



Of Love and Dust

Ernest J. Gaines

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This is the story of Marcus: bonded out of jail where he has been awaiting trial for murder, he is sent to the Hebert plantation to work in the fields. There he encounters conflict with the overseer, Sidney Bonbon, and a tale of revenge, lust and power plays out between Marcus, Bonbon, Bonbon's mistress Pauline, and Bonbon's wife Louise.

Of Love and Dust Details

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From Reader Review Of Love and Dust for online ebook

Mikie says

Like watching a train wreck: You know what is probably going to happen at the end and you just can't look away. A fast read and a well-told story.

Monica Hyacinth says

(I'm still in the process of finishing this book.)

it is about racial conformities and how they are sometimes imposed upon us whether are not we notice it.

It definitely brought into my perspective how lucky we are to have progressed so much racially as a society. However, there is always going to be more that we can work on. Of Love and Dust reminds its readers not to take anything for granted.

It is a quick read and very worth your while.

Ana Mardoll says

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When a young black man is forced to work on a white man's farm to "work off" his prison sentence, he astonishes his more moderate peers by entirely refusing to accept the situation. Rather than capitulate, accept the situation, and "make the best of it", he chafes under the cruelties of the landowner, even though his stubborn refusal causes him intense pain and fatigue. Our narrator is at first surprised and then horrified as the rebellious young man continues to rebel - even to the point of seducing the landowner's wife, and running off with her in the night.

Racial relations are explored carefully in Gaines' novels, and "Of Love and Dust" is no exception. The landowner is not explicitly evil; he is friendly to the narrator, and he has a relationship with one of the women who lives on his land. He loves the woman dearly as well as the two children he has with her, but he refuses to acknowledge that his position of privilege leaves the narrator no room to refuse his friendship, nor his "lover" any room to refuse his advances. At the same time, our young protagonist is no angel: he is rude to the narrator and brusquely brushes aside the narrator's attempt to help the young man. His seduction of the insecure lady of the house is marked with violence and revenge, only later blossoming into a rough-edged love.

Like all of Gaines' novels, there are no easy answers here. The young protagonist is undoubtedly guilty of manslaughter. Some penance should be made, but it does not seem right that the black prison members should be sent out to work white-owned fields as their "punishment". And yet, the produce is necessary and needed and the prisoners are given more freedoms than they would have in prison; on the plantation they have access to their women friends, as well as other luxuries. The situation is clearly wrong, but it is unclear how it can be ultimately fixed. Perhaps the answer is hidden in the title: only love and time can remedy this

situation.

~ Ana Mardoll

Cindy says

Whew, couldn't put this one down! I had no idea it was written in 1967, until I was almost finished with it. I would imagine this is a fairly accurate account of life on a plantation. This book delves into the thought processes of the older generation blacks and a younger generation man (Marcus). So much of how the older generation reacts to situations is based on fear and the repercussions one person's actions could have on all of them. Marcus' views are completely opposite. His life experiences have lead him to believe only in himself and to put himself before all others. While this attitude can seem selfish, Jim Kelly can't help but eventually admire Marcus. Marcus does eventually show a softer side and that he is capable of loving someone besides himself. This book also deals with the power games that are played out, whites vs. whites, blacks vs. whites and blacks vs. blacks. The older generations knew "the code" that would keep them safe, but a young, high-spirited black man shakes the very foundations on the plantation and there is hell to pay!

Justin says

This book shared so many similarities with Gaines's *A Lesson Before Dying* that it's no wonder I liked it so much.

Of Love and Dust is something of a beautiful slow-motion car wreck: You know what's coming and that it won't end well but yet you are completely engrossed and can't look away.

Like *Lesson*, *Of Love and Dust* is centered around a young black man convicted of a crime and another black man who acts as a mentor/defender. In this case, the young man is Marcus, who was bonded out of jail while awaiting a murder trial. We slowly find out that the payment of his bail by a wealthy plantation owner wasn't exactly altruistic and we see Marcus pursuing the two women of the plantation's overseer, knowing all along that it is not going to end well for him.

Marcus's somewhat reticent mentor Jim also knows things won't end well for Marcus, but try as he might he is unable to stay out of the younger man's affairs and also ultimately unable to help his admiration for Marcus's courage, as reckless as it is.

Coleen says

Very well written as his other books are. Engaging

Gene says

This is a timeless Classic from one of my favorite writers! This is a study on race relations at its finest.

Sandy says

I've been on an Ernest J. Gaines kick this summer since I read *A Lesson Before Dying* for The Big Read. After that came *In My Father's House*. I found the plots of both of these came with foregone conclusions. Gaines's art is not in the plot but how that plot will transform the main character. These books are tragedies.

Third in line for me was *Of Love and Dust*. I thought this one would be like the other two I had read and the outcome would be clear from the start. It was not. Perhaps it should have been, but this one was too close to the bone for me, so I stumbled along with Marcus toward the conclusion of his story and his life.

Marcus is a black man awaiting trial for the murder of another black man in a brawl over a woman. Marcus says he killed the guy in self-defence. But what would a white jury say? While he is awaiting trial, a plantation owner basically buys him so he can work him on his plantation until Marcus's court date. There he meets Geam, or James Kelly, who attempts to show him the ropes and who narrates the story. James tries to induct him into the White Man's Game.

Marcus won't learn, though. He has his own ideas of what his life is about, and he refuses to submit to a system that refuses his right to decide for himself what is right and wrong, who he is, of what he has the right to dream. Marcus is a misfit, a trouble-maker, just because he breathes.

He is also a womanizer (that's the close-to-the-bone part for me--been there too recently) who will have his needs satisfied--even if the wife of the overseer is the object of his attention, and even if that attention leads to his demise. Better to be led by passion than obedience. In the end, he will settle for the love of a woman who genuinely cares about him, even if he isn't sure he loves her--just because her affection is genuine and that is new to him.

There the story ends. Because it must because he is black and she is the white wife of the Cajun overseer and there are some things the people with the most and the biggest guns just won't let happen.

Marcus is everything you dreamed of and everything you love. Gaines leaves you wondering why you hated him. And that's the story.

Vivian says

A gritty, thought-provoking story about a older black man who has been trampled into submission by "the man" and his relationship with a younger black man who is determined not to let anyone keep him down. James is frustrated because he can't seem to convince Marcus that it would be better for him in the long run if he just accepted "his place" in the world and conformed. But to James' amazement, his opinion is the one who becomes changed as he watches Marcus stand up for his rights. A very well-written book that swings the reader along with James.

Mary says

It was such a good novel! It was 1948 a long time past the Civil War. Mr. Hebert owned a plantation in Southern Louisiana. He was "old school" and worked his black tenants like slaves. He had a Cajun overseer, Sidney Bonbon who followed orders to work them hard. A young black man Marcus, was bonded out of jail to work off his time to the tune of 10 years. He resented Bonbon's authority and had a will of his own. It was considered o.K. for Bonbon to live with a black woman from the "quarters", but Marcus was not allowed the same when he started seeing Mrs. Bonbon a white girl. Remember this was 1948. The fields and dirt roads were covered in a layer of white dust, ankle deep. The flies and mosquitoes buzzed through the hot houses as the worn out folks waved them away.

Jessica says

Deceptively simplistic, and engaging in that simplicity. It's a great story.

Camie says

When Marcus a fancy dressing young black man accused of murder is bonded out of jail and sent to work on the Hebert plantation he soon stirs up a big commotion while trying to seek revenge on Bonbon the Cajun overseer who overworks and mistreats him. Really adding to the story is its narration by James Kelly a field-hand who helps transport him to the plantation and tries to look out for him but ends up feeling conflicted about the character and actions of the man he's trying to protect. Ernest J Gaines' books are always thought provoking and carry a wallop punch despite his simplistic writing style. This is an early work and I think they just keep improving. Read for On The Southern Literary Trail 3.5 stars

Cateline says

My first Gaines, and certainly not my last. His writing style is deceptively simple, exquisitely executed.

Of course I knew exactly how it could end, considering the time, 1948, and the location. A Louisiana plantation seeming run in much the same way it was run pre-Civil War, only with convicts, not actual slaves.

How far we've come, thankfully. Reading this book, makes one appreciate the strides we've taken as a country, and people.

Diane Barnes says

A good story, well told. That's my criteria for a memorable book. Ernest Gaines does that and more: you feel the heat, the dust burns your eyes and clogs your throat, racism and the unfairness of the "system" eats into your soul, and the dialogue puts you squarely in the middle of the scene and the action. I have loved all of his books so far, and this early novel (1967) was a great read, lacking the intensity and sadness of "A Gathering of Old Men" and "A Lesson Before Dying", but one I thoroughly enjoyed for that very reason.

Favorite line: "No matter what a person does, there ought to be somebody on his side at the last moment".

Valjeanne Jeffers says

This book is incredible! Rich with culture and sexuality. The characters are so alive, so tragic and yet powerful. One of his best offerings.
