

Does Grant Have The Most Pressure In The Book A Lesson Before Dying?

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Introduction

Crises are known to refine life, as they are where a person ends up discovering oneself. In the novel *A Lesson Before Dying*, both the conviction and planned execution of Jefferson end up generating crises for various characters, such as Grant Wiggins, who end up changing their lives. Grant volunteers to teach Jefferson how a person dies like a man and this journey and search for dignity brings about far-reaching consequences as Grant ends up confronting issue of his personal life. (Sharma, 2021)

A closely related analysis is available in [An Analytical Overview Of Racism In “A Lesson Before Dying”](#).

Grant's Character Transformation

As the story progresses, Grants undergoes a transformation in character and the way he looks at life. Moreover, the predicament surrounding Jefferson intrigues a transformation in Grant, resulting in him re-evaluating what he believed denotes a human. Additionally, Grant's view on dignity to himself and the community at large is shifted. All these transformations that Grant undergoes bring about a lot of pressure as he tries to embrace the numerous changes that come his way. (Johnson, 2023)

Initial Resistance to Helping Jefferson

Exactly after Jefferson's conviction, Grant is seen refusing to assist Jefferson as he believes it is hopeless to do so. Instead of listening to all the requests of Aunt Luo and Miss Emma, Grant opts to minimize the whole situation by avoiding Jefferson. Grant strongly believes Jefferson is in an insufferable situation. He is seen commenting, “....Jefferson is now dead, and as it is known I cannot raise the dead.....there is nothing any of us can do to help...” (Grant 14). At this point in the novel, Grant is more focused on self-preservation as he believes he is more elevated than any other character present in the novel. The reason why he sees himself as superior is because of his education, and he uses this as an excuse to exclude himself from Jefferson's predicaments. In one instance, Grant is seen asking himself, “.....to save Jefferson, who am I? God...” (Gaines 31). (PBS Michiana, 2023)

Religious Conflict and Moral Pressure

Religion helps us understand Grant's struggles as a character within the novel. In one instance, Grant functions as a god-like stature to Jefferson, but he himself is not a religious person, and this depicts internal conflict. Grant opts to avert mentoring Jefferson as he doesn't feel he has the power to instruct Jefferson on how to live his life. Grant comments, ".....What do I tell him...do I know man?....I am trying to figure out how a man should live..." (Gaines 31). Eventually, Grant accepts the role of mentoring Jefferson despite him not believing in himself and being confident. When beginning this whole transformation, Grant is not concerned about the general desires of both the community and Jefferson, instead he focuses on his desires and issues as he tries to maintain his humanness. This acts as a struggle and puts more pressure on Grant as he wants to try to maintain his personality in the long run. (National Endowment for the Arts, 2022)

Sources of Grant's Transformation

It is difficult to identify what starts Grant's progression, but his admiration for Miss Emma, as well as the structure of institutionalized racism, could be strong factors. It is, however, untrue to claim that Grant's visit, as well as his take on Jefferson, is out of personal motives. When conversing with Sheriff Guidry, Grant is heard admitting, ".....i prefer having nothing to with it sir....but this is all what Miss Emma wants.... (Gaines 49) despite explicitly showing disinterest, this statement shows that Grant has gradually moved beyond his selfish interests. It's clear that Grant doesn't want anything to do with Jefferson, but he is human enough to care about other people's emotions. This is clearly shown when he begins visiting Jefferson and starts reminding Jefferson of his duty to society. Grant is seen telling Jefferson, ".....you don't owe me anything.....you owe your godmother. Show her love and understanding....."(Gaines 139). the advice Grant offers is ironic as it applies to his own life yet doesn't apply to it.

Relationship with the Community

Through agreeing to help Jefferson, Grant got an opportunity to establish a relationship with the community. Initially, it was hard for Grant to develop a relationship with his surroundings as he was more focused on his distinction. Through talking about duty, he comes to realize his own obligation to himself and the society at large. By doing so, he gradually becomes part of the community, something he has come to terms with. One core reason why Grant acknowledges his connection to society is the excessive racism being experienced throughout the novel. Just like any other African American, Grant is also discriminated against by the whites in the South and this results in him creating a connection with the black community. Grant is seen telling Jefferson, "...Regardless how much I try to change and eliminate racism, it impossible as the society has run away from this issue...." (Gaines 167). One fact that is clear is that every African American has an obligation to

society as they cannot run from racism. The advice Grant offers to Jefferson is the same advice he should hear himself. However, Grant comes to learn that the wellness of the entire community depends on individual wellness. This, however, acts as a challenge for Grant as he has to learn how to perform his obligation within the society while holding his dignity.

Moral Duty Toward Jefferson

Throughout the novel “A lesson before Dying” Grant is seen struggling to identify his moral duty to Jefferson. Since the story begins, Grant is seen making numerous solo visits to Jefferson in an attempt to show him how to be a man. After every visit, Grants ends up feeling like he has not done as per his expectations. This resulted in Grant feeling like a failure to both his family and himself, thus creating a lot of pressure for him. In one instance, Grant is seen commenting, “..... When I go back, I will tell her (Miss Emma) we sat on a bunk and ate...” From this statement, Grant aims to tell Miss Emma how his visit was productive, which is not true as Grant is struggling, knowing the visit did not meet his expectations. Being the only teacher in the family, Grant is under a lot of pressure to teach Jefferson how to be a man and to find his moral obligation. Instead of feeling like he has done something good, Grants ends up feeling that he has not done enough.

Education and Social Responsibility

Grant is able to finish his progression by understanding his position in society and making Jefferson understand his place within the society. Being educated, Grant is always under pressure to help people within the community who end up in horrible situations. Reverend Ambrose is seen explaining to Grant, “.....you got educated to help relieve pain, relieve all the hurt, and if you are required to lie to do so, the lie.....” (Gaines 218). However, Grant knows that he is not able to fulfil all these expectations and become a hero within society. This poses a conflict between what Grant desires and what society expects from him, thus putting a lot of pressure on Grant.

Conclusion

In summation, people do react differently when faced with a crisis. Grant is a good example as he ends up finding his place within society despite isolating himself. Grant undergoes a lot of pressure to teach Jefferson how to be a man and, in doing so, ends up discovering his role within society. In the end, Grant surpasses all the struggles and pressure to become a better person. Looking at all the eyes upon Grant, it is true to say that he was the most pressured character in the novel, as discussed above.

References

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