SCHRIFTLICHE ABITURPRÜFUNG 2006

Englisch
(Leistungskursniveau)

Einlesezeit: 30 Minuten
Bearbeitungszeit: 300 Minuten

Thema: Dead Man Walking
Dead Man Walking
by Helen Prejean

Helen Prejean, a nun, is invited to write to a prisoner on death row, Robert Willie, who brutally killed Faith Harvey, a teenager. – Although she abhors his crime, she befriends the man and visits him regularly before his execution.

It's 11:30 and the team of guards goes into the cell with Robert to put the diaper on him. I hear the murmur of voices. I hear the toilet flush. A clean heart create in me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me … for you are not pleased with sacrifices … a heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn …

Robert is back at the door and has the guard hand me his parting gift, the black knitted hat. “It’s probably pretty dirty,” he says. “You’ll have to wash it.”

I thank him for the hat.

He thanks me for teaching him about God. “I know God knows the truth about what happened,” he says. “I know I’m gonna be okay, and look, when I get in the chair, I’m gonna let you know I’m okay.”

“Look at me,” I tell him, “look at my face.”

He seems confident that he is going to a better place. “I’m not worried at all,” he says, but he shivers and the guard comes and puts his denim jacket around his shoulders.

And here we go again, we are doing this all over again, this time coming to the door at midnight with the full squad of the “Strap-down Team,” saying, “Time to go, Willie.”

He is already standing. He is ready.

I step back as the guards bring him out and surround him. As we walk, I read to him from the Gospel of John, and if he can hear, if he can take in the words at a moment like this, he hears the words of Jesus about laying down his life in order to take it up again, and as I read the words I look up and see that Robert is walking with the same little jaunty walk, up on the balls of his feet, the only way I have ever seen him walk.
As we approach the death chamber the guards direct me to a chair with the other
witnesses. I see Vernon and Elizabeth Harvey on the front row. They are serious,
silent, looking straight ahead. The lights are very bright, the dark oak chair gleams,
the big clock on the wall behind the chair says 12:07.

Robert says his last words:

"I would just like to say, Mr. and Mrs. Harvey, that I hope you get some relief from
my death. Killing people is wrong. That’s why you’ve put me to death. It makes no
difference whether it’s citizens, countries, or governments. Killing is wrong."

He sits in the chair and the guards begin to strap him in. He watches as they strap
his arms and legs. They put the metal cap on his head and the electrode on the calf
of his left leg, and they are ready to put on the chin strap and the mask over his face
when Robert takes one more look around the room at the world he is leaving. He
looks at me and winks, and then they strap his chin, lower the mask, and kill him.
This time I do not close my eyes. I watch everything.

I walk into a blur of television camera lights outside the prison.

Vernon Harvey pours himself a drink and smiles, and says to the clutch of
reporters that he’s sorry every victim doesn’t have the satisfaction of watching a
murderer die. But he says Willie died too quickly, and he wishes Willie could have
had the same kind of painful death that Faith had, and he hopes he fries in hell for all
eternity. When asked if he’s happy, Vernon Harvey says, “Do you want to dance?”

Elizabeth Harvey says Willie’s unrepentant attitude made her want to witness his
execution and that she’s glad he’s dead and won’t be able to kill any other people.

Fourteen-year-old Lizabeth Harvey, who was not permitted to view the execution
because of her age, has been waiting outside the gates with friends and supporters.
Inside the family van, she has helped to make posters supporting capital punishment.

A picture of her smiling and hugging her mother and a family friend after the
execution will make its way into a two-page spread in Life magazine. She tells
reporters that this has been the “best Christmas” she has had in a long time, knowing
the man who had killed her sister was finally executed. “That ought to tell murderers
that if they kill somebody, they’re going to face the electric chair.”

When reporters turn to me, I say, “What have we accomplished by killing Robert
Willie? Now two people are dead instead of one, and there will be another funeral
and another mother will bury her child.”
Reporters ask me if Willie showed any remorse. I tell them of his last words to the Harveys, that he hoped his death would give them peace.

For a second, in the glare of the lights, Vernon Harvey and I look across at each other. It is only for a moment.

from: Dead Man Walking, New York 1993, pp. 269-272
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Assignments

1. What can be inferred about the relationship between Helen Prejean and Robert Willie?

2. Explain the function of the narrative perspective used in this excerpt.

3. Referring to lines 1-38, prove that the atmosphere and setting are related to each other.

4. Describe the reaction of the Harvey family to the execution and compare it to Helen Prejean’s reaction.

5. Choose one of the following topics.
   a) “Killing people is wrong. [...] It makes no difference whether it’s citizens, countries or governments. Killing is wrong.” (lines 31-32) Discuss.
   b) Donna B., 38, drank a bottle of wine and then drove home. She had a car accident and killed a 13-year-old boy.
      If you were a judge what sentence would you give to this person? Formulate the speech you would make to justify your decision.
   c) Should the media be allowed to cover any event? Give your opinion.