extract of Grant’s speech to Jefferson confirms it. “White people believe that they’re

better than anyone else on earth – and that’s a myth. ...Their forefathers said that we’re only three-fifths human – and they believe it to this day.” (pg. 192; Gaines, 1993)

The old generation of African Americans in the time this novel was set – before Martin Luther King - seemed to be reconciled with its degrading position in the society and passively tolerated that myth. Old black people did not react to the insults, and they lowered their heads without any comment, although it might hurt them. They found their freedom instead in God. Religion represented reconciliation and a kind of hope for a better future after death. According to Tante Lou and Miss Emma, older generation possessed a kind of pride and dignity. They coldly show their feelings and they are strict and stubborn towards their descendants as they understand the Bible to command them to act in this way. If they need something, they demean themselves by begging from their former white masters, adverting to their hard-work in the past and the favors they did for them, in order to obtain a minor bit of assistance.

The young generation like Grant would never beg or submit in humiliating fashion because young people realize that the behavior they had to suffer for so long was not fair. They are aware of the injustice. They are proud of their African origin and do not feel inferior. They are willing to be engaged politically for freedom and justice but they need encouragement to do so because they otherwise feel hopeless and defenseless when confronting overwhelming power of white society and these feelings make them bitter. They often do not believe in God because to kneel in church is yet another humiliation.

5.6. Generational Conflicts and Changes

In contrast with *A Gathering of Old Men*, there is a profound chasm between the young and old generation in *A Lesson before Dying*. The young and the old differ in many aspects and seem to not understand each other since they are differently influenced by the injustice and violence committed on their ancestors or their own personalities by white oppressors.

The cruel treatment caused that the older generation has become emotionally withdrawn and reserved toward all the people they love. They do not show their feelings because for many years they had to hide pain, sorrow and suffering caused by their white cruel masters. Showing sensitivity in this society means not to be strong enough, but to be weak.

The young generation is not ashamed, but even proud of their black African origin and rejects the humiliating behavior of whites. They are haunted by the idea of unequal choice, racial oppression, and segregation. The young go through the inner struggle whether to escape from the world of lawlessness, or to stay and join the flock of obedient sheep as their forefathers did; or to fight for their life and freedom. But their love towards their friends and familiars makes it impossible for them to leave and let the white despots torture their loved ones, so they do not bend their heads down. The only way to survive is to fight. They are rebellious, prepared to battle. The only thing they need is heartening but the old generation does not support them in the way of revolt.

The people of the old generation are afraid of whites and of their own power to stand up and fight because they had been always humiliated and beaten. Old blacks are reconciled with their degrading social status of partial animals suitable just for work, sexual or another satisfaction for whites. Although they possess a kind of pride and dignity, they prefer to remain quiet and look for hope in better future in the arms of God, a view of Christianity which the majority of the young generation denies.

Many young people consider kneeling in front of God, someone whose existence is not confirmed, as another kind of degradation. Many of the new generation have confidence in intelligence and obstinacy. The young know God will not solve all the problems but they have to employ their collective determination and power will.

6.0. Conclusion

"I know the last thing in the world that whites wanted to see was humanity in blacks." Ernest J. Gaines

Each of the four Gaines' novels analyzed in this work contains an original notion that causes the powerful movement in plot to be very moving and successful. Gaines' novels are high-quality and convincing thanks to his accomplished knowledge of the environment and the people he writes about, and also his usage of the common vernacular. "I like to catch the feeling of that place; I can catch it through that language." (pg. 41; Lowe, 1995)

Although each novel introduces a kind of conflict; as the conflict between old blacks and white Cajuns in *A Gathering of Old Men*, and the contradiction between old and young black generations in *A Lesson before Dying*, or the racism within the black community in *Catherine Carmier*; all novels are connected by one common element which is the struggle of men to reach manhood. Old and young black generations fight together for the same purpose but in different ways. This idea of manhood is multiplied in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* where many men appear in the century-long narrative in Jane's life.

Gaines intentionally leads his "male characters to the verge of manhood and then leave[s] their future unknown but hopeful. He gives them strength of character, but the future is not on their side." (pg. 40; Lowe, 1995) Gaines' novels are mostly sad and tragic because the majority of the men only achieve dignity, pride and humanity in death. Jefferson, the condemned young man, stands and walks just before he is executed. The oppressed murderer of the white Cajun, Charlie, is shot just after he finds the strength to confess his guilt and is considered by other blacks to be a man. Ned and later also Jimmy Aaron are both shot for their rebellious

opinions against the unequal system of justice in white dominated South. As the final example Joe Pittman who broke horses could be mentioned.

Men are not the only members of the black community who fight for freedom and dignity. Even women endowed with strong characters who try to act “because black women had more opportunity to act (as the dominant member of the family, the mother).” (pg. 40; Lowe, 1995)

However the plausibility would fade away if all figures managed to overcome the past. Tee Bob and Jackson represent the victims of the racist rules of society although each comes from its opposite pole. Jackson feels suffocated by the constant oppression, racial discrimination, injustice and degradation just as the young black generation does, although he spent many years in the North in California. Through his disappointment Gaines illustrates the real conditions in the United States of America and undermines the imagination about the “better” North for blacks because he “rejects the North [...] as a solution for his Afro-American population.” (pg. 119; Tucker, 2011)

Gaines prefers his young characters to stay in the South standing and fighting although some of them go through the inner struggle about whether they should leave the southern states or not. They are mostly tied up to their relatives and they find it very difficult to abandon them because they love them, even though there is some times a deep chasm between them.

The young blacks are proud of their African roots and refuse to reconcile themselves with the unjust situation as the old generation has done. They are haunted by the past and present segregation, racial oppression and unequal opportunities. They believe the struggle is the only way to survive and reach justice. Some of young and rebellious blacks choose an oral appeal as a weapon, while the more aggressive ones are prepared to use violence and demonstrate in the streets to protect their entitlement to a fair life.

More than on faith, young generation relies on the power of black folk. They appeal to other people from the black community to stand and

fight together. "Together" is the key word for being successful and to reach the change they demand. This idea appears among the rebellious blacks but also in *A Gathering of Old Men* where the young generation is represented by young football teammates nicknamed Salt and Pepper. Although they differ in the color of their skin, they both propagate the cooperation and reject violence. This emerging idea, inspired by Martin Luther King, holds the general imagination of blacks and whites working together, as well as the South with the North to be successful as a whole.

The majority of young blacks disapprove of the strict religion because the faith cannot satisfy their hopeless feelings. Of course, there are young people like Martin Luther King and his followers who are very religious Christians, but Gaines' young characters distance themselves from religion. The church cannot help them to find solace for the unjust world. Additionally, they consider it to be personally degrading to kneel in front of God.

Their rejection of God disappoints the old generation because old black people are deeply religious. In the times when they were dehumanized and humiliated, the faith appeared the only way they could seek comfort. They had become attached to the church, hoping that their prayers for fair life would be answered one time. This is the only manner they use to reach justice.

Older people as well as young blacks possess dignity and pride but not strong enough to join their young descendants and stand together. They seem to be reconciled with the degrading social status of non-citizenship suitable just for work and stay quiet because they prefer to spend the rest of their lives in peace, taking care of their beloved ones.

For five centuries of humiliation, racism and maltreatment which left marks on them, they are not able to find courage to oppose the white oppressors, nor to show their true feelings. Old blacks have become emotionally withdrawn and reserved toward all the people they love. They always had to hide their pain, sorrow and suffering before their white masters and even now they believe it would show their weakness.

Considering the civil right changes, the novel *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* illustrates them in the best way. The plot progresses from slavery in 1860s, the Civil War (1861-1865) until the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. Until the World War I., the changes were minimal because it seems that the Civil War did not change their status so much. Although the slaves were freed, their renewed freedom brought them complications such as looking for new homes and additionally also more danger from the part of the former Confederate soldiers that formed the future secret groups like the Ku-Klux-Klan.

A Lesson before Dying describes the social situation in the 1940s when white jury did not hesitate to sentence to death by electrocution a young boy although he did not commit the crime. Jefferson was guilty just for his black skin. In 1962, when *Catherine Carmier* is placed, the situation does not seem improved. Black farmers are pushed out of their fields because the Cajuns, well-equipped white farmers, ask more and more land. Thanks to their white race, they had gained an advantage over blacks many centuries before.

The Civil Right Movement initiates in the 1960s when predominantly young blacks, led by Martin Luther King and his followers, demonstrate against the segregation in restaurants, buses, etc. Jimmy Aaron in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* revolts against the segregated fountains and toilets. All these demonstrations lead into significant transformation in the civil right system although the old blacks in *A Gathering of Old Men*, which is set in the 1970s, are not aware of it until the trial when they find out that the law is equal for all. The way of justice and legal rights for African Americans were very difficult, long and slow to access but finally, they reached equality.

From my point of view, I have successfully accomplished the aim of my thesis which I found very interesting and at the same time shocking by the real situation in the American South described in the four novels by Ernest Gaines. I believe my work contributes to the understanding of African

American literature as well as relationships between African Americans and white Americans.

7.0. Czech Summary

V každém ze čtyř zmíněných románů autor snoubí originální myšlenku, skvělé znalosti prostředí a lidí, o kterých píše, a využití jednoduchého vyjadřování a dialektů, které vedou k vysoké kvalitě a přesvědčivosti jeho děl. Přestože se v každém románu objevuje rozdílný konflikt, ať už mezi Afroameričany a bělochy, mezi mladou a starší generací nebo i uvnitř černošské komunity, všechna díla spojuje jeden společný prvek, kterým je snaha o dosažení mužnosti. Obě generace Afroameričanů usilují o stejný cíl, každá však odlišným způsobem. Gainesovy romány vyznačují smutek a tragičnost, neboť osobnosti, které důstojnosti a hrdosti dosáhnou, umírají.

Příčinou jejich smrti bývá často neochota smířit se s rasovou diskriminací a nespravedlností táhnoucí se od dob otroctví až do jejich současnosti. Mladá generace Afroameričanů se dusí pod neustálým tlakem, omezováním a ponižováním ze strany bílého obyvatelstva v celých Spojených státech amerických, přestože severní státy vždy představovaly naději na lepší život. I tam ale černošské rodiny narazily na odvrácenou stranu ráje, kterou E. J. Gaines bravurně vystihuje v románu *Catherine Carmier*. To je také jedním z důvodů, proč se Gainesova díla odehrávají v Louisianě, jižanském státu dobře známém pro své rasistické postoje.

Mnoho postav svádí vnitřní boj, zda opustit rodnou plantáž a hledat spravedlivější život v severních státech nebo zůstat se svými milovanými příbuznými, i když mezi nimi často stojí hluboké nepochopení, a spokojit se s nadřazeností bílé rasy. Gaines ale odmítá „sever“ jako řešení pro své černošské hrdiny a upřednostňuje, aby zůstali ve své rodné zemi a bojovali proti bezpráví se vztyčenou hlavou. Právě odlišnost v názorech a prioritách mladé a starší generace se stala předmětem této práce a dovolila vyvodit následující závěry obecnějšího rázu.

Mladí Afroameričané jsou hrdí na své africké kořeny a odmítají se smířit s nespravedlností panující ve Spojených státech tak, jak to učinili jejich předkové. Jsou sžíráni zlostí při pomýšlení na několik století trvající rasovou segregaci, útlak a nerovné možnosti. Věří, že spravedlnosti mohou dosáhnout pouze bojem. Někteří vzpurní jedinci volí jazyk za svou zbraň a vyzývají spoluobyvatele komunit k činu, zatímco ti agresivnější jsou připraveni použít násilí a demonstrovat v ulicích, aby obhájili své právo na spravedlivý život. Spíše než na víru se mladá generace spoléhá na sílu lidu a spolupráci. „Společně“ je klíčové slovo ke změně, kterou požadují. Tato myšlenka, inspirovaná Martinem Lutherem Kingem, propaguje nutnost spolupráce nejen mezi černochoy a bělochoy, ale i jihu a severu. Spojené státy nemohou jinak fungovat a uspět jako celek. Většina mladých Afroameričanů odmítá náboženství, neboť víra jim nedokáže poskytnout útěchu a smýt beznaděj a hněv, které pociťují. Ačkoliv Martin Luther King a jeho následovníci patřili mezi hluboce nábožensky založené rebely, Gainesovy postavy se od víry distancují. Navíc považují pokleknutí před Bohem za další druh ponížení.

Hluboce věřící starší generace Afroameričanů se jen těžko smiřuje s odmítavým přístupem potomků. V dobách, kdy byli černí obyvatelé ponižováni, zotročováni a týráni, představovala víra jedinou útěchu a svobodu, na kterou se mohli upnout a doufat. Skrže modlitby bojovali za svá práva. Stejně tak jako mladá generace, i starší generace má svou hrdost a důstojnost, které ovšem nejsou dost silné na to, aby je vyburcovaly k povstání. Staří černoši se zdají být smířeni se svým ponižujícím postavením ve společnosti a dávají přednost klidnému zbytku života, který chtějí obětovat péči o své milované. Rasismus a tyranie na nich během pěti století zanechaly jizvy, kvůli nimž nejsou schopni vzdorovat svým utlačovatelům. Navíc jim hrdost nedovoluje projevit své skutečné city a udržuje je emočně chladné vůči lidem, které milují. Vždy totiž byli nuceni skrývat svou bolest, smutek a utrpení před svými pány. Projevení citů znamená ukázat svou slabost.

Co se týče občansko-právních změn, nejlépe je ilustruje román *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (Autobiografie slečny Jane Pittmanové). Příběh se vyvíjí přibližně od roku 1860, kdy s otroctvím měla brzy skoncovat Americká občanská válka (1861 – 1865), až do počátků občansko-právního hnutí v 60. letech 20. století. Ačkoliv byli otroci osvobozeni, jejich nabytá svoboda přinesla své komplikace jako například hledání nových domovů, obživy a navíc nebezpečí ze strany bývalých vojáků Konfederace, kteří utvářeli tajné rasistické spolky typu Ku-Klux-Klan.

Román *A Lesson before Dying* (Hodiny před Popravou) popisuje společenskou situaci okolo roku 1940, kdy porota sestavená z bělochů neváhala odsoudit k smrti na elektrickém křesle nevinného chlapce. Jefferson byl popraven pro barvu své pleti. Gainesův první román *Catherine Carmier* se odehrává v roce 1962, kdy jsou tmaví farmáři vytlačováni ze svých polí, kvůli lépe vybaveným bělošským plantážníkům. Ti díky své bílé pleti získali výhodu již před mnoha staletími.

Občansko-právní hnutí graduje okolo roku 1960, kdy převážně mladí černoši vedeni reverendem Martinem Lutherem Kingem a jeho přívrženci demonstrují proti rasové segregaci v restauracích, autobusech, atd. Jimmy Aaron v *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* vyzývá obyvatele komunity k demonstraci proti odděleným kašnám a toaletám. Tato spolupráce nakonec vede k významné proměně občanského právního systému. Staří černoši v *A Gathering of Old Men* (Shromáždění starých mužů), které se odehrává v 70. letech 20. století, si jich ovšem nejsou vědomi až do vyslyšení rozsudku u soudu, kdy zjišťují, že před zákonem jsou si konečně všichni rovni. Cesta spravedlnosti a práva pro Afroameričany byla velice složitá a zdlouhavá, ale nakonec jí dosáhli.

Z mého pohledu jsem úspěšně splnila cíl diplomové práce, kterou považuji za velice zajímavou a pro většinu z nás šokující, protože odkrývá skutečnou situaci ve Spojených státech, zvláště pak v Louisianě, kterou Gaines dokládá ve svých čtyřech románech. Věřím, že má práce přispívá k pochopení Afroamerické literatury a vztahů mezi Afroameričany a Američany bílé pleti.

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