# THE INVERTED REPRESENTATION OF THE MANDALA IN THE NOVEL *AS I LAY DYING* OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

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***Resumen:*** *A pesar de las hipóstasis y las discusiones que rodean el hilo narrativo de la novela de William Faulkner, "Mientras agonize", la estructura del texto, basada en un número de cincuenta y nueve monólogos pertenecientes a los miembros de la familia Bundren y a los observadores externos, permite la identificación de un tipologías de comportamiento complejas y una forma específica de manifestación, frente a una de las etapas significativas del ser humano: la transición al espacio con valencias de la muerte. El texto faulkneriano permite vislumbrar una polifonía discursiva que incluye una inclinación hacia la integración de los arquetipos, que surgen de la combinación del fondo sagrado y el humano; los personajes participan en una serie de estructuras que tienen un papel iniciático, que surgen de la mezcla de ironía y fuerza oculta del tumulto interior.*

***Palabras claves:*** *polifonía discursiva, mándala, ironía, simbología.*

Moving away from the civilizing space of Jefferson presented in the novels *The Sound and the Fury*, or *Light in August*, and lowering his narrative to the rural roots of Yoknapatawpha County, William Faulkner projects in *As I Lay Dying* the identifiable death compulsion through the image of the dying woman, Addie Bundren, and the forty-mile journey she submits her family to as a result of her desire to be buried in the city of her childhood. The incursions that the American writer makes in the saga of the Bundren family outline a literary work on the border between conscious and abysmal force of the imaginary act, in which the characters are internalized in an "ironic Eden" (Karl, 1989: 383), where everyone is looking for his own identity.

The unfolding of the action includes a narrative thread with an apparent linear, simple structure, which is actually the sum of the perspectives from which the events are told by the characters. Beyond the simplicity that the unfolding of the narrative seems to establish, Faulkner's novel marks a special originality, generated by the structure of the

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narrative technique based on the presence of monologues, that identify a mixture between the voices of the characters, which outlines the familiar frame of the archetype of death, and the journey it involves. Faulkner seems to present, in a first stage, the instances of Thanatos in the form of a normal process, of pathological nature, but which becomes a symbol in the context of the epic structure outlined by the Bundren family. For each character, this episode provides the right time for introspection, self-orientation and personal needs because "the death of Addie Bundren is only the pretext for entering into the complicated family relationships" (Mihăieş, 2012: 405).

Fulfilling the promise, which is in the position of triggering the whole movement system of the novel, in a way, both individual and collective, does not show the presence of a balance, promoted by the seven family members, but increases the individual needs of each character, who find the necessary valves to fulfil their own desires with the realization of this journey. Because each character of the novel incorporates a need whose solution can be seen with the trip to Jefferson. The individuality with which the American writer loads his characters allows a type of static narration, which presents a hybridized type of movement, related to the inner part of the characters.

Faulkner expressed in every novel a desire to reinvent himself at the level of expression, which oscillated between a classic narrative, identifiable in *Sartoris*, the embedding of a series of monologues that emphasize realism or irrational complexity like those in *The Sound and the Fury*, or the technique of multiple perspectives recognizable in *As I Lay Dying* (Alexandrescu, 1969: 49). What William Faulkner manages to create through his novel is an authentic discursive polyphony that fits the paradigm imposed by Mikhail Bakhtin. Starting with Dostoevsky's work, Bakhtin develops the principle of discursive polyphony which encompasses: "A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices [...] a plurality of consciousness, with equal rights and each with its own world." (Bakhtin, 1984: 6)

The narrative is divided among the members of the Bundren family, the individual fragments being transferred to the adjacent characters, which involves a constant overcoming of the subjectivity of each story angle, a reconstruction and a permanent condensation to define the overall picture. The alternation scheme turns out to be a complex one that has in the centre both a subtle juxtaposition of narrative sequences and the pursuit of a precise delimitation of events. The voices of the characters are cumulated in order to define the continuity of the narrative thread, the implications of a subjective nature spreading in every active affirmation of the storyteller's voice. Around each character the action permits the existence of an individual zone that concentrates into its skeleton the main features that sketch the psychological construction of Bundren family.

The gaps that are registered in the unfolding of the narrative act are compensated by the overlapping of the epic fragments formed at the level of each monologue. From the first part of the novel, the folding of the sequences becomes necessary in order to obtain the overall image of the narrative flow. Beyond the mosaic identified at the level of chronological development of events, the internal commotion, that manifests itself inherently in each character, does not get a direct account, the identification of feelings and experiences is always made from a distinct angle. Although he does not use a classical narrative technique, what Faulkner tries to do through the narrative structure that he imposes is to produce the true image of reality, of human suffering in the face of accepting death. In the characters' paradigm, Darl proves to be the most articulate in the novel's



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scheme, being assigned nineteen chapters out of the fifty-nine, due to his ability to allow the reader a sense of alienation and empathy.

The vision of the characters on Darl is a dual, contradictory, that oscillates between the image of a high sensitivity and one of an unbalanced character seen from the rational perspective. Beyond the complexity with which it is built, his internal tumult over Addie's imminent death is not directly highlighted in his section, but through the monologues of his sister, Dewey Dell, and the family friend, Cora, because in Faulkner's case realism does not consist in the illusion of unmediated representation but in the picturing of moral dogma.

> "What you want, Darl?" I say.
> "She is going to die," he says. […]
> "When is she going to die?" I say.
> "Before we get back," he says. (Faulkner, 1912: 23)

> "It was Darl. He come to the door and stood there, looking at his dying mother. He just looked at her, and I felt the bounteous love of the Lord again and His mercy." (Faulkner, 1912: 20)

The scene of Addie's death is also presented through Darl's monologue, who, although finds himself outside the perimeter generated by the domestic space of the Bundren family, being away with his brother Jewel to load a series of logs at the insistence of the father figure, Anse, Darl anticipates every last seconds of his mother, the structure of the text focusing the narrative flow on the sequences within the house, placing in a secondary plane, the image of his activities and Jewel's. The death scene is centred on the impassive presence of Anse and the deeply marked one of the youngest of the Bundren family children, Vardaman.

These overlaps of perspectives are identifiable throughout the novel, the sequences being ordered to allow the shaping of a complex overview, the emblematic figure of the narrator being diminished to the simple act of maintaining the unity of actions understanding. Each narrative segment encompasses elements presented previously or anticipates future sequences. Beyond the repetition visible throughout the narrative structure, the characters develop a delimitation system of narrative the voices that allows them the act of coexistence, because, beyond the events presented, extensive actions of introspection are spread throughout the novel.

Due to the structure based on monologues, the characters of the novel *As I Lay Dying* seem to be embedded in a non-specific narrative stagnation. However, Faulkner manages to impose mobility on the narrative flow, giving the reader a clear sense of characters movement in the text. After making the necessary preparations, the whole Bundren family sets off for Jefferson to fulfil their promise to Addie. In this context of this journey, one of the most important and representative symbols of the Faulknerian literary genome is defined, represented by the image of the road, which acquires the valences of an archetype, incorporating in its internal skeleton both the special and temporal coordinates of the narrative flow.

The structure of the chronotope enhances the development of the roadsymbolism, perceived as the way to define the initiatory perspective in which the characters are positioned. If the classical representations tend towards the integration of the road in a process with positive valences, each incursion in the periplus of a journey, perceived as a



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stage towards the fulfilment of the initiation ritual, in the case of the novel *As I Lay Ding* it serves towards a new perspective to which the characters aspire, but it enhances the cyclical feature of the action. As Mircea Mihăieş claims, Addie, the one who initiates this trip, does not travel to get somewhere, but starts towards this road to get nowhere.

But of all the members of the Bundren family, Anse is the most reluctant to accept the positioning of his existence in the road proximity and a possible trip. The first section dedicated to him propagates directly the life doctrine that the paternal figure promotes throughout the novel. Reluctant and dissatisfied, Anse refers to the entire positioning of the chronotope as if it were the main source that causes the slippage of his family members. Visibly disturbed by the state of mobility imposed by the road in front of his house, Anse does not refuse only thedynamism installed with these access roads, the contact with humans, but any form of modernity, that could unbalance his patriarchal system, conservative, which he has not obtain through a series of direct actions, but through an inheritance of archaic social foundations. The whole spatiality of the novel marks these paths or roads, as elements predestined to the Bundren family.

Despite the reluctance that Anse manifests on multiple occasions towards any form of removal from the protective space of his own perimeter, his descriptions of road geometry allow the identification of a mandalic forms in the space geography: "the Lord put roads for traveling: why He laid them down flat on the earth. When He aims for something to be always a-moving, He makes it long ways, like a road or a horse or a wagon, but when He aims for something to stay put, He makes it up-and down ways, like a tree or a man." (Faulkner, 1912: 30).

The curved and circular shapes that Anse indicates are noticeable from the beginning of the novel, in the description made by Darl, "The path runs straight as a plumb-line, worn smooth by feet and baked brick-hard by July, […] where it turns and circles the cotton-house at four soft right angles and goes on across the field again, worn so by feet in fading precision." (Faulkner, 1912: 1). Faulkner's texts embody an obsession of the characters to transit the territory of Yoknapatawpha County, registering a migration of Faulknerian characters to the urban space of Jefferson. Each narrative frame is dominated by an endless road, a line leading to the centre of the county. It is significant in this sense that most of the characters engaged by the American writer show, at some point in their narrative journey, a reference to the need to reach the perimeter of Jefferson.

The novel *Sanctuary* places Jefferson as a point of connection for the characters that perish in the territory of Yoknapatawpha, constantly attracting them like a magnetic force, like the narrative frame of the *Light in August* that opens with the path of Lena Grove. At the same time, the domestic plan of the Compson members is engaged in the centre of Jefferson, the development of the family being closely linked to the preferential position given to them within the social environment. As a result, Faulkner transits the coordinates of urban space in almost all of his novels, allowing the reunion of narrative perspectives, his imaginary world ceasing to look like a mosaic.

Thus, the saga of the Bundren family is moved from the remote space of the farm to the crowded centre of the city, each character perceiving the place as a source of annihilation for their own shortcomings. Hyatt H. Waggoner identified in the centre of Faulkner's imaginative land "The most significant meanings […] all start in Jefferson" (Waggoner, 1966: 253), because the city is seen as a character in itself, the space described acquires different hypostases.



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This innate need of Faulkner's characters to bend down in pursuit of a path places Addie's existence in a mandalic loop that opened with her marriage to Anse Bundren and ended with her desire to return to Jefferson after her death. The road acquires a circular design with a perpetual transformation, embodying the illusion of progress. However, the mandala in which Addie positions her existence does not bring her the purifying stage, but leads her to an austere space of emptiness, suggested by the lack of the divine element throughout the narration. If the symbolism of the mandala gives the one who enters the sacred circle the path to an initiatory knowledge that allows him to reconnect with the self, merging into a symbiosis of human perfection, the character represented by the wife and mother of the Bundren family has limited access to the coordinates of a impassive emptiness, marked by the metastases of her actions. Addie's inner construction draws new values into an already fallen system of moral conduct. For her, sin does not acquire the religious importance that conditions its path to purification, Faulkner's female character falls into the damned social typology of the South for which "sin is something very relative, which for one is bad, for another is good." (Jung, 2010: 368).

Addie manages to identify the fallen frame of incest, but without attaching it to her destiny. The ironic position of the only narrative section she occupies in the novel designates the religious system that potentiates her state of permanent crisis. Between the monologue of Cora, which abounds in the promotion of Christian dogmas and moral rules, and that of Whitfield, which designates only a pseudo-vision of religious notes, Addie's sequence is loaded with violent touches of a blamed existence. For Addie, it is precisely this damned manifestation of sin that becomes the force that initiates her path to salvation. In Jewel's image, she projects her only chance for rehabilitation: "He is my cross and he will be my salvation. He will save me from the water and from the fire. (Faulkner, 1912: 156).

And if Jewel is the child who will bring her rehabilitation, through Darl is initiated the final rupture of Addie in relation to the two children she will later have with Anse. With the birth of the second son, Addie determines her husband to promise to bury her in Jefferson, the ties between her and the new family being permanently broken after death. Being projected as the central pillar of this evil connection, Darl cannot go beyond the deficient relationship that his mother initiates. Darl is deeply attached to Addie, although he was denied access to a mother-son relationship, he inevitably identifies with her as her descendant, so without Addie, he cannot survive alone. With Darl, Addie feels the disappointment of marital relationships and identifies more and more, both psychologically and gesturally, with what the image of her father figure tried to: "My father said that the reason for living is getting ready to stay dead" (Faulkner, 1912: 164). Growing up under the auspices of this dictum, every gesture that the woman develops in relation to her new family is under the sign of the agony that foreshadows death.

Ion Biberi speaks about an inherent psychology in the process of passing into non-existence, in which the dying seeks in a pre-agonising phase a meaning to those lived "at this stage, philosophical stroke or the religious support credit can give […] effective peace to insecurity and to the inner trembling." (Biberi, 2000: 151) In her monologue, Addie reveals with obvious cynicism the deficient lifestyle, dominated by an affection passivity that, despite her senseless structure, she manages to dominate and control the fate of the other characters, her release "becomes a trap for the family, forced to take a path, which as an element or motive of universal literature, offers the novel an epic content." (Bârleanu, 2018: 232).



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What is more, if we look at the map at the end of the novel *Absalom, Absalom,* in which it is marked the journey made by the Bundren family to reach Jefferson from the distant space of the farm, we can notice the cross form construction that the city plan has. The two roads that intersect in downtown Jefferson allow the identification of an image in the form of quaternity. Jung speaks about about quaternity as the supreme form that allows the soul to reconnect with the universal forces, but in the same time, the architype of the cross has the "connotation of suffering" (Jung, 2014: 374), a felling well-known by all the members of the Bundren family. As if in a continuous cyclicity, Faukner's characters will move around this centre of Yoknapatawpha or they will look for it, from various spaces, without ceasing to separate from the social-moral construction that the city induces to its inhabitants. Spatiality does not only give Addie integration in a mandalic system, Anse faith is equally projected in a circular path; the end of the novel giving the role that the road to Jefferson has for the father figure, because, beyond solving his physiological deficiencies, the city has always given him a new marriage.

In one of his interviews, Faulkner positions his characters from the novel *As I Lay Dying* in "the two greatest catastrophes which man can suffer – flood and fire" (Reed, 1973: 84). Of all the members of the Bundren family, only for Anse the difficult road to Jefferson does not have the valences of an impetuous duty to the one who was his wife, but is the promise of fulfilling a destiny that seems to be predestined for him. His journey takes on the role of a replica, in an ironic way, of biblical sequences. By establishing a connection between his representation and the images of Old Testament martyrs, Anse defines his existence as deprived of divine grace, which should not be attributed to him, therefore, the journey he undergoes should give him the stability he deserves: "I have done things but neither better nor worse than them that pretend other like, and I know that Old Master will care for me as for ere a sparrow that falls." (Faulkner, 1912: 32-33).

Continuing the fine line of irony by projecting the images in the mirror, Anse Bundren's entity as a disarticulated character does not disappear, but sharpens compared to the references to the sacred space. The very beginning of the journey presents, in an ironic key, the name of *New Hope* as a place that can guarantee the characters a new existence that turns out to be forbidden to them. Critical studies have not avoided placing Anse in the position of the fallen representation of Noah, the river scene being a replica of the biblical flood. Following the line of comparison, building is also identified within the Bundren family, but not to save those who begin their journey, but to allow the archetype of death to become concrete in the text at the level of the symbolism. And if for Noah the path he follows is an ascending one, in the case of Anse, his path is limited to the descent, reducing his limited status to his damned condition.

When the rain begins, it deviates with a sudden violence, suggestive of shaping an apocalyptic atmosphere. In the flood scene, Anse reacts like the chosen one who seems to have divine protection over him, but without releasing it further on his children. The whole series of monologues developed around the scene from the river includes the magnitude of the swollen waters due to the rains and the internal commotion of the characters. Of all the angles that determine the gravity of the situation, Darl's perception prevails again. The whole image encompasses beyond the tension of the moment, the position that each character occupies in the narrative system, defines the way in which they are thinking and taking the road to Jefferson. Moving from Vardamn's childish reporting to Cash's objective position, the focus highlights Anse's passivity and Darl's desire to give Addie the release she needs, taking advantage of every opportunity of the narrative journey.



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The scene from the river presents from a panoramic perspective the hidden manifestations that each member of the Bundren family nourishes, recording the inner tumult that governs their gestures and the way of reporting to the whole situation. Of all the characters present in this scene, Anse and Darl become the main representations on which they touch the biggest load of affection. The perspective from which Anse makes this trip to Jefferson is becoming more pronounced, the financial detriment taking a higher status in front of the values and family ties. The sequences from the river capture a detached Anse, distanced both physically and sentimentally, because the paternal figure participates passively in the whole scene, without indicating a minimal desire for involvement. Cora sublimates his inability to take on the role of father figure ("If he had been a man, he would have been there instead of making his sons do what he dursn't." (Faulkner, 1912: 140) In the context of the situation, Jewel is in the position of the only one of the five children willing to carry out the mission of rescuing the coffin.

Beyond the associations made regarding the image of Anse, the sacred character of the scene from the river is enhanced by the interventions of Cora who sees in the log that overturns the cart with Addie's body a divine sign. Beyond the general picture of the accident, we must not lose sight of the fact that not only the coffin is subjected to crossing by water, but all members of the Bundren family, as if the procession they undergo, requires the involvement of a purification process. In the symbolic system of the narrative act, the coffin represents the life-death duality, because beyond its funerary character, Bundren family never refer to it as a simple object, but always associate it with the pronoun *she*, as if the one locked there is still in life. Addie's death does not automatically imply her absence, but on the contrary, her presence is what determines the flow of the journey.

The psychoanalysis has given container-type constructions a connection with the universe of the maternal archetype. Although the coffin is normally an element of the Thanatos sphere, in the novel *As I Lay Dying* it is the life drive of the Bundren family and its motivational force, even in death. The water and fire that Faulkner originally spoke of become important elements of the narrative in support of symbolism. Towards the end of the novel, Darl sets out to set fire to the barn where Addie's body was housed overnight, out of an impetuous desire to give her the purification her soul needs. And if the characters manage to get past the moment of baptism, the scene of the burning of the barn once again summons the five children and the father figure to overcome the courts of a purgatory.

But the primary forces of life continue to dominate. After the austere burial ceremony of the coffin, the end of the novel offers a photographic perspective of what the life of the members of the Bundren family means with the final separation from Addie. The youngest of five children, Dewey Dell and Vardaman, remain in the lower status, not being actively involved in Anse's decisions. Moreover, the only daughter remains to give birth to a child she does not want, becoming one of the female representations specific to the Faulknerian epic, such as Caddy Compson or Lena Grove. Darl's inability to overcome Addie's poor relationship system leads him to Jackson's asylum. And if Jewel's image is as blurred as it appears throughout the novel, Cash retains to the end the balanced status with which the narrator endows him. Although Addie's figure seems to be a double, always mentioning and referring to her, Anse not only fixes his teeth, but resumes his cycle through a new marriage. Manifesting a latent form of evil, the mandala to which the Bundren family submits engulfs them into a bubble placed in a topos of death and disillusion.

The saga of the Bundren's quiver allows a continuous sliding of the narrative plans that develop around the Thanatic valences produced with Addie's death. Fulfilling his



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funeral pact, life returns to normal, only for the chosen one, within the flow imposed by a series of personal coordinates, which does not seek to meet the needs of others, but is limited to the intimate space of the individual. Having a syncopated structure as a result of using monologues to perform the narrative act, the novel *As I Lay Dying* induces the reader a type of emotional reading, which tries to restore the consciousness of the characters after the journey of feelings and sensations that holds together members of this family whose relationships are so unbalanced built

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