CORINA ANGHEL CRISU

“Tell Nannan I Walked”: Reconstructing Manhood in Ernest J. Gaines’s *A Lesson before Dying*

Abstract: Drawing on a variety of philosophical and ethical views, as well as on African American studies, this paper discusses the way in which Ernest J. Gaines’s *A Lesson before Dying* reconsiders the black male character in the context of racial prejudices in the segregated South in the late 1940s. The paper demonstrates that Gaines is one of the authors who had to face the difficult task of transforming the invisible African American presence into the central element of his narrative. From a silent, subjugated figure, from being simply a substitute of the white man, the black protagonist metamorphoses into a *polytropic* character. The article proposes a close textual and intertextual analysis of Gaines’s reconstruction of black male identity. The main argument focuses on the way in which Gaines rewrites the earlier representation of the lonely rebellious African American – (de)constructing the image of the *native son* and *invisible man* – by insisting on the importance of the pedagogical role of the community.