



## Characters and Narrative in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*

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### Abstract

*The paper examines narrative techniques utilised in William Faulkner's novel As I Lay Dying (1930). The study starts with analysing each of the internal narrative voices of the Bundren family: Addie, Anse, Darl, Jewel, Cash, Dewey Dell, Vardaman, and continues with the external narratives of non-Bundren narrators. The paper aims to analyze stream of consciousness, interior monologues and multiple points of views of its modernist narrative. The analysis arrives at the conclusion that whereas none of the narrators can be deemed fully reliable, their subjective accounts function as a composite framework through which multiple interpretations of the narrative. These narrative strategies displace epistemological authority, requiring the reader to actively engage with the text to reconstruct coherence from its fragmented and often contradictory perspectives. Fragmentation of the narrative multiple voices create a unique narrative style, which is different from the traditional one and has set up a milestone in American and world literature.*

**Keywords:** William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, characters, narrative, literary modernism

### 1. Introduction

William Faulkner's novel *As I Lay Dying* (1930) is considered one of the masterpieces of modernist literature of the twentieth century, a daring adventure in style that defies literary conventions. Following the Bundren's family journey to fulfil their mother's will to be buried in Jefferson, it explores the existential plight of poor whites in Yoknapatawpha County. Towner (2008) highlights "that the story of the Bundren's journey to Jefferson is narrated by fifteen different voices. Among them are the family members: Anse, the lackadaisical father; Cash, the eldest son who is a skilled carpenter; Darl, the second eldest; Jewel, the middle child; Dewey Dell, the only daughter; Vardaman, the youngest; and Addie, who even in death, lends her voice to the tale. Their story is enlarged by the perspectives of both neighbors and strangers, adding depth to the narration." (p. 24).

The predominant method of narration is stream-of-consciousness, which centres attention to character's arbitrarily, disorganized, chaotic and fleeting flux of unexpressed thoughts. Prominent novelists recognized for their significant use of this technique include Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, and William Faulkner. (Hamblin 2005: para 12).

This novel is composed of a group of soliloquies. Arbitrary in *As I Lay Dying* are the multitude of scenes presented with titles that identify the speaker, which are presented as a drama, but unconnected by an objective narrative. Unlike the conventional tradition of writing where each of the characters narrates the monologue in his own unique style, the author uses the modernist technique of each character's idiolect.

Faulkner's skilled employment of multiple points of view to narrate various versions of the same scenes and episodes of the fable, by presenting the reality filtered quite contrastively from character to character, creates intentionally

to the reader the sense of uncertainty in relation to what is reliable. The way the author arranges novel's episodes and sections seems to aim at introducing the greatest number of characters and simultaneously not confuse the reader. Ultimately, his novel unfolds as a performance, featuring a variety of voices that create a blistering and darkly comedic exploration of decay. (Parini 2004: 143).

## 2. Internal Narrative Voices

Humphrey (1958) argues that in a myriad of stories told by thirteen characters, "Faulkner composes a fundamental plot that is the unifying axis of character's consciousnesses, an innovative technique that marks the departure of this short fiction from stream of consciousness novel to combine the traditional novel and stream of consciousness. Because there is a coherent plot and because the characters act in an external drama which has a beginning, complications, climax, and ending, the absolute need for further unifying devices does not exist." (p.103).

The fifty nine monologues narrated are of varying lengths. The seven first-person narrators of the Bundren family are divided into short chapters combined, making the novel read almost like a drama. Faulkner enables the reader to engage in the narration by adopting a different narrator for each monologue. Because the narration does not explicate certain aspects of the events, the reader is more directly entering the narrative and determining the specific nature of each relationship or significance of each event. This strategy also allows the reader to access the inner thoughts of all the characters. This masterful use of stream of consciousness developed the novel's potential.

The most important aspect of this technique is that it enables readers to experience every event through different viewpoints. The loss of the coffin in the river creates multiple storylines which present the same event through various perspectives for readers to understand. Darl gives his own version of the coffin's loss. Vardaman says that his mother was a fish swimming in the river. The coffin was not balanced according to Cash, but Anse believes this will become his next challenge before he can purchase dentures. The inner monologue sections show the character's thoughts in every situation with others because their thoughts get interrupted by conversations. They document these before returning to their mental process.

Humphrey (1958) also emphasizes that "typically, the inner thoughts of characters are mainly the perceptions of other characters. This presents a unique dilemma for Faulkner, for he will have to reveal less of the content that comes from the imagination and memory depending on the observational content of consciousness. Such a selection may lead to a representation of consciousness that is not credible. Faulkner partly circumvents this difficulty with two devices: first, he deals only with a fairly surface level of consciousness in *As I Lay Dying*; and secondly, he is faithful to the idiom and language which most accurately represents the particular character. (p.120).

We are told the story from the viewpoints of one character and then another. Dawson (1930) has demonstrated that "Parts of it are written with that tense, defiant obscureness, the self-sufficient dislocation of thought which withdraws itself from facile understanding; and other passages, clear in themselves, are absolutely unhinged from the point of view of the character whose mind they expose and whose impressionistic portrait they seem to contradict. (p. 6).

According to Robinson (1930) "These characters, thus, not only speak by the metaphorical language within a wide spectrum, as can represent virtually any sensorial point of view. If the central issue of the novel involves the reasons for Addie's request to be buried and why her family goes through fire and water to fulfill it, then the structure of the novel forces the reader to resolve these issues by analyzing each character." (p. 46).

## 3. Darl Bundren's Narrative

Darl Bundren narrates nineteen of the chapters, including the very first one. He is a seer who ultimately goes insane, thus the border separating him from the mad world disappears. Neglected by Addie, the detached Darl asserts that he has no mother, and his remarkable awareness embodies this belief. (Bloom 2010: 239).

Darl the character has more depth within the novel, and each of his texts echoes an almost introspective mind involved in petty insights of life.

Many Darl's stories are marked by a strong sensitivity to the physical sensations that surround him. Through Darl, readers experience the landscape and its inhabitants, as he narrates the majority of the novel, spanning eleven chapters. He offers insights into the characters' perspectives, capturing them with a sharp attention to detail. Occasionally, Darl recounts scenes he doesn't physically witness, like Addie's death. At other moments, he connects telepathically—primarily with Dewey Dell—or reveals family secrets, such as Dewey Dell's pregnancy and the true parentage of Jewell.

Darl possesses a sharp intellect and a vivid imagination, yet he grapples with jealousy and mental instability. The

escalating horror and absurdity of the journey to lay Addie to rest forty miles away in Jefferson deeply affect him. As a result, Darl becomes acutely aware of the emotions of his family members, and his language reflects the sensitivity of a poet and artist. In his fifth monologue, he envisions the moments surrounding his mother's deathbed. While it might seem that Darl has an instinctive sense of when his mother will pass away, there's also the possibility that he vividly imagines the scene without fully realizing she has already died. His depiction is compelling, rooted in careful observations of his family and their predictable reactions. Following this, Darl meticulously recounts the events that unfold after Tull and Vardaman return to the farm.

The terrifying moment for Darl happens in front of the flooded river. He is struck with a keen sense of disruption and displacement as he looks into its depths. As the river takes control—not in anger, but with a haunting, almost sentient eloquence, Darl is shown a world devoid of human agency and coherence:

Before us the thick dark current runs. It talks up to us in a murmur become ceaseless and myriad, the yellow surface dimpled monstrously into fading swirls travelling along the surface for an instant, silent, impermanent and profoundly significant, as though just beneath the surface something huge and alive waked for a moment of lazy alertness out of and into light slumber again. (Faulkner 1957:82).

At the conclusion of the sixth monologue, he shifts back to the present and contemplates the meanings of "is" and "was" in relation to people. Instead of allowing readers to witness these events directly, Faulkner opts to filter them through the perspective of the absent Darl. This choice serves a dual purpose: it emphasizes Darl's connection to his home and mother while providing a vivid portrayal of events through the lens of the most insightful observer in the narrative. Even in his absence, the imagery remains strikingly clear. In Darl's reimagined scene, an air of surrealism envelops the moment.

Buisson (2020) remarks that: "Darl's passion for accuracy is clearly visible in his first monologue; the expository scene abounds in words referring to geometrical shapes: "straight as a plumb-line," "center," "right angles," "square," "opposite," "circles," "single file" ("Darl," 3). An almost scientific reading of the world thus counterbalances his slippage into insanity. Yet the oxymoronic phrase "fading precision" ("Darl," 3) shows that his geometrical rendering of reality, like Addie's "gaunt face framed by the window," gives way to "a composite picture" ("Darl," 28), or, like Jewel's horse, to "an unrelated scattering of components" ("Vardaman," 33). Representation itself proves as slippery as reality". (p. 132).

In the eighth monologue, Darl provides a much more intricate portrayal of the same scene that Cash touched upon in his second monologue. His observations echo the moment described in the Vardaman chapter from his fourth monologue. While Darl typically fixates on Jewel's actions, this time his attention shifts to Dewey Dell. As she climbs into the carriage, his disjointed thoughts highlight her sexuality. Darl, who is deeply preoccupied with the essence of existence, finds himself captivated by the origins of life. He views women as playing a crucial role in shaping existence, revealing his belief that his struggles are rooted in his relationship with his mother—the very source of his life—who withheld the love he needed to fully develop.

Darl's observations present a vivid array of images crafted by Faulkner through the character's perspective. At the heart of these scenes is Jewell, who frantically rushes to save the Gillespies' animals before hurrying back to the stable to find Addie. Darl's perception of events carries a sense of wild unconsciousness, reflecting his skepticism about reality. His inner thoughts are striking and reveal his deep understanding, a trait Faulkner consistently highlights for readers. Darl is aware of his sister's pregnancy, recognizes that Jewell is not Anse's biological son, and understands that his mother does not embody the true essence of motherhood. He views humanity itself as a primitive disaster, plagued by psychic wounds stemming from Addie's emotional distance and Anse's self-indulgence. Darl faces profound isolation and a disconnection from others, leaving him with no means of escape. His desires are complicated by an unsettling attraction to his own sister, reinforcing the notion that family can feel like its own kind of curse.

In the concluding monologue, Darl steps back from his own experiences and perceptions, skillfully taking on the role of an observer, viewing himself from a third-person perspective. Given the reader's awareness of Darl's potential split personality, his final detachment after being betrayed by his family comes as no shock. In this moment, his voice resonates with a heartbreaking fragility. Although Darl's insight is overshadowed by thoughts of his mother, his faltering reveals the deep emotional wounds suffered by his siblings. The chapter closes with Darl envisioning his family discussing "our brother Darl," while he finds himself imprisoned in a cage, two "dark hands" reaching out through the bars, his mouth frothing—a haunting image that captures the essence of madness.

### 3.1 Addie's Central Narrative

"The narrative, always in the first person, switches back and forth from one character to another. It unrolls with sordid horror". (Baker 1930:33). As if to prove its importance, the title of the book refers to Addie Bundren who dies almost in the first pages of the novel. Addie speaks only in one of these monologues, in the fortieth, but this monologue alone is enough to alienate the reader. A dead Addie is a curse many times greater than a living Addie. In the monologue, Addie reflects on her life and the family to which she belongs. Although she speaks only in one of the monologues of the novel, Addie prevails because she is the hearth, the center around which the other characters revolve.

The timeline of the story is somewhat ambiguous, though it's clear that it takes place after the day Cora prayed for her. The character that unfolds is intricate, yet this complexity isn't surprising given the hints we've already seen in the children. Addie's inheritance from her father is a troubling one—the belief that life's purpose is merely to prepare for death. This notion, much like her memories of the feelings she had for her students, has deeply shaped her view of life and her relationships with others. Essentially, the entire book chronicles Addie Bundren's life as she navigates the preparation for her own demise, a tale woven through the lives of her children and the essence of her husband. From this section, it's evident that Addie grapples with a profound inner conflict driven by what she refers to as "wild blood," a reference to her tumultuous sexual desires (Faulkner 1957:166). The brief respite she experiences after marrying Anse quickly dissipates once she becomes pregnant. Anse's notion of "love" for her soon becomes a hollow term. Yet, her intense sexual longing persists, ultimately leading to the birth of Darl. Still, Addie realizes that Anse too is ensnared in a frenzy that transcends mere words. In a twist of fate, Addie seeks revenge by ensuring that Anse will face death alone, buried far from her own grave. However, this revenge does not unfold as planned, and as the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that the family fulfills Addie's wishes almost inadvertently. Addie's influence on Anse's negativity is palpable, a trait noted by everyone who knows him. Its roots can be traced back to the moment Darl was born, when Addie decided to treat him as though he were already dead.

Addie remembers the active young man she once married, but time and adversity have taken their toll. These impoverished white people's lives are characterized by fatigue, which Tull subtly admits as he recalls his own mother, Tull's contemplation having a restrained empathy for his neighbors' approaching loss:

It's a hard life on women, for a fact, some women. I mind my mammy lived to be seventy and more. Worked every day, rain or shine; never a sick day since her last chap was born until one day she kind of looked around her and then she went and taken that lace-trimmed night-gown she had had forty-five years and never wore out of the chest and put it on and laid down on the bed and pulled the covers up and shut her eyes. "You all will have to look out for pa the best you can," she said. "I'm tired." (Faulkner 1957:18).

Addie continues to evolve, seeking the true essence of experience, especially when weighed against a backdrop of empty words. She believes she has uncovered the fundamental purpose of life within the realm of sexual desire. This intense pursuit of authentic experience, in contrast to the concept of "sin," leads her into a state of delirium. While a religious man might view her passionate yearning as a form of debauchery, Addie's decision to take Whitfield as a lover makes a twisted kind of sense. It is only by confronting the reality of sin that she can truly understand virtue and find inner peace, recognizing her actions as "true." Following these indulgences, she becomes open to embracing "fidelity" and "virtue" as meaningful ideas. Their legitimacy, however, hinges on the fulfillment she finds in sexual delirium, something she demonstrates through her relationship with Whitfield and the birth of Jewell. Having turned away from the hollow rhetoric of religion, Addie discovers truth in lived experiences. As a result, her conversations with Cora occur on entirely different planes. Cora promotes acceptance while transforming sin into a chaotic stream of empty words, whereas Addie undertakes a long and challenging journey to come to terms with life and death through her experiences. Yet, the path she has traveled, much like a road leading to the grave, bears the scars of those who have suffered due to her selfishness.

The family arrives in Jefferson in a disheartening condition: Jewell is without his horse, Darl has lost his sanity, Dewey Dell is missing a leg, and Cash also bears a leg injury. Long before they even began this journey, each of them had already made significant sacrifices in the name of Addie's pursuit of truth. Addie was solely focused on preparing for her own death, indifferent to the toll this preparation took on her loved ones. While it's important to recognize that she inherited a warped legacy from her father, who viewed life merely as a lead-up to death, she makes no effort to improve the legacy she passes down to her children. This monologue serves as the poignant core of the book. Its placement after more than half of the story has unfolded is intentional, as Addie Bundren's influence lingers even after her death, granting her a voice even when she is no longer physically present.

According to Bloom (2010) "Addie's monologue takes place two-thirds of the way through the novel, following her

death, and reflects on her life by delving into significant aspects of family dynamics. Her narrative is rich with thick, enigmatic, and descriptive prose, capturing her struggles with some of life's most profound challenges, ultimately leading to her failures. This insight reveals the reasons behind her desire to be buried alongside her father. Even in death, Addie emerges as an even greater burden than she was in life, as the story unfolds in a grotesque, heroic, and often darkly humorous manner, depicting the outrageous journey her five children and husband undertake through flood and fire to transport her body to her chosen resting place." (p. 241).

### 3.2 *Anse's Three Monologues*

Anse expresses his thoughts in a straightforward, chronological manner, focusing solely on aspects that impact him personally. In his first monologue, he shares his unfiltered thoughts and memories, which are heavy with frustration as he curses the weather, the road, and even his own sons for his predicament. The following paragraphs delve into his unspoken, somewhat superstitious feelings about the road, revealing more about his character. Through these reflections, we gain insight into Anse as a lazy individual who consistently dodges responsibility for both his circumstances and the broader world around him. His belief that the road is the source of all his problems highlights not only his frivolity but also serves as a humorous illustration of his tendency to seek out someone—or something—to blame for his misfortunes.

Family honor is the sole principle that unites the Bundrens, as Anse, the father, is just as destructive in his own way as Addie. A farmer in Frenchman Bend, Anse is revealed through three monologues in chapters nine, twenty-six, and twenty-eight, painting him as a cunning, characterless, and manipulative deceiver, equally selfish as his wife. After Addie's death, Anse attempts to honor her wishes, but his laziness often leads him to rely on others to do the work, claiming that if he exerts himself, he could die. He uses a sunstroke he suffered at the age of twenty-two as an excuse for his lack of effort.

On the day of Addie's funeral, the Bundrens' neighbors talked about how worried they are about how bad weather and the economy can hurt their income. The neighbors had no idea what was going on. Anse feels the same way that people in the South do about the capitalists who cause the economic downturns that farmers have to deal with:

It's a hard country on man; it's hard. Eight miles of the sweat of his body washed up outen the Lord's earth, where the Lord Himself told him to put it. Nowhere in this sinful world can a honest, hardworking man profit. It takes them that runs the stores in the towns, doing no sweating, living off of them that sweats. It ain't the hardworking man, the farmer. Sometimes I wonder why we keep at it. It's because there is a reward for us above, where they can't take their motors and such. Every man will be equal there and it will be taken from them that have and give to them that have not by the Lord. (Faulkner 1957: 63).

Anse lacks any self-criticism and cannot fathom how he might contribute to his family's poverty. While he worries about how his family will appear to the community, he takes no action to change the situation. Instead, Anse attributes his misfortunes to the world around him and dreams of the salvation that awaits him in heaven for enduring his struggles, as well as the immediate comfort he believes new false teeth will bring him. Though he feels tempted to blame God for his unfortunate circumstances, he ultimately convinces himself that his suffering signifies his value to God. These familiar expressions illustrate how Anse uses religious language and beliefs to justify his frivolous nature amidst a life of hardship and meaninglessness. They create a comforting routine, allowing him to accept even the loss of the bridge he was waiting to cross as merely an unfortunate setback.

Anse is portrayed as a comically inept character, so clumsy and ineffective that he barely seems like an individual. When disasters like the flood and fire strike, he reflects on these hardships as mere obstacles he must endure to finally secure his dentures. Ironically, he even forgives Addie for the trouble she brings him, despite being perpetually in debt to others. He claims to honor his promise and respect the deceased, yet when Addie passes away, he views it as an opportunity for God's will to align with his own desires to get his teeth fixed. Anse's actions reveal a darkly humorous side; he is selfish and manipulative, exploiting his family's struggles for his own gain. He takes Jewel's cherished horse, steals Dewey Dell's money, pilfers from Cash while he lies unconscious with a broken leg, and admits Darl to an asylum—all to reward himself with new teeth and a fresh wife.

### 3.3 *Jewel's Only Monologue*

Jewel distinguishes himself from the rest of the Bundren family, not just in stature but also in heritage, as he is notably taller than his siblings. His father, Pastor Whitfield, sets him apart, marking him as different from the Bundrens. Jewel's

conception came during a tumultuous period when Addie craved a forceful awakening of her identity, leading to a tumultuous relationship with the preacher, whose sacred garments added an element of symbolism to their connection. A man of remarkable vigour and determination, Jewel acts heroically when he retrieves Addie's body from both the river and the blazing barn. Upon reaching the suburbs of Jefferson, he clashes with a local resident, irritated by complaints about the odour of the corpse in the wagon. In his sole monologue, the fourth in the novel, Jewel envisions himself alongside Addie on a lofty hill, playfully rolling and hurling rocks at those below.

Jewell appears to embody the most aggressive temperament among the Bundren family. His determination to cross the raging river, rather than opting for a safer bridge, showcases his impulsive nature. This reckless decision results in the tragic drowning of the mules, Cash suffering a broken leg, and an altercation with a stranger upon their arrival in Jefferson. As a consequence of losing the mules, Anse reluctantly trades Jewell's cherished horse for replacements. In a moment of desperation, Jewell rushes into the burning stable, striving to rescue both the animals and his mother's lifeless body from the flames. Similar to his mother, Jewell shares only one monologue, which is his fourth.

In his narrative, Jewell conveys his love through haunting images and intense thoughts. Unable to openly express his feelings for his mother, he channels that affection into his bond with a horse. Darl recounts the tale of how Jewell acquired this horse, detailing a lengthy episode leading up to the fateful river crossing. Unknown to everyone, Jewell has been putting in late nights clearing a neighbour's land to save up for the horse, a secret endeavour that leads Darl and Cash to mistakenly assume he is involved with a woman. When Jewell's hidden life is finally exposed, Darl observes Addie's deeply emotional response to the revelation that Jewell has substituted his love for her with that of his rival—his horse. Jewell, fearless and unwavering, expresses himself solely through his vigorous actions.

Anderson 2007 points out that "His monologue serves as a powerful protest against Cash making arrangements for their mother's funeral, culminating in a haunting vision of him enduring the final agonies of his dying mother, isolated from his family and the rest of the world. The relationship between Jewell and Darl is marked by intense mutual hatred, while a dark animosity brews between Darl and his sister Dewey Dell, hinting at an incestuous undertone. As the story unfolds, readers discover that Jewell represents the "cross" that Addie carries, suggesting that he is her path to salvation. However, Jewell struggles to act on any conscious or subconscious desires; his existence revolves around expressing emotions and words through actions, unfiltered by thought. True to Addie's prophecy, Jewell ultimately rescues her from both water and fire, proving to be her salvation after she sacrifices her horse to ensure their journey continues. (p. 45).

### 3.4 *Cash's Five Monologues*

Faulkner shapes the novel around Cash as he constructs Addie's coffin, skillfully and in plain view. As the eldest of the Bundren siblings, Cash delivers just five monologues throughout the story—at eighteen, twenty-two, thirty-eight, fifty-three, and fifty-nine—three of which center on the coffin he has crafted for Addie. Generally, Cash maintains a good relationship with his brothers and sisters. He embodies simplicity and directness, tackling life's challenges with remarkable bravery. Similar to Jewell, Cash possesses physical courage, yet he lacks deep contemplative insight. Born when his mother realized that words hold little meaning, Cash approaches life with a focus on actions rather than verbal expression. Consequently, he seldom speaks, usually only after taking some form of action. His views align with Addie's belief in the futility of words, and his primary focus is on immediate tasks. While he works on the coffin, he is unable to entertain any other thoughts.

His story is strikingly straightforward, particularly when he outlines the thirteen steps he takes to prepare the ark. Cash's remarkable patience elevates his character, even as the horrors he endures highlight the grotesque nature of his family's plight. The meticulous care he puts into building the ark, alongside the pain he faces throughout the journey, serves as a powerful testament to his love for Addie. Unlike Addie's other children, Cash appears less emotionally scarred, possibly because, as the eldest, he received more attention and managed to sidestep the intense and overwhelming bond she shared with Jewell.

Cash presents himself as someone who is organized, practical, and somewhat limited in his thinking. However, a deeper examination reveals a conflict between the numbers he relies on and the reality they represent. While he attempts to maintain a structured, numerical approach to his thoughts, they often diverge from that order. His passion for carpentry provides him with a framework, yet even within that realm, his imagination shines through. As the family struggles to balance the coffin on the cart, Cash's frustration boils over into anger, though no one pays attention to him. In his third monologue, he speaks only two sentences, one of which remains unfinished, highlighting his semi-conscious concern for the coffin's fate—a fate he foresaw due to the way the women placed Ed inside. Throughout the burial of Addie, Cash's mind is filled with silent thoughts and the words he both expresses and hears from those around him.

According to Rampton (2008:49), "Cash's character reveals surprising layers. He's clearly pondered the fine line between sanity and madness, and he shares those concerns regarding her as well. Ultimately, Darl finds himself betrayed by nearly all his family—except for Cash—who turn against him for trivial reasons. Ennis's obsession with wealth, Jewell's disdain, Dewey Dell's hidden truths, and even Vardaman's innocent curiosity all play a role in Darl's downfall. Darl's maniacal laughter only reinforces the belief that he has lost his mind, with the exception of the introspective Cash. For Cash, this laughter serves as a catalyst to further explore the concept of sanity, a question he is right to contemplate given the flaws of the others around him." (p. 49).

The novel's concluding monologue starts when the carriage halts, marking Anse's return of the borrowed bucket, and wraps up with the family arriving home, now accompanied by a new Mrs. Bundren. This final scene is largely comedic, showcasing Anse's secretive behavior, and it ends with a sense of irony. After taking Mrs. Bundren to Jefferson, the family comes back with another wife for Anse, leaving the children amazed by the transformation in their father.

The novel wraps up with a monologue that starts when the cart halts as Anse goes to return the borrowed bucket, and it concludes with the family making their way home, now accompanied by a new Mrs. Bundren. This final scene leans heavily into comedy, showcasing Anse's secretive demeanour, and it finishes with a twist of irony. After bringing one Mrs. Bundren to Jefferson, the family returns with a different one. The transformation in their father doesn't go unnoticed by the children. Cash's final monologue, delivered in a calm and steady tone, offers an unusual sense of closure to the Bundren family's bizarre, unending journey.

### 3.5 *Dewey Dell's Narration of Confession*

Dewey Dell, the sole daughter of Bundren, carries a sense of dignity yet struggles to find the strength to grieve her mother's passing. As an unmarried, pregnant, and impoverished white woman, she secretly seeks a way to have an abortion. She expresses a desire to feel concern, but admits that she is unable to focus on anything long enough to truly worry. Her thoughts are so primal and fundamental that they shift rapidly, making her confessions feel like a series of fleeting ideas. The closest she comes to coherent reasoning is when she reflects on the physical temptations she has experienced.

Dewey Dell sees life with a negative outlook, refusing to accept any responsibility for her pregnancy or her mother's funeral. Her primary focus is on obtaining medicine in town to address her situation. When their journey is interrupted, she reminds Ennis of his promise to lay Addie to rest in Jefferson. However, her main preoccupation remains her desire for an abortion. She is often portrayed in a comedic light, with her actions and thoughts likened to the slow, deliberate movements of a cow, suggesting a tranquil, almost animalistic approach to life. Her decision to go to the basement with the pharmacist in Jefferson highlights her naivety; she knows it won't resolve her abortion issue, yet she views it as an experience worth having. The only moment she truly takes action is when she lashes out at Darl after the guards arrive to take her away, an outburst driven by her fear of him.

Dewey Dell's struggles are deeply moving, and her monologues reflect a palpable anxiety through a free-flowing stream of consciousness. She fiercely protects her secret, misleading her family by claiming that the box containing her Sunday clothes is filled with sweets meant for Cora Tull in town. After her encounter with Leif, Dewey Dell becomes aware that Darl knows about what she has done. This silent understanding between them might simply be a figment of her imagination, yet it's also possible that within their tight-knit family, Darl can intuitively grasp his sister's hidden burden without needing words. Unwilling to accept this invasion of her private life, Dewey Dell responds with hostility when Darl shows up at her sickroom door. Darl tells Dewey Dell, in a conversation that sounds like the one between Caddy and Quentin:

The reason you will not say it is, when you say it, even to yourself, you will know it is true: is that it? But you know it is true now. I can almost tell you the day when you. (Faulkner 1957:135)

Faulkner crafts a narrative that captures the essence of a simple, grounded woman who operates solely on a physical level. Deep down, she feels utterly adrift, unsure if her presence is a burden or if she has the capacity to feel sorrow. She likens herself to "a wet wild seed in the blind, hot earth," a vivid image that reflects her fertility, her profound sadness, and the indifferent world around her, the "blind, hot earth." In an italicized segment, she reinforces the idea that the earth embodies both life and death. On a level that transcends words, Dewey Dell perceives a distinction between what endures—the "bones"—and what decays—the "shrimps." As is often the case, her introspective character navigates the depths of her inner thoughts while remaining aware of her surroundings. She momentarily shifts her attention from the "womb of time" to her brothers, particularly Darl, recognizing his metaphorical power to lay her bare: "I sit naked...on the rump of life." Troubled by this vulnerability, she recalls a haunting dream in which she killed Darl. This recollection triggers

another dream where she struggles with her own identity, reflecting, "I could not even think of my name, I could not even think that I am a girl that I could not even think..." (Faulkner 1957:14)

McGowan's manipulation regarding sexual exploitation, claiming it would facilitate her abortion, exemplifies the dark humour woven throughout the novel. Dewey Dell's repetitive expressions highlight her profound despair, and the imagery she conjures flows with a natural rhythm. Faulkner captures Dewey Dell's unvoiced suffering so powerfully that it evokes deep sympathy for her plight. However, her dynamic with Darl adds complexity to her character by unveiling her strong, proactive side. Darl understands her without words, aware of her hidden sexual secrets, yet she resents him for encroaching on her privacy, even fantasizing about killing him with a knife. When authorities arrive to take her to the asylum, she instinctively throws herself at him. By distancing Darl, the only person aware of her pregnancy, Dewey Dell manages to stall her fate, although her circumstances remain unresolved throughout the narrative.

### 3.6 Vardaman's "Simple" Monologues

Blotner (1998) has drawn attention to the fact that "In his portrayal of Vardaman, Faulkner aims to illustrate the chaotic thought process of a child with intellectual disabilities. To make it clear that Vardaman can mistakenly equate his mother with a fish, Faulkner depicts him as jumping between thoughts, revealing how one idea can trigger another. The language is straightforward, reflecting the simplicity of Vardaman's mind. However, his monologues are complex; his thoughts do not follow a logical pattern, prompting Faulkner to express them through vivid, basic images. These images primarily revolve around themes of the fish's death, his mother's passing, being confined in a stable, and struggling to breathe. By doing so, Faulkner effectively captures the inner workings of a mind that operates illogically, while still arranging the thoughts in a way that allows readers to understand Vardaman's perspective". (p. 113).

Vardaman refuses to accept the reality of Addie's death. In his desperation, he pokes holes in the coffin to allow her to breathe, linking her existence to a large fish that he believes caught her as she lay dying. As the youngest of Addie's children, Vardaman grapples with the painful truth of her passing. His bewilderment during the moment when her body is placed in the coffin highlights the profound struggle he faces in navigating a world that feels incomplete without her. This turmoil is mirrored in the chaotic jumble of his thoughts, which often defy conventional grammar and meaning. His mind wrestles with a twisted kind of logic as he tries to reconcile the dead fish with his deceased mother. Throughout this chapter, he clings to the notion that there is a deep connection between the two, culminating in the moment he declares that his mother is a fish, solidifying this unsettling belief.

When someone dies, we do think about the past, to when they were still alive, and the future, when they won't be here anymore. But the present is clouded by the huge hole that death leaves. This means that death takes away the present, even for those who are still alive. This is clear in Vardaman's speech, when he first makes the connection between the fish's disappearance and his mother's:

The moment of death compels a turning of the mind both backward and forward—toward memories of when the dead were still among us, and toward the uncertain future from which they are now absent. Yet the present itself is eclipsed, hollowed out by the vast emptiness that death imposes. In this sense, death becomes the negation of the present, even for those who survive. This tension surfaces vividly in Vardaman's speech, when he equates the vanishing of the fish with the loss of his mother:

It's laying in the kitchen in the bleeding pan, waiting to be cooked and et. Then it wasn't and she was, and now it is and she wasn't. And tomorrow it will be cooked and et and she will be him and pa and Cash and Dewey Dell and there won't be anything in the box and so she can breathe. (Faulkner 1957:39).

Through Vardaman's innocent perspective, we gain a striking view of the pain felt by his family members. Cash's leg shows signs of blackness, likely due to gangrene, while Jewel's back bears the same dark marks from the soot oil that Dewey Dell applied. These are just the visible symptoms of the decay that plagues not only Addie but her entire family. When Vardaman encounters Darl in tears, the reason behind his sorrow remains unclear. Vardaman wonders if Darl is upset about Addie's near-burning, but it's also possible that Darl is mourning the failure of his plan to rid himself of their mother's body. While Vardaman presents his experiences straightforwardly, lacking the expressive and poetic depth that characterizes Darl's reflections, his monologue possesses its own unique beauty. The straightforward, childlike words he uses to convey the burning of the stable reveal a genuine aesthetic appreciation, as he feels deeply moved by its beauty. Vardaman also observes how the faint bands of moonlight still lingering in the coffin seem to dance over Darl's body; in essence, Darl is trembling with grief, causing the moonlight to flicker across him. In these moments, along with others in Vardaman's narrative, Faulkner's raw and unfiltered response to the world conveys not just a sense of loss, but also an underlying sense of wonder and beauty.

Fargnoli et al 2008 indicated that "Vardaman offers a childlike viewpoint on the unfolding events. Faulkner skillfully utilizes Vardaman's straightforward observations as a way to infuse wit and vivid imagery into the narrative. As they travel, Vardaman depicts the fierce blizzards engulfing the ark and the drowning mules with a simplicity that encourages readers to imagine the underlying horror of these scenes themselves. However, Faulkner also lets Vardaman express deep emotions through unconventional language that reflects a nonverbal awareness, especially in his portrayal of Jewel's horse in the dim stable. Among the family, Darl appears to be the only one patient enough to engage with Vardaman on this unique level. Their conversations reveal a poignant connection between the man on the brink of madness and the traumatized child". (p.440).

#### 4. External perspective of other narrators

Inge (1995) acknowledged that "Faulkner intentionally leaves out crucial details, compelling readers to piece together the narrative of the Bundren family through the fragmented monologues of different characters. This omission encompasses various secrets that the characters attempt to conceal, inviting us to engage in the family's web of secrecy as we grapple with the hidden truths that elude our understanding." (p.45).

On the other hand, Faulkner incorporates various narrators beyond the Bundren family, which enhances the overall objectivity of the story. If the narrative were strictly told from the Bundrens' perspective, readers might not grasp the severity of the situation, such as the repulsive smell coming from the unburied corpse, which leads the family to breach societal norms by transporting it across the countryside. These external narrators provide a broader perspective, allowing us to better understand and assess our feelings towards the Bundrens' actions.

The story features sixteen monologues delivered by eight characters outside the Bundren family. Cora has three, Tull six, Peabody two, while Armstead, Samson, Whitfield, McGowan, and Moseley each contribute one. A chorus of eight neighbors and townsfolk offers an outsider's view on what appears to be a grotesque journey. This odyssey unfolds just three days after Addie's death, as her family embarks on a six-day trek through the sweltering July heat of Mississippi to honor her wish of being buried in Jefferson, among her own people.

The external narrators serve to shed light on different facets of the Bundren world or to provide essential information. They deliver their monologues in a straightforward manner, each reflecting their unique personality. For instance, Cora Tull focuses on surface-level religious themes, while Doctor Peabody expresses himself through blunt, sarcastic critiques.

The narrator is complemented by the presence of their next-door neighbors, Vernon and Cora Tull, along with other locals and townspeople. Hypocrisy and scepticism dominate the judgment surrounding Addie and her children, yet Cora's gossipy remarks add a touch of humour to the situation. Meanwhile, Vernon Tull represents the farming community, highlighting their willingness to support the Bundrens, despite their grumbling about Addie. In six of Vernon's monologues, he recounts significant moments, including the end of Addie's funeral and the funeral itself. He witnesses the disastrous river crossing and serves as one of the narrators for the novel's most intense episode.

Whitfield's sole monologue, positioned after Cora's final words and Addie's only speech, creates a clever illusion that envelops Addie's integrity in a web of hypocrisy from both perspectives. He worries that Addie might reveal her adulterous actions on her deathbed, and he promises to confess first. However, when Addie passes away without making a confession, Whitfield sees it as a sign of God's forgiveness and acceptance of the "will to the deed" (Faulkner 1957:167) regarding the confession.

The other narrators in the story function more as dramatic monologues directed at implied listeners, in contrast to the interior monologues of the Bundren family. This group includes Dr. Peabody, neighbors Armstead and Samson, and the two men, Moseley and McGowan, whom Dewey Dell seeks for assistance. Although reading about Dewey Dell's pregnancy is tempting, Moseley tells her not to look for an abortion:

You get that notion out of your head. The Lord gave you what you have, even if He did use the devil to do it; you let Him take it away from you if it's His will to do so. You go on back to Lefe and you. (Faulkner 1957:188).

These external narrators help to situate the Bundrens within their social environment, allowing for a more objective examination of their lives. Faulkner's brilliance shines through in how he tailors his writing style to reflect the distinct perspectives of each narrator. From Darl's poetic reflections to Vardaman's muddled thoughts and Cash's straightforward reasoning, Faulkner skillfully adjusts his style to enhance the themes of the novel.

The world of *As I Lay Dying* is archetypal in its clarity – life, death, nature and cosmos – and yet the sentences probe reality to its very limits, pushing past the known and the visible into the plane of the metaphysical. This is Faulkner's grand statement about the human condition. (Lynch 2023: para 1). All the narrators emphasize that the

Bundren had lost hope, could never believe that they could be freed from the curse that had befallen them. God had made no deal with the Bundren, perhaps because they are characters who have come out of hell and must go back there. "Giving Up the Ghost" portrays the human condition as a disaster by singling out the family in a most horrific way. Internal monologues drive the action forward, revealing the characters' personal, unspoken thoughts using poetic language full of imagery, highly elaborate, and commenting on the actions of others. Faulkner gives us a South of deep poverty, in a novel that is both tragic and comic at the same time, where human beings demonstrate the ability to survive by celebrating the ability to suffer and endure between being and non-being even in the most absurd and grotesque situations.

As Moreland (2008) explains: "In *As I Lay Dying*, each monologue, except for Addie's – whose timing remains ambiguous – and the two monologues before and after hers by Cora Tull and Whitfield, progresses in a linear fashion with the unfolding action. Whether they occur right after one another or hours apart, these monologues contribute to the family's journey, reflecting the characters' private obsessions that emerge primarily within their spoken thoughts. This highlights the need to understand that the novel significantly departs from Faulkner's typical portrayal of human experience, both in urban and rural settings. It also removes the usual exuberance in expression that can be found even in his bleakest works. As a result of what Faulkner often described, and which is largely supported by his life story, as a more contained and disciplined writing process – shaped by the demands of marriage and family – *As I Lay Dying* veers toward a primal essence defined by the pervasive theme of "dying" throughout the narrative. (p. 443).

The true journey that a reader embarks on in this book isn't just a trip to Jefferson; it dives deep into the intricate, troubled, and often nightmarish minds of the characters. Darl grapples with profound questions about his identity and reality, while Jewel wrestles with a bubbling anger and a thirst for revenge. Cash fixates on neatness and order, Dewey Dell is consumed by her personal anxieties, Vardaman navigates the innocent confusion surrounding death and grief, Anse faces an internal battle between inertia and honour, and Addie is weighed down by her frustrations, regrets, and secrets. These are the shadowy, hidden depths that Faulkner beautifully unveils through his remarkable stream of consciousness style. To neighbors like Tull and Samson, the Bundren family might seem like a devoted unit bonded by a shared, albeit absurd and slightly insane, cause; however, the reader uncovers the truth about the Bundrens: they are selfish, divided, fearful, dysfunctional, lonely, and, most tragically, unloving and unloved. (Hamblin 2005: para 14).

## 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the narrative techniques employed in *As I Lay Dying* considered the external perspectives offered by Bundren and non-Bundren narrators. Central to the study are Faulkner's composition techniques that contribute to the novel's fragmented narrative style. *As I Lay Dying* offers a compelling demonstration of the distinction between internal and external narrators combining perspectives of characters. Faulkner's utilization of multiple narrations, alongside narrative techniques such as stream of consciousness and interior monologue, allows for the representation of diverse psychological realities in response to shared events. Multiple narrative voices deepen the psychological depth of individual characters but also contribute to the overall structural and thematic unity of the novel. Through a dynamic interplay of internal and external narrative perspective, readers are granted access to the cognitive and emotional landscapes of multiple narrators, facilitating a more nuanced understanding of the novel.

Faulkner distinctly individualizes the narrative style of each character, but also reinforces the subjective nature of narrative construction within the text. The alternation between Bundren and non-Bundren narrators further emphasizes the epistemological subjectivity that underpins the novel. In the absence of an omniscient narrator, no single authoritative perspective is presented. Instead, truth is refracted through the individual consciousness of each narrator. The use of first-person narration functions as a device that not only enhances the intimacy of the narrative but also positions the reader as an active participant in the interpretive process.

Faulkner strategically retains key details, compelling readers to piece together the Bundren family's history through the fragmented voices of various narrators. This unrevealed information encompasses secrets characters desperately try to hide, inviting readers to engage with the family's web of secrecy as they seek to grasp what remains unspoken. Faulkner's approach relies on interior monologues and manipulates time according to each family member's perspective. The language within these monologues features beautifully crafted passages that stand in stark contrast to the straightforwardness and the intentionally clumsy nature of the academic narration, forming the foundational thought process for many characters. The characters' individual experiences compose a collective experience: hence the mother is not dead but always dying for them, why her great and beautiful monologue is placed precisely at the centre of the work.

In the final analysis, the novel challenges readers' perceptions of the novel, the character, and the narrative voice. Each narrator contributes a distinct version of events surrounding Addie Bundren's death and the family's journey to Jefferson. While these perspectives often diverge in tone, focus, and intent, they collectively form a cohesive narrative structure that reflects the fragmented yet interconnected nature of human experience. The novel thereby becomes a polyphonic discourse in which characters reveal their worldviews and conditions.

The findings suggest that while none of the narrators can be regarded as fully reliable, their subjective accounts collectively construct a multifaceted narrative framework that invites diverse interpretations. These techniques ultimately challenge traditional notions of narrative authority, compelling the reader to actively participate in the creation of meaning. Through its multiplicity of voices and structural fragmentation, the novel exemplifies a distinctive narrative mode that marks a significant departure from conventional storytelling and represents a landmark achievement in both American and world literature.

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