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BA DIPLOMA THESIS

**Main Characters, Conflicts and Themes in William Faulkner's
“As I Lay Dying”**

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DECLARATION

I, Rrezarta Dula declare that I worked on my thesis on my own – pursuing the Academic Honesty Statement’s principles in word and spirit – and used the sources mentioned in the Bibliography.

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1. INTRODUCTION

William Faulkner is considered as one of the strongest American novelists of the 20th century. Faulkner is well-known for the techniques and the stream of consciousness that he uses in his writings. His novels are set in the American South and he used to write about the places and people that influenced him.

His works include short stories and novels.

As I Lay Dying is one of William Faulkner's masterpieces, along with *The Sound and the Fury*. *As I Lay Dying* makes a strong statement on the absurdity of life and the characters' actions and their beliefs. Faulkner has created an idea of the human mind and the controversial thoughts of the characters, on how they are stuck between "a dying life and an active death" (Tönnies, 2006).

The reason why I chose this novel as my diploma thesis, is the fact that I was so intrigued by the way Faulkner described this family and the way they dealt with their loss. I was surprised with the way he elaborated the reaction of each of the members of the Bundren family towards the death of their mother/wife.

This diploma thesis is going to be divided in five main chapters.

The first chapter will include the author's biography, including his life and his literary works.

I will give details on his life, from his childhood until his adult days and all the events that characterized his life. Whereas regarding his work, I will give details on his most popular novels and short stories throughout his career as a writer and the techniques that he used in his works.

The second chapter will include more information about the novel and a short summary of it.

The third chapter will be dedicated to the main characters of the novel which include all the members of the Bundren family:

Addie Bundren, Anse Bundren, Cash, Darl, Jewel, Vardaman and Dewey Dell. Each of them has different perspective and reasons to finish their story. I will elaborate more on each character and their differences.

The fourth chapter will describe the main conflicts that the Bundren family has to deal with, while trying to fulfill Addie's last wish. Their main conflict is an external one, that with nature, throughout the journey they deal with flooding and inability to arrive in Jefferson sooner.

Whereas the other conflict which is an internal one, appears when Darl starts questioning the purpose of their journey.

The fifth chapter will discuss the main themes of the novel. The themes that will be discussed are: Death, Identity, Liminality, Language and Lack of Communication.

Death is the main reason for the development of the Bundren family's story and it gives an explanation on how the members of the family deal with it.

Identity is a problem that follows the characters throughout the novel, because the situations they deal with, make it harder for them to understand who they are and what their purpose is.

Liminality means the condition of being between two different states at the same time. Some members of the family happen to be torn between two conditions and struggle to choose the right one.

Language and Lack of Communication is an important theme, because the members of the Bundren family are known for not using language and not being able to communicate with each other.

The last chapter will be the conclusion of the thesis and the overview of the entire work.

I would like to sincerely thank my professor, Pr. Asoc. Dr. Lirak Karjagdiu, for being ready to help and provide the best advices on the process of writing this diploma thesis. Also, thank you to the academic staff of the University of Gjakova.

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2. AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

2.1. Life

“It is my ambition to be, as a private individual, abolished and voided from history, leaving it markless, no refuse save the printed books...It is my aim and every effort bent, that the sum and history of my life, which in the same sentence is my obit and epitaph too, shall be them both: He made the books and he died”. (William Faulkner).

These are the words that the author said to the well-known critic, Malcolm Cowley on the fact that he did not want a biography written for him.

William Cuthbert Faulkner is an American writer, born in New Albany, Mississippi, on September 25, 1897.

He was the first child of Maud and Murry Faulkner. His father was a third generation worker of the family railroad, whereas his mother was part of a very prominent family from Oxford, called The Butlers. He took the first name from his great-grandfather and his middle name from his father. Faulkner had three younger brothers named Murry (nicknamed Jack), John and Dean (Hamblin, 2016).

As a young child, he suffered from colic which is also known as excessive crying, and it is a condition that affects a lot of infants. In order to relax him, his mother used to tie him in a straight-backed chair and hearing the chair moving at night, the neighbors thought that the Faulkner family were some strange people.

After he turned one year old, his family moved to Ripley. The four years of their lives in Ripley were the happiest ones, because his father Murry enjoyed the railroad (Hamblin, 2016).

His family moved to Oxford in 1902, days before he turned five and he spent his childhood, his youth days and most of his adult life there (Minter, 1980).

William Faulkner did not start school until he was eight years old, but after he started it, he became an honor student and was allowed to skip the second grade and go directly to the third one. He was excellent in all subjects but because of his mother's influence, who was an artist and a college graduate, he was more interested in drawing. Also, his mother passed on him the love for literature

and reading, and introduced him to her favorite authors like Shakespeare, Dickens, Balzac and others (Hamblin, 2016).

According to Minter (1980), Faulkner studied his region with such care and was strongly regional, but his library included books of geography and history as well.

Faulkner started writing and reading poetry around 1910.

In 1916, he started working in his grandfather's bank, after declining graduation from high school (Minter, 1980).

Like his father, he had problems with drinking and never managed to quit. He related drinking with triumphs and release, and with the idea of feeling "bigger and wiser".

He had a very strong relationship with his mother and after getting married in 1929, she did not enjoy the presence of his wife, so he left her home and visited his mother often (Minter, 1980).

William Faulkner moved to New Orleans in 1925, where he worked as a journalist and also met the American Sherwood Andersen. He convinced him that writing about the places and people he could identify with, would improve his career as a writer.

Until death, Faulkner continued his work in literature, including short stories and novels.

In 1949, he was rewarded with the Nobel Prize for Literature.

He died on July 6, 1962, in a sanatorium on a hill in Byhalia, a place near Oxford (Minter, 1980).

2.2. Work

William Faulkner is a well-known American writer of the 20th century. He is a novelist and is known for the narrative and stream of consciousness techniques that he uses in his novels.

According to Joseph W. Reed, Jr., his narrative style represents powerful and bold interactions:

1. between characters,
2. between characters and narrator,
3. between characters, narrator and reader (as paraphrased in Prabhu, 2015).

His novels and short stories are conducted with themes that deal with important issue of America like: Civil War, Class Conflicts and Slavery (Prabhu, 2015).

He started his writing career between 1926 and 1961. During this period of time, he wrote 19 novels. He was influenced mostly by F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Keats.

Faulkner's first poem "*Portrait*", was published in June 1922, at the age of 25. It was published in a magazine that had a big reputation at the time, called *Double Dealer*.

In 1924, he published his first book which was a collection of poems titled *The Marble Faun*.

His first novel "*Soldiers Pay*" was released in 1926, when America was heading towards the Depression Period of 1930. Faulkner looked carefully to its details and presented it to the world through his poetry. During that period of time, he also published two other novels: *Mosquitoes* (1927), and *Sartoris* (1929) (Stanley & Napierkowski, 2000).

In 1929, his stream of consciousness novel "*The Sound and the Fury*" was published and it was ranked 6th on the Modern Library on the hundred best English Language novels of the 20th century. It is considered his best and most experimental novel (Prabhu, 2015).

Together with "*The Sound and the Fury*" (1929), other novels like "*As I Lay Dying*" (1930), "*Light in August*" (1932), "*Absalom Absalom*" (1936), "*The Hamlet*" (1940), are considered among the best novels of the 20th century. All these novels represent rich collection written by William Faulkner using his characters and his own setting to represent the human condition (Prabhu, 2015).

He also received the Pulitzer Prize in 1954 for his novel "The Fable".

From 1957 until his death, Faulkner worked as a writer-in-residence at the University of Virginia (Stanley & Napierkowski, 2000).

3. ABOUT THE NOVEL

3.1. Relevant Information

“I set out deliberately to write a tour-de-force. Before I ever put pen to paper and set down the first word I knew what the last word would be and almost where the last period would fall...”
(William Faulkner).

As I Lay Dying is a novel written by William Faulkner in 1929 and published in 1930. It is a satire of heroic narrative and includes both comedy and tragedy in it. The stream of consciousness technique is used in the writing of this novel.

The setting time of the story is the 1920s and it is based in the rural area of Yoknapatawpha Country, Mississippi.

The story is told in 59 chapters in the perspective of 15 different characters.

As I Lay Dying is one of Faulkner’s most innovative and intriguing novels. He shows a world in which the reality is related to the individual perception. He does not use the traditional way of having one narrator, but changes it with the ideas of 15 different ones. Faulkner also does not follow a chronological order of the events, but they are presented by the characters, even if they did not witness them.

3.2. Short Summary

This novel tells the story of Addie Bundren and her family’s attempt to fulfill her last wish, that of being buried in her hometown of Jefferson. Each character perceives and deals with the death of Addie in a unique personal way.

The beginning of the novel shows Addie lying in her bed, in her last days of her life.

They live in bad conditions and the patriarch of the family Anse, is a weak one. His desire to buy a new set of false teeth is one more reason why he wants to fulfill his wife’s last wish.

Cash, the oldest son of the family, creates the coffin of his own mother in front of her room’s window. Addie’s two other sons, Darl and Jewel go out of town for a delivery which would bring them three extra dollars that Anse and Jewel want, and while they are away their mother dies.

Vardaman, who is the youngest son of the family, compares his mother to a fish that he caught the other day, and even makes holes in her coffin which touch her face.

Dewey Dell, the only daughter of the family, deals with anxiety because of a sexual experience with a farmer that left her pregnant.

The other day, the Bundren family has the funeral for Addie and when Darl and Jewel come back, they see buzzards in their house, and realize that their mother is dead.

Their journey to Jefferson is very long and hard. They deal with a lot of troubles. Because of the flooding a lot of bridges were washed away, the coffin falls and also Cash has problems with his injured leg. They spend nights in different farms, some of the people in those farms were nice and others were rude to them and saw their journey with a lot of skepticism.

On the other hand, while on the road, Dewey Dell tries to buy some kind of drug for abortion, but the pharmacist refuses to sell it because of moral reasons.

The other day, the Bundren family arrives in Jefferson and they bury Addie. Dewey Dell again tries to buy an abortion drug, but the boy working in the pharmacy pretends to be a doctor and convinces her for sexual interaction, thinking that she will get that drug.

Darl is sent to a mental institution because of some troubles that he created throughout the journey.

The following morning, the patriarch of the family Anse shows up to his children with a new pair of teeth, and a new wife, a local woman that he met during those days of the journey.

4. CHARACTERS

4.1. Addie Bundren

Addie Bundren is the central character of the novel. Even though she has only two chapters in the entire novel, her will of being buried in her hometown, is the reason of all the struggles, difficulties and elaboration of the story.

The readers of the novel get to know her and her story better, through the perspective of other narrators including her family members and her neighbours.

She is not the typical mother. She does not love all her children the same. She loves only Jewel, whom she has from another relationship with the local minister named Whitfield.

“I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of. And now he has three children that are his and not mine” (Faulkner, 1930, p.109).

She hates her husband and never had a happy marriage.

She chose Anse as her husband, because he was more like her. He lived alone and had no relatives. She thought that this marriage was not going to attack her privacy and pride. But it was nothing like she pictured it and ended at a very early phase (Nanchong & Sichuan, 2015).

During her years in her hometown, Addie was a schoolteacher in Jefferson and in order to escape that life, she married Anse. She was happy when she had her first child Cash, but considered the other ones, only as an obligation.

Even though, she is viewed negatively by a lot of critics, still she is the heroine of the story. She is seen as a mother whose personality brings tragedy in their families.

She is considered to be a “round character”, which means that she goes through different changes, ideas and characteristics.

Addie does not like to be stereotyped and caricaturized. She has given birth to five children, raised them mostly by herself and lived as a slave until the very last days of her life (Nanchong & Sichuan, 2015).

“I could just remember how my father used to say that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time. And when I would have to look at them day after day, each with his and her

secret and selfish thought, and blood strange to each other blood and strange to mine, and think that this seemed to be the only way I could get ready to stay dead, I would hate my father for having ever planted me.” (Faulkner, 1930, p.105).

This is the perspective of Addie for life and its struggles. She considers bringing children to life as a mistake. This process kills those around and it seems pointless to her, to live just to stay dead for a long time. Her father is the reason of Addie’s personality and this way of thinking about life and its importance.

According to (Nanchong & Sichuan, 2015), Addie grew up in a loveless family. Somehow she was a parentless child and did not get the love she needed from her own parents.

Addie is a private and proud woman, sometimes lonely, hard on herself and she can be selective in her love for her children (Nanchong & Sichuan, 2015).

For her neighbours, she looks as a very individualist and distinctive person. Cora describes her:

“She lived, a lonely woman, lonely with her pride, trying to make folks believe different, hiding the fact that they just suffered her, because she was not cold in the coffin before they were carting her forty miles away to bury her, flouting the will of God to do it”. (Faulkner, 1930, p.18).

Addie’s story shows a contrast of her world. In one side, she is represented as a powerful woman, for making her family fulfill her last wish. In the other hand, she had no power to escape from the life she always hated. Addie hated everybody around her. Her father, for bringing her in this world. Her students, for their terrible behaviour towards her. Her husband Anse, for cheating on her and not loving her the way she wanted (Nanchong & Sichuan, 2015).

Addie Bundren’s character is one that will get the readers’ attention and sympathy. She is an independent and strong woman, yet enigmatic and complex. She struggled her entire life, with everything that happened around her. Her narration expresses the loneliness and the struggles of her life and that brings the readers a bigger picture and a better understanding of her reasons and wishes.

4.2. Anse Bundren

Anse Bundren is the patriarch of the family. He is a lazy person that never worked a day. He owned a local farm in the rural area of Yoknapatawpha Country, Mississippi, where the family lived. He was a bad husband to his wife and a bad father to his children. Anse wanted to fulfill his wife's wish of being buried in Jefferson, because that way he could get himself the new pair of teeth that he wanted for a long time, and maybe a new wife as well.

“And now I got to pay for it, me without a tooth in my head, hoping to get ahead enough so I could get my mouth fixed where I could eat God’s own victuals as a man should, and her hale and well as ere a woman in the land until that day”. (Faulkner, 1930, p.27).

When Addie was dying, he made Darl and Jewel go out of town for work, and they could not see their mother in her last moments.

“But if she don’t last until you get back,” he says. “She will be disappointed.”

Vernon spits into the dust. But it will rain before morning.

“She’s counted on it,” pa says. “She’ll want to start right away. I know her.

I promised her I’d keep the team here and ready, and she’s counting on it”. (Faulkner, 1930, p.15).

A lot of critics consider him as a lazy and mean character. He sold Jewel’s horse and took Dewey Dell’s money that she needed to buy the abortion drug. Because of his manipulative behaviours, his family experiences great loss (Nanchong & Sichuan, 2015).

He is the main character of the Southwestern humor techniques. He is mainly described in animal imagery by everybody that knows him. Anse gives the readers the laughing factor more than that of compassion. Through his actions, he reveals his absurdity. He has great trading skills and he uses them to manipulate his family members and his neighbours as well (Fowler, 1984).

“And pa thinks because neighbours will always treat one another that way because he has always been too busy letting neighbours do for him to find out”. (Faulkner, 1930, p.21).

During his family’s trip to Jefferson, to bury his wife, Anse manipulates his own children.

He takes money from all of them for his purposes. He sells Jewel's horse, takes Cash's graphophone money and Dewey Dell's money that she needed for the abortion drug.

In the novel, Anse's character gives an elaboration on the element of mystery. For example, it is not sure if he really believes that if he sweats, he will die. His main aim is inertia, which is the unwillingness to change anything in his life.

"He stands there, like he don't aim to move again nor nothing else". (Faulkner, 1930, p.24).

Anse Bundren's character does not create a good impact on the readers, because of all of his actions and manipulations. The way he handled all the situations in his life, regarding his wife and his children shows that he was interested only in himself and his well-being.

4.3. Cash Bundren

Cash is the first child of Addie and Anse Bundren. He is lucky enough to have experienced love from his mother, because Addie loved him and was happy when she had him. He has great carpentry skills and that is the reason that he creates his own mother's coffin. Cash builds it in front of her room window and shows her every little piece he puts in it, for her approval.

He has only five chapters on the novel, most of them dealing with the process of building the coffin. His chapters are the easiest ones to understand, because he cannot think for two things at the same time. Cash pays attention to the details and he tried to create the best coffin for his mother. *"A good carpenter. Addie Bundren could not want a better one, a better box to lie in. It will give her confidence and comfort"*. (Faulkner, 1930, p.8).

Like most of the other members of the family, Cash has an individual motive to go to Jefferson as well. He wants to buy a "graphophone", which is known as a phonograph (Fagnoli & Golay, 2008).

During the journey, Cash breaks his leg in the river crossing, when he fell out of the wagon, and the way he dealt with this situation, brings a new understanding of his character. He injured the same leg before, he fell from a church that he was building. By the time they arrived in Jefferson, his leg was completely black and Dr. Peabody had to intervene in it (Anderson, 2007).

"Don't tell me. And don't tell me it ain't going to bother you to lose sixty-odd square inches of skin to get that concrete off. And don't tell me it ain't going to bother you to have to limp around on one short leg for the balance of your life—if you walk at all again". (Faulkner, 1930, p.146).

His family buys cement to put on his leg, but it goes directly into his skin and causes a terrible infection that leads to Cash losing a lot of skin.

The effort that he gave to build his mother's coffin, and the pain he suffered during that journey, made us realize the love that he had for Addie.

Cash is the only child of the family that does not feel damaged by Addie's behaviour towards her children, because he felt her love from the beginning. He also did not give attention to his mother's affection for his younger brother, Jewel (Anderson, 2007).

His other brother Darl, feels that he has a stronger bond with him, even though Cash is part of the plan to put Darl in the mental institution, because he burned another farmer's property.

"I tried to tell him. If I could have just moved, even set up. But I tried to tell him and he quit laughing, looking up at me.

"Do you want me to go?" he said.

"It'll be better for you," I said. "Down there it'll be quiet, with none of the bothering and such. It'll be better for you, Darl," I said". (Faulkner, 1930, p.145).

Towards the end of the novel he becomes the most balanced member of his family. He is the narrator of the last chapter of the novel, which describes the moment the Bundren children met their step mother, and saw the new teeth that their father wanted for a long time and finally got them (Anderson, 2007).

4.4. Darl Bundren

Darl is the second son of the Bundren family. He is a World War I veteran. Darl is the most complicated character of the novel. He is the narrator of 19 chapters, more than any other character of the novel. Through his eyes the readers get to understand others' decisions and actions. The chapters that he narrates are more complicated and give a reflection of a person that thinks of many things at the same time. That is the reason that Darl gives the readers a view of what other characters are thinking. Darl's chapters are harder to understand, because he is that one character involved the most, in everything happening in his family's story.

Darl is an imaginative, intelligent and jealous guy. He is also mentally ill. He takes Jewel away from his mother during the last days of her life, because he always knew that he was Addie's favourite child.

Darl is also the most affected member of the family for this trip to Jefferson, and also thinks that it is a waste of time. During the journey, he even burns Gillespie's barn with his mother's coffin inside, in order for this unnecessary trip to end right there. This is the reason that Darl is sent to a mental institution in Jackson by the end of the novel (Fargnoli & Golay, 2008).

According to Bloom (2013) in the chapters that Darl narrates, he uses artistic metaphors to describe his grudge with his family members. For example, he describes Jewel in the banal modes of art. In the first chapter of the novel, Darl makes fun of Jewel by comparing him to a cigar-store Indian. *"Still staring straight ahead, his pale eyes like wood set into his wooden face, he crosses the floor in four strides with the rigid gravity of a cigar-store Indian dressed in patched overalls and endowed with life from the hips down, and steps in a single stride through the opposite window and into the path again just as I come around the corner"*. (Faulkner, 1930, p.8).

Darl's desires to change his perceptions of his existence and the attempts to change his world, are the dominating parts of *As I Lay Dying*. He also tries to change his mother's influence over him, and gives her metaphors of imprisoning that serve as synonyms of death.

His madness is the result of his inability to accept his reality as it is. Instead he tries to change and negate it in his own terms.

As in the case of many other novels from William Faulkner, his characters' problems are shown by the observations and thoughts of other characters. Darl is one of those characters, that observes others' ideas with his eyes. Just like his mother, Darl has the ability to affect others with his eyes. It feels like a tradition passed from the mother to her son (Bloom, 2013).

The ending of the novel finds Darl in a train on his road to Jackson.

“Darl has gone to Jackson. They put him on the train, laughing, down the long car laughing, the heads turning like the heads of owls when he passed. “What are you laughing at?” I said.

“Yes yes yes yes yes”. (Faulkner, 1930, p.154).

4.5. Jewel Bundren

Jewel is the son that Addie had from another relationship. He is his mother's favourite child. He is the son of the local minister Whitfield, with whom Addie had a love affair and Jewel does not know the truth of his biological father. In his appearance, people could understand that he is different from the other members of the Bundren family, because he is taller than all the others. His thoughts are represented by Darl in most of the chapters. Jewel has a strange relationship with his father and his siblings even though he does not know that he is not a part of that family.

He narrates only one chapter, the fourth one. By the number of the chapters he narrates, readers might think that he is a minor character, but his story, his relationship with the entire Bundren family, his strong bond with his mother, makes him one of the most important characters of the novel.

He is one of the novel's most interesting and different characters, he is considered his mother's salvation.

He is a very energetic and a man of action. He saves Addie's coffin from the flooding river and the burning barn. When they arrived in Jefferson he had a fight with a man who directed a knife towards them, and Darl had to intervene to stop him. In the only chapter that he narrates, he describes that he imagines himself together with his mother in a hill, throwing rocks at the other people below (Anderson, 2007).

Jewel is very obsessed with his horse, and he takes care of him in a way that is compared to the affection that Addie showed towards him. In order to get that horse, Jewel worked for weeks, he cleared a neighbour's farm, to earn the money he needed. He even kept it a secret from his family members, including his beloved mother. His father Anse, is the reason that Jewel finishes the journey without his horse, because he sold it, in order to get a new team of mules.

When Darl burned Gillespie's barn, Jewel went into the flames to save all the animals, including his horse and his mother's coffin that was inside. Because of that, he got himself a really burnt skin.

“The stall door has swung shut. Jewel thrusts it back with his buttocks and he appears, his back arched, the muscles ridged through his garments as he drags the horse out by its head. In the glare its eyes roll with soft, fleet, wild opaline fire; its muscles bunch and run as it flings its head about, lifting Jewel clear of the ground”. (Faulkner, 1930, p.133).

Darl says that his close relationship with his horse, is a substitution for his close bond that he had with his mother (Anderson, 2007).

Like many other members of the family, Jewel supports the idea of taking Darl into the mental health institution, because of his actions and their consequences.

After reading the novel, and getting to know every character better, all the readers would agree that Jewel was the most affected and had the hardest time to accept the situation, because of the love he always felt for his mother Addie.

4.6. *Vardaman Bundren*

Vardaman is Addie and Anse's youngest child. He is the narrator of 9 chapters of the novel. He is known by all the readers and literary critics, for his famous quote "My mother is a fish". Vardaman is compared with Benjy from the other masterpiece of William Faulkner, "The Sound and the Fury", because he represents a naïve perspective on the events happening in the novel and readers think that he is mentally unstable.

At the beginning of the novel he cannot comprehend with his mother's death. Vardaman cannot find the reason of his mother's passing. First he thinks that the reason for Addie's death is her doctor, Peabody and in revenge, he releases his horses. Another idea that comes to his mind, is the one in which he thinks that his mother has turned into a fish. He caught a fish the other day, and that caused him thinking that his mother is the same as the fish. He even creates two holes in her coffin, so that she has enough air (Anderson, 2007).

During the journey to Jefferson, when Addie's coffin falls into the river, he runs to catch her from the fear that she might escape, having in mind that she is a fish. In one of the chapters that he narrates, he explains his inner thoughts:

"Cash is my brother. But Jewel's mother is a horse. My mother is a fish. Darl says that when we come to the water again I might see her and Dewey Dell said, She's in the box; how could she have got out? She got out through the holes I bored, into the water I said, and when we come to the water again I am going to see her. My mother is not in the box. My mother does not smell like that. My mother is a fish". (Faulkner, 1930, p.121).

According to Anderson (2007), William Faulkner uses Vardaman's way of dealing and recording everything that happens, as a way of describing all the events in the easiest way. Vardaman describes everything with simplicity and invites readers to experience the horrors of those events. Faulkner allows Vardaman to use a language that is not realistic, but that brings awareness to what is happening.

Vardaman has a stronger connection with Darl. He seems to be the only one that understands him and his world. He is an observant person and sees Darl when he burns Gillespie's barn, but Dewey Dell told him not to tell anybody else.

“And I saw something Dewey Dell told me not to tell nobody. It is not about pa and it is not about Cash and it is not about Jewel and it is not about Dewey Dell and it is not about me”. (Faulkner, 1930, p.131).

This event disappoints him and he cannot understand his brother's madness and he gets very sad when Darl is sent in the mental asylum.

4.7. Dewey Dell Bundren

Dewey Dell, the only daughter of Addie and Anse Bundren. She is the narrator of four chapters of the novel. Like two of her other brothers, Darl and Vardaman, she feels that she has been rejected from her mother, her entire life. At the early age of seventeen, she suffers an unwanted pregnancy and throughout the novel, readers see her struggle to find a drug for abortion. She shares the same ideas as her mother. Just like her, she feels that bringing a child in this world, just kills other people around them.

Her unwanted pregnancy keeps her preoccupied and serves as a way to process her mother's death. According to Anderson (2007), Dewey Dell shares the same virtues with her father, including accepting the sexual interaction with her seducer Lefe. They were picking cotton together, and she told herself that when her sack is full, she will have sex with him.

“And we picked on toward the secret shade and our eyes would drown together touching on his hands and my hands and I didn't say anything. I said “What are you doing?” and he said “I am picking into your sack.” And so it was full when we came to the end of the row and I could not help it”. (Faulkner, 1930, p.21).

Dewey Dell's condition is very hard, and she has nobody to help or share it with. She does not tell anybody in her family, whereas her seducer Lefe gives her 10\$ to buy the drug she needed. She decides for an abortion and attempts to do that during the journey to Jefferson. Dewey Dell had two attempts to buy the drug and failed in both of them. Her first attempt happened in Mottson before arriving in their final destination, where the first pharmacist refused to sell the drug to her, because of moral reasons. Whereas the second one happened in Jefferson after they buried Addie. The boy working in that pharmacy, pretended to be a doctor and deceived her and had sexual interaction with her, implying that it would have the effect she wanted.

Faulkner expresses her anxiety in a way that creates sympathy for her struggles and her lack of communication with other people about it (Anderson, 2007).

Dewey Dell has a strange relationship with her brother, Darl. He is the only member of the family that knows her secret. Even though, he does not tell anybody else and does not judge her, she still

does not want him to be involved in her private life. By the end of the story, she starts to hate him and even fantasies of killing him. She is the one that told Gillespie the truth about his barn and accepts the idea of sending Darl to the mental asylum.

Her attempts to buy the abortion drug fail and she does not get the result she wanted.

The end of the novel, does not give the end of her story. The author leaves it unexplained.

5. CONFLICTS

As *I Lay Dying* is characterized with the presence of both external and internal conflicts.

Both of these conflicts that appear in the novel show a very important part of the characters' personality.

External conflicts appear when the characters have conflicts or problems with someone or something else. It can be conflicts with another character, conflicts with nature and others.

Whereas the internal conflicts appear when one character has conflicts with himself/herself and their inner thoughts on something.

The journey of the Bundren family and their neighbours to Jefferson, is very difficult and unpredictable. They have to go through a lot, in order to arrive at their final destination and to fulfill Addie's last wish.

In one hand, the external conflict happens when they struggle against the forces of nature and the difficulties it brings. They suffer a lot from the raining because it has washed away all of the bridges that lead to Jefferson, and also Cash re-injures his leg during that period.

On the other hand, an internal conflict happens to appear when Darl starts questioning the entire journey to Jefferson and if it was even worth it.

5.1. External Conflicts

The journey of the Bundren family and their neighbours to Jefferson took them eight days. During those eight days, they have to deal with a lot of unfortunate events, many of them happening from the forces of nature. Nature was not in their side those days of the trip and it brought a lot of tension between the characters. Because of the raining a lot of bridges were washed away, and all the people involved in the journey had to stop in different farms for nights because it was impossible for them to continue the journey in those circumstances, and struggled keeping Addie's coffin "safe".

"It was nigh up to the levee on both sides, the earth hid except for the tongue of it we was on going out to the bridge and then down into the water, and except for knowing how the road and the bridge used to look, a fellow couldn't tell where was the river and where the land. It was just a

tangle of yellow and the levee not less wider than a knife-back kind of, with us setting in the wagon and on the horse and the mule". (Faulkner, 1930, p.78).

5.2. Internal Conflicts

Darl is the only member of the family that during the journey started to think if it was all worth it. He feels that it is unnecessary to fulfill his mother's wish and take her to Jefferson. He is not very invested in the journey and does not understand his mother's wish. The fact that he does not have any additional reason to finish this trip, makes it even more senseless to him. This situation starts a conflict within himself.

"And since sleep is is-not and rain and wind are was, it is not. Yet the wagon is, because when the wagon is was, Addie Bundren will not be. And Jewel is, so Addie Bundren must be. And then I must be, or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room. And so if I am not emptied yet, I am is. How often have I lain beneath rain on a strange roof, thinking of home". (Faulkner, 1930, p.52).

6. MAIN THEMES

6.1. Death

The story of *As I Lay Dying* starts as a result of the death in the Bundren family. Addie's death is the reason of the elaboration of the story. Therefore, death is a very important theme in the novel. As in every other case, death is painful and hard, and in the Bundren family's case it gives a deeper understanding and a different approach on how the characters deal with it.

Even though death is the theme that keeps the story going, it is not the main concern of the novel. The perspective of the characters on it and the treatment of the dead person are the main points of the story. Also, in Vardaman's chapters Faulkner expresses the idea on death and the confusion that goes in his head about it (Stanley & Napierkowski, 2000).

"It was not her because it was laying right yonder in the dirt. And now it's all chopped up. I chopped it up. 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 to-morrow 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, 1930, p.43).

The theme of death in *As I Lay Dying* takes other forms, as well. Faulkner uses Addie's chapters to suppose that there are ways to be dead also alive at the same time. Faulkner makes Addie "speak" from her coffin.

"She was under the apple tree and Darl and I go across the moon and the cat jumps down and runs and we can hear her inside the wood. "Hear?" Darl says. "Put your ear close." (Faulkner, 1930, p.131).

Another form of the theme of death is represented by Addie's narration. She thinks that her husband Anse is dead and does not even know it. To Addie, Anse represents only emptiness and blindness. Faulkner investigates this way of existence by exploring all of his characters (Stanley & Napierkowski, 2000).

“He did not know that he was dead, then. Sometimes I would lie by him in the dark, hearing the land that was now of my blood and flesh, and I would think: Anse. Why Anse. Why are you Anse.”
(Faulkner, 1930, p.107).

In the majority of the normal families, death of a family member would represent an important concern and they would struggle a lot to accept the new reality. Whereas, in the case of the characters of *As I Lay Dying* it just represents the beginning of a new life, with a lot of secrets, problems and selfishness.

6.2. Identity

Identity is one of the main themes of *As I Lay Dying*. Faulkner describes that all the characters of the novel struggle to find themselves, avoid their problems and try to change their bad habits.

The death of their mother shows that these individuals struggle to accept the reality in different ways and also are very isolated and do not communicate with one another.

Throughout the course of the novel, many of these characters struggle to find who they are and what they have to do.

The nature of self-identity is developed in the novel. Characters like Cash, Anse, Jewel, the Tull neighbours, are very aware of their identities. But, there are other characters like Darl, Dewey Dell and Vardaman that Faulkner uses to describe the delicate nature of identity (Stanley & Napierkowski, 2000).

Dewey Dell is in trouble with her identity. She wants to escape her reality and wants to be alone. Her pregnancy made her realize that it is not just her anymore, she is the reason for another life as well.

“It’s because I am alone. If I could just feel it, it would be different, because I would not be alone. But if I were not alone, everybody would know it. And he could do so much for me, and then I would not be alone. Then I could be all right alone.” (Faulkner, 1930, p.39).

Vardaman defines his identity by relating himself with other members of the family. Throughout the novel Vardaman repeats his famous quotes, *“My mother is a fish”* which indicates that he struggles to understand his mother’s identity now that she is dead. Also, *“Darl is my brother”*, which shows that he connects himself with others very often.

On the other hand, Darl is the character that feels that the process of finding yourself will never reach an end. The absence of his mother’s love lead to his isolation from the other people on his life (Stanley & Napierkowski, 2000). He also reflects on the difference between himself and his younger brother Jewel.

“I don’t know what I am. I don’t know if I am or not. Jewel knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know whether he is or not. He cannot empty himself for sleep because he is not what he is and he is what he is not.” (Faulkner, 1930, p.51).

The life of the Bundren family was full of tension and unexpected events, and it created confusion between the characters. They struggled to know their real purpose and their own identities. All the time, they were trying to find themselves and what was best for them.

6.3. Liminality

Liminality is one of the main themes of the novel *As I Lay Dying*. Liminality refers to the situation of being between two states. For example, the state of being between life and death, or day and night. Even the title itself, *As I Lay Dying*, implies being between a state of life and death (Anderson, 2007).

Many of the members of the family included in the journey seem to always be between two ideas or two decisions.

The entire journey to Jefferson follows the process of Addie's burial and by the end of the novel she remains an animation for her family members. During a conversation with each other, Darl and Vardaman seem to hear her speaking from her coffin. This gives an explanation of Addie's liminal condition, of being a dead person speaking.

"She was under the apple tree and Darl and I go across the moon and the cat jumps down and runs and we can hear her inside the wood.

"Hear?" Darl says. "Put your ear close."

I put my ear close and I can hear her. Only I can't tell what she is saying.

"What is she saying, Darl?" I say. "Who is she talking to?"

"She's talking to God," Darl says. "She is calling on Him to help her." (Faulkner, 1930, p.131).

Liminality is a condition that two other members of the family deal with. Darl has a liminal state between sanity and insanity. His acts of madness throughout the story, give a strong emphasis on this condition and also are the reason that he ends up in the mental health asylum.

On the other hand, Dewey Dell has a liminal tendency as well. She is between the process of becoming a mother and being a girl at the same time. Her unwanted pregnancy is the reason of her struggles. She wants to "save" herself from becoming a mother, because she thinks that it does not bring anything good into her and other people's lives (Anderson, 2007).

According to Anderson (2007), this theme gives a strong emphasis on the journey for Addie's burial as an extended rite of passage. For the characters of *As I Lay Dying*, the liminal position as mourners for the tragedy that happened to them, gives them the right to ramble and make their

neighbours part of their story, even if everybody may suffer from the smell of Addie's body, which has been in a coffin for eight days of the whole journey.

In rites of passages, the same as in the novel, these liminal situations, give different ways of coming back into a normal life on the society. After Addie is buried in her hometown and Darl is sent to the asylum, the Bundren family can try and make themselves part of that normal society.

According to Carlson (n.d), liminality offers various ways of a structuring society, and different theorists argue that it can ruin the established order (as paraphrased in Anderson, 2007).

6.4. Language and Lack of Communication

Whenever we think of a family, we think of love and communication between members of the family. But, in the case of the Bundren family, we have an exception. They are a very dysfunctional family that lack on the support and communication with one another.

This is a reason that language is another major theme of “As I Lay Dying”. It is an important theme, considering the fact that all the members of the Bundren family fail to express their feelings and talk to each other about their concerns. All of them have different secrets, reasons and problems that they struggle to share with their parents or siblings.

The question for the efficacy of language is a major part of the novel. As she explains in her monologue in the novel, Addie feels that, “*words are no good; that words don’t ever fit even what they are trying to say at*”.(Faulkner, 1930, p.106).

She also notes that all her family members have secrets and never tell her or anybody else about them.

“And when I would have to look at them day after day, each with his and her secret and selfish thought, and blood strange to each other blood and strange to mine, and think that this seemed to be the only way I could get ready to stay dead, I would hate my father for having ever planted me”.(Faulkner, 1930, p.105).

The only daughter of the family Dewey Dell, tries to keep her pregnancy a secret from everybody, hiding the real reason of carrying a basket with her during the entire journey. Even though she did not communicate with anyone about her pregnancy, her older brother Darl, understood it from her behaviours.

“We have been passing the signs for some time now: the drug-stores, the clothing stores, the patent medicine and the garages and cafés, and the mile-boards diminishing, becoming more starkly re-accruent: 3 mi. 2 mi.”(Faulkner, 1930, p.138).

Also, without communicating with anybody, Darl understood that Jewel is the son of another man: *“Your mother was a horse, but who was your father, Jewel?”*(Faulkner, 1930, p.130).

The character of Addie Bundren expresses William Faulkner's hesitation about the language, but during the course of the novel, it gives a strong emphasis in this topic (Anderson, 2007).

According to Bleikasten (as paraphrased in Anderson, 2007), the theme of language in *As I Lay Dying*, is an allegory of two characters of the novel, Cash and Darl.

Cash, an incredible carpenter, his perfectionism on the skills of carpentry, are compared to a great writer's skills that lack on great vision. Whereas, Darl has a great poet's vision, with his "*queer*" eyes he reveals all the secrets of his family.

In the novel, language is unreachable, but William Faulkner continues to use it as a way of looking for truth from his characters.

7. CONCLUSION

As *I Lay Dying* is one of the masterpieces written by William Faulkner. It is one of the novels that made him popular and one of the biggest names in the literature of the 20th century. The features that make this novel special and different from the others are: his way of writing by using stream of consciousness technique, fifteen different narrators and most importantly, a family story like we have never heard before.

As *I Lay Dying* represents the story of the Bundren family. The matriarch of the family Addie expresses her wish of being buried in her hometown of Jefferson, and this becomes the main concern of all the people involved in the story, mostly her family members, including her husband and children. Fulfilling her wish becomes the priority of the Bundren family members, which also have their own personal reasons of making it happen.

The main characters of the novel included: Addie, the wife/mother of the family. Since she had an unhappy life, she wanted her last wish to be fulfilled. She did not have a happy marriage and also did not have a close relationship with all of her children. She loved Jewel the most, whom she had from another relationship. Anse, the patriarch of the family. Faulkner describes him as a weak and lazy husband/father. He does not fulfill Addie's wish only to make her happy, but also for his own reason, that of buying a new set of teeth. He does not have a close relationship with his children, either. Cash, the oldest son of the family. He was lucky enough to experience his mother's love. Throughout the journey he suffers from an injured knee and loses a lot of skin. Like some other members of the family, he has another reason of fulfilling this trip, and that is, buying a new record player. Darl, the second child of Addie and Anse. He has no specific reason to finish this journey, and during the days of that trip, he feels that it is unnecessary to bury Addie in Jefferson and burns another farmer's barn with his mother's coffin in it. He narrates most of the chapters in the novel, and has the ability of understanding others' secrets without communicating with them. Jewel, the son of Addie and Whitfield. He has the strongest relationship with his mother, because out of all her children, she loved him the most. The love was mutual. He also has no other reason for this trip, only Addie's wish. He has a strong connection with his horse that is used as a substitution of his mother's love. Vardaman, the youngest child. He has different ways of approaching reality, which makes him seem mentally ill. He compares his mother to a fish that he caught the other day.

Darl is the only member of the family that understands him and his world. Dewey Dell, the only daughter of the family. Her unwanted pregnancy is the main point of her part on the story. She wants to buy an abortion drug, because she does not think that bringing a child into this world is a good idea.

The Bundren family members and their neighbours go through some external and internal conflicts until they arrive in Jefferson. The external one was against the forces of nature. They have a difficult time against the nature. The raining did not stop for days, and because of the flooding, the bridges were not seen anymore and they had to carry Addie's coffin very carefully, even though at one moment of the journey, it felt on the river.

Another conflict was the internal conflict of Darl. He thought that the idea of taking Addie to Jefferson for her burial is senseless and a waste of time.

Main themes of *As I Lay Dying* mentioned in this paper were Death, Identity, Liminality, and Language and Lack of Communication. Addie's death started their journey and they all deal with it in different ways. Throughout the novel many of the characters struggle to find their real identity and suffer a lot to find the solution about it. Some of the members of the Bundren family had liminal condition, where they were left between two states. Addie, between life and death. Dewey Dell, between motherhood and girlhood. Darl, between sanity and insanity.

They all failed to communicate with one another. They all had secrets and problems, and because of the lack of communication, they kept them to themselves.

William Faulkner gave a different and special representation of a family. The Bundren family is a very dysfunctional and different one. They do not have the love and empathy for each other as other families do. They all have secrets, problems and different perspectives on the events that happen in their lives. They all struggle to accept them in different and unique ways. After reading and researching for *As I Lay Dying*, I came to the conclusion that not every family is perfect and not everybody is lucky enough to experience love and support from the place that counts the most: Home!

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