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Depiction Of Privacy And Morality Of An Individual In William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*

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ABSTRACT
William Faulkner in his fiction projects something of the paradoxical condition of contemporary man in America. The hero who emerges brings with him both the helplessness of man in the face of the forces of dehumanization, mechanization and conformity and the hopefulness, as futile as it may seem, of triumphing over these very forces. The hero is caught in a now familiar existential dilemma: man victimized by a world he never made and yet yearning for transcendent power and a privately satisfying sense of self. Ihab Hassan's rebel-victim is
William Faulkner's typical hero for he combines in one paradoxical figure both the victim hero and the self-asserting hero. Among William Faulkner's heroes are examples of this type. They are alienated from society, groaning under imaginary or real grievances. The victim and rebel are two guises under which 'the hero' appears, and after the identity of the victim and the victimizer is confused.
William Faulkner contemplated with awe the impressive array of his fiction. Hit literary powers seemed miraculously to have come to him from some mysterious source.Faulkner's reference to "voices," though couched in the usual disingenuous phraseology of his public statement raises the crucial, yet thorny, issue of psychogenesis. Those voices, the promptings of the individual's subconscious, are of great importance in the creative process. But Faulkner, like most writers and their critics, was unwilling to attempt to examine them closely.

Introduction: The force of *As I Lay Dying* is in its opacity. Faulkner's novel has the particularity of real experience and this is so rare a quality in modern art that the reader have forgotten how to appreciate it. So untranslatable, so irreducible to symbol and idea is the detail of the novel that one looks for analogies in painting and music; and even the sporadic explosions of reflective rhetoric the book convey little more than a momentary and frustrated impulse to the "universal": they a momentary and frustrated impulse to the "universal": They remain essentially opaque. For example, the construction "How do our lives ravel out into the no-wind, no-sound, the weary gestures wearily re-capitulant: echoes of old compulsions with no-hand on no strings: in sunset reader fall into furious attitudes, dead gestures of dolls" (1) has no value whatsoever as literal statement or meaning, particularly in the context, where it lies disconnected, florid, and obtrusive, like a bouquet found abandoned in the dust. These words function, instead, precisely as "furious attitude", as an expressive verbal gesture, a mood painting; they are as immediate in interest as the sudden clenching of a hand or the swirls in a Van Gogh cypress.

Key Concept: In the sense intended by William Golding in Free Fall, *As I Lay Dying* is patternless, "Translating incoherence into incoherence," (2) from life to art. The novel has a wonderful immunity to schematization; it is innocent of both a moral and a morality, and it seems to breathe out rather than posit a world view. Faulkner's novel does have, to be sure, a narrative movement and structure a movement that, considering the fragmentation of narrative method, is remarkably steady, and a structure that is timeless, that answers to some unchanging psychological need: the journey undertaken and, despite great perils, completed. And yet, regardless of this, the book is open, both in the sense of making room for the incidental (indeed, the trivial) and in the sense that it does not understand itself: it is essentially spectacle.

As I Lay Dying is to be "Seen" not understood; experienced, not translated; felt, not analyzed. The malignity it portrays, both of the land and sky and of man, is aesthetic. Here suffering is above all a spectacle to us, to the neighbours of the Bundrens (the chorus to the collective protagonist), and even to Anse Bundren, who looks upon each new misfortune as a show of the Opponent's ingenuity, the staging of Destiny. Is there, indeed, an organizer behind the spectacle? The novel does not help us to an answer. What it unfolds before us is simply the autonomy of misfortune: the brutal fact of its monotonous regularity and astonishing variety, of its farcical absurdity, of its tragedy; and questions of cause are not raised – they are extraneous. There is thus in the novel a fundamental silence that is truly terrible. For what is more mysterious, finally, than immediacy? Explanations tranquilize wonder, and *As I Lay Dying* contains no explanations.
The form nakedness in this novel is the aesthetic equivalent of an act of courage; and despite its strong element of farce, the book is like tragedy in its refusal to mediate between destructive contradictions. The openness of *As I Lay Dying* is thus almost morally exhilarating; and yet it is appalling, too. For like its own Darl Bundren, the novel lacks defense; it takes the world upon its flesh like a rain of arrows. Can one imagine a Faulknerian utopia? His books do not hold their heads to so high as hope. *As I Lay Dying* is a prolonged cry of astonishment; everything within it is recorded as if with a

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soundless gasp. “Outrageous”, say the neighbours when they are assailed by the odour of the rotting corpse; and the word echoes and expands until it has embraced everything in the book.

One could argue that *As I Lay Dying* is patternless to a fault- that it is, in places, confused and self-destroying. The crucial monologue of Addie Bundren, for instance, is a marvel of dazzling unintelligibility. Why does she call himself “three” (herself, Cash, and Darl) when, as she says, Darl is her husband’s child and not her own? By cash’s birth, she remarks, her “aloneness had been violated and then made whole again by the violation: time, Anse, love, what you will, outside the circle (16). But if cash is still inside the circle with Addie, is her aloneness truly intact. Very often, the illogic of the characters is extreme, grotesque; it is not merely puzzling, but dizzying, and throws the mind down. And yet this grotes-querie possesses a kind of beauty precisely the beauty of opacity. Like the pyrotechnic rhetorical reflections, the logical absurdities have a stubborn and assertive density that makes them analogous to the squiggles and clots of paint on modern canvasses: the book is entirely of a piece, odalisque all through.

It is for this reason that the thematic of *As I Lay Dying* are difficult to approach or better, that it is questionable to speak of a thematic at all. At any rate, there is clearly no Ariadne’s thread that will lead one through the labyrinth. But of course it is far from my intention to claim of what would after all be self-defeating that the book cannot be discussed. The problem is that it can be discussed endlessly, since its patternlessness results, not in emptiness, but precisely in a continuous, pretentious thickness of meaning, the significant indefiniteness of life itself. My purpose is simply to explore one of the dialectics of the novel as this is manifested in both the content and the form. I shall be bolder and assert that this dialectic is at the center of the book- not its theme, but its axis; not what the novel is “about”, but a significant part of its substance and the determining principle of its form.

In *As I Lay Dying* life is conceived as the antagonist, living is terrible the protagonist self is alone: a naked and isolated consciousness I a broad land. This nakedness, this dreadful isolation, is already a kind of defeat, a form of abjectness, so that the utmost to be expected from the mind in its continual conflict with the world is simply a capitulation without dishonour: a surrender of everything, if need be, except pride. It is true that there are or appear to be, in the Faulknerian world, other “answers” to aloneness for example, Vardaman’s mental revision of a reality his emotions cannot accept, and the physical “violation” of Addie’s aloneness that comes with childbearing. Yet Vardaman’s answer is transparently desperate, and Addie’s seems to have the effect, not of breaking through her aloneness, but of expanding it; the circle of isolation remains inexorable. Thus the third term of this existential dialectic, the solution which remains after all others have failed, is pride, for pride is the only answer that stands upon, rather than attempts to evade, our inescapable nakedness.

The most remarkable quality of the very remarkable Bundrens country people who feel their difference from “town folk” is their fierce, their unexpected, their magnificently sustaining pride. Even Anse Bundren really seems to believe that he would be “beholden to none” (218) though in truth, of course, he often is. Like wounded animals that have instinctively found the herb that will cure them, the Bundrens have discovered pride; and each is typical, each is “universal”, precisely in bearing, not as an idea but as a fact, the wound of nakedness, the solitary confinement and essential impotency of conscious being.

The fact and awareness of isolation is the very bedrock in Faulkner; it is given out direct as an odor. And it is the strength and beauty of *As I Lay Dying* that the form of the novel itself amplifies, that it is an aesthetic equivalent for, this truth. For each of the numerous monologues constitutes a new demonstration of the obvious: the fundamental isolation inherent in the very structure of consciousness.

Now let us take note of an apparent contradiction in the form and at the same time, of its echo in the content. Obviously, each monologue is implicitly isolated, hermetically sealed, from the others; yet the result of their grouping is, nonetheless, an appearance of mutual cooperation. *As I Lay Dying* is a composite narrative, a kind of unwitting group enterprise; and undeniably this apparent aspect of the form is as expressive as the actual technique of the accretion of fragmentary monologues. Considered as a whole, the novel expresses, through its form, Faulkner’s profound feeling for the human group, above all for the family, which is presented as constituting its own fate: a kind of involuntary and inescapable group confinement, the inexorable circle in expanded form.

Human coherence in Faulkner, whether of the family or of the larger community, is presented chiefly as a response to the onslaughts of an opposing world. In the Bundrens, Faulkner lays bare the most primitive of the motives to community: society as a principle of survival. Shy and aloof as a herd, the Bundren family is held together, not by love, but by pride, which is its instinctive response to danger, including unfavourable public opinion. And if this herd is self-destructive, still it prefers its cannibalism to exposure to the world, to nakedness synonymous with defeat.

The Faulknerian family is thus a kind of exacerbating protective covering, a hair shirt, to the “abject nakedness” of the individuals composing it. These accounts for the fact that family ties are so horrendously tense in Faulkner: They are the crackling bonds of a bitter necessity. At bottom, the Faulknerian family is a compulsive effort to end, to disguise, nakedness; but since nakedness is inescapable, this effort issues in hate. Thus if nakedness leads to community, it is also true that community leads to an aggravation of nakedness. The effort returns upon itself. Like the aesthetic form of the novel, the family only appears to transcend or resolve the fundamental isolation of the individual; in actuality, it is a terrible and frustrating unit of interlocking solitudes, atomic in structure like a molecule.

Yet the family is no more, if no less, terrible than nakedness. In the absence of other consolations, it may afford at least an illusion of “confidence and comfort” words Darl uses when he defines the meaning that the coffin has for Addie (25).

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Let use note that the coffin and the family are analogous forms, or better, that a dreadful yet desired confinement and covering is the form that accounts for both. Peabody helps us to this perception when, seeing Anse and Addie together, he observes latter and she keenly watches me:

I can feel her eyes. It's like she was shoving at me with them. I have seen it before in women. Seen them drive from the room them coming with sympathy and pity, with actual help, and clinging to some trifling animal to which they never see more than pack-horses. That's what they mean by the love that passed understanding: that pride, that furious desire to hide that abject nakedness which we bring with us . . . (and) carry stubbornly and furiously with us into the earth again (44-45).

This title noticed but important passage obviously extends into a paradigm of the behaviour of the Bundles on the journey to Jefferson, for they too, in their furious desire to hide their abject nakedness, drive from them those coming with sympathy and pity. More subtly, it explains the importance to Addie of the coffin, over the construction of which she attends, from her bedroom window, with an anxious and severe observation. To her, the coffin is a substitute for her family; it represents but a change of coverings.

Of course, for a while after death Addie clings to the family itself, and it is in this sense that she is not yet dead, that the entire journey takes place while still lies "dying" Through her magnificent will, which is the instrument of her pride, she is thus doubly protected on her way to the grave, even in death covering her nakedness in the fierceness of her "modesty", which is but the 'pride, as it were, of her privacy. "For an instant", as the coffin is loaded on the wagon, "it resists, as though volitional, as though within it her pole – thin body clings furiously, even though dead, to a sort of modesty, as she would have tried to conceal a soiled garments that she could not prevent her body soiling" (91). It is as if even death could not conquer Addie's pride, though it constitutes the final and absolute nakedness. By means of the promise Addie exacts from her family to bury her in Jefferson, she prolongs even into death their customary relationship to her while she was living, which was to protect her, to encircle her with "her own flesh and blood". She is thus not so much bothered as attended to Jefferson. Nor does she "die" until he is placed in the ground. Then at last she is abandoned and as she might have foreseen immediately forgotten, replaced at once by a new "Mrs Bundren" By that time, however, she has punished her family just as she had intended punished it by keeping it to herself a little longer, and in suffering, and for the reason that she had needed it, just as, in the instance of the deceit she practices for Jewel, she hated him "because she had to love him so that she had to act the deceit" (123).

Faulkner then, pride binds but at the same time lacerates; there is a distance between people which, except in rare instances, cannot be closed, which, indeed, is maintained by pride itself. For pride an expression of the aggressive instinct, a response and counter antagonism to the antagonism of destiny, to the painfully naked structure of being.

The community that pride creates is at best an illusory one the Bundrens on the road to Jefferson. And this deceptive community, over laying a stark and irremediable personal nakedness, is mirrored in the form of the novel, which is real in its parts its lonely monologues but illusory as a "whole". In both the characters and the form that presents them, it is isolation that is basic and substantive.

Turning from the relationship of from to content, let us consider the two characters of the novel who embody the extreme ends of Fulknerian being: "Darl Bundren, I whom nakedness has an absolute from, and his brother Cash, in whom pride attains to a constructive, humane, and stabilizing limit" (23).

Conclusion: Among the others Bundrens and Darl alone lacks the ingredient, the enzyme, of pride. Stricken in his very being, he is a demonstration of our natural emptiness, of nakedness powerless to hide itself being an "I". What is more, the vacuum of indent in Darl, unlike that of the mystic or the artist, cannot be seized upon and converted into a positivity; for although Darl is invaded by others as the mystic is inundated by God and the novelist possessed by his characters, those who occupy Darl do by replenish him, and naturally his consciousness deteriourates by a law of diminishing returns. Hopelessly open and undefended, at times even plural and familial, Darl's mind leaps barriers of space and flesh, flowing everywhere like the flood waters of the river but flowing because unformed because it has no home in itself, no principle of containment.

This bitter gift and fatality, this plurality of being, Darl carries like a cross. If he is freak, he is also a victim, and knows with characteristic lucidity what has made him the casualty he is. When Vardaman says, "But you are, Darl," the latter replies: "I know it . . . That's why I am not too many for one women to foal" (15). The point is that, unlike Jewel (whose "mother is a horse"), Darl has never been a foal, that is, sponsored; and as her here observes to Vardaman, it is his fate to be everyone except himself. He consciously inhabits the world as a kind of excess, baseless and, as a result, pitilessly empowered to trespass upon the privacy of others.

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