

08. Fragmented Narration and The Unequal Acknowledgement of Suffering in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* ¹

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APA: Tunç, R. A. & Erkan, M. (2026). Fragmented Narration and The Unequal Acknowledgement of Suffering in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. *RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (54), 139-149. **DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22824725>

Abstract

This article explores how narrative fragmentation in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* is not only a form of representation of trauma but also a way of representing the uneven recognition of trauma within the Bundren family. Although the novel's multiple narration and polyphonic form have been widely examined as markers of high modernist experimentation, comparatively little attention has been paid to the moral consequences of this dispersal of narrative authority. The article argues that Faulkner's fractured narration makes suffering narratively visible, but does not allow it to be acknowledged, shared, or answered in the way that interpersonal recognition would. The study selectively draws on Bakhtin's notion of polyphony, Caruth's and LaCapra's accounts of trauma, and Wittgenstein's reflections on the limits of language to offer close readings of scenes chosen for the way they stage a gap between the expression of suffering and its reception. Vardaman's metaphorical response to the death of his mother is read in relation to traumatic cognition; Addie's monologue in relation to the tension between linguistic abstraction and embodied experience; Dewey Dell's encounters in Mottstown and Jefferson in relation to gendered silencing; and Darl's narration in relation to self-consciousness, social recognition, and institutional exclusion. The analysis reveals that the novel's formal discontinuity is not just a reflection of modernist subjectivity, but a hierarchy of recognition in which some forms of suffering are tolerated, others ignored, and others banished from the family.

Keywords: Fragmentation, Trauma, Ethical recognition, Polyphony, Modernism

¹ **Statement (Thesis / Paper):** It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were followed during the preparation process of this study and all the studies utilised are indicated in the bibliography.

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest is declared.

Funding: No external funding was used to support this research.

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Source: It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were followed during the preparation of this study and all the studies used are stated in the bibliography.

Similarity Report: Received – Turnitin /Ithenticate, Rate: 17 %

Ethics Complaint: editor@rumelide.com

Article Type: Research article, Article Registration Date: 15.07.2026-**Acceptance Date:** 18.09.2026-**Publication Date:** 19.09.2026; **DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22824725>

Peer Review: Two External Referees / Double Blind

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William Faulkner'ın *Döşegimde Ölüirken (As I Lay Dying)* Romanında Parçalı Anlatı ve Acının Eşitsiz Kabulü ⁴

Öz

Bu makale, William Faulkner'ın *As I Lay Dying* adlı romanında anlatısal parçalanmanın yalnızca travmanın temsilini değil, Bundren ailesi içinde travmanın eşitsiz biçimde tanınmasını da nasıl biçimlendirdiğini incelemektedir. Romanın çoklu anlatıcı yapısı ve çokselsli biçimi yüksek modernist deneyelliğin göstergeleri olarak geniş çapta ele alınmış olsa da, anlatısal otoritenin bu dağılımının etik sonuçları yeterince incelenmemiştir. Makale, Faulkner'ın parçalı anlatımının acıyı anlatı düzeyinde görünür kıldığını, ancak bu acının kabul edilmesini, paylaşılmasını ya da karşılık bulmasını sağlayacak kişilerarası tanınmayı esirgediğini ileri sürmektedir. Çalışma, Bakhtin'in çokselslilik kavramından, Caruth ile LaCapra'nın travma kuramlarından ve Wittgenstein'in dilin sınırlarına ilişkin düşüncelerinden seçici biçimde yararlanarak acının dile gelişi ile alımlanışı arasındaki boşluğu sahneleyen pasajları yakın okuma yöntemiyle çözümlemektedir. Vardaman'ın annesinin ölümüne verdiği metaforik tepki travmatik biliş, Addie'nin monoloğu dilsel soyutlama ile bedensel deneyim arasındaki gerilim, Dewey Dell'in Mottstown ve Jefferson'daki karşılaşmaları toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı susturulma, Darl'ın anlatısı ise öz-bilinç, toplumsal tanınma ve kurumsal dışlanma bağlamında okunmaktadır. Çözümleme, romanın biçimsel süreksizliğinin yalnızca modernist öznelliği yansıtmadığını; bazı acıların hoş görüldüğü, bazılarının görmezden gelindiği, bazılarının ise aileden bütünüyle uzaklaştırıldığı bir tanınma hiyerarşisini açığa çıkardığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Parçalanmışlık, Travma, Etik Tanınma, Çokselslilik, Modernizm

⁴ **Beyan (Tez/ Bildiri):** Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.
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Kaynak: Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.
Benzerlik Raporu: Alındı – Turnitin, Oran: % 17
Etik Şikayeti: editor@rumelide.com
Makale Türü: Araştırma makalesi, **Makale Kayıt Tarihi:** 15.07.2026-**Kabul Tarihi:** 18.09.2026-**Yayın Tarihi:** 19.09.2026; **DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22824725>
Hakem Değerlendirmesi: İki Dış Hakem / Çift Taraflı Körleme

Introduction

Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* has been regarded, ever since its publication, as one of the defining works of literary modernism, in large part due to its break with realist conventions, including the use of multiple narration and stream of consciousness (Brooks, 1963; Millgate, 1966; Kartiganer, 1979). On a surface level, the novel's journey to bury Addie Bundren is a simple one, but on a deeper reading, the journey also enacts the disintegration of common meaning in a family and a community. The Bundren family's journey to Jefferson thus becomes a process of interrogating the objectivity of meaning-making and revealing the multiplicity of perspectives on reality. The article argues that the narrative rupture in *As I Lay Dying* is both a formal device and a locus of ethical instability: trauma is made narratively visible but unequally acknowledged, so that the suffering of some characters is recognised, while that of others is ignored, misread, or pushed to the margins of the family.

Fragmentation has generally been taken in modernist criticism as an epistemological strategy and a stylistic innovation. Modernist fiction reveals the feeling that reality is subjective and unstable, a feature of the early twentieth century, partly due to industrialisation and the First World War. According to Erinda Papa, modernist writers "dismissed the Victorian novel's precise, realistic temporal structure in favour of episodic time, fragmented structures, and an explicit rejection of linear narratives" (Papa, 2025, p. 481). In this regard, *As I Lay Dying* is particularly radical. The novel is told in fifty-nine sections from fifteen different points of view and has a non-linear spatio-temporal progression. Rather than being presented with a single coherent narrative to interpret, readers are left to construct meaning out of conflict and disintegration rather than unity (Vickery, 1995; Weinstein, 1992).

Numerous studies have investigated the polyphonic structure of *As I Lay Dying*. As Matthews (2009) observes, Faulkner's fiction cannot be understood apart from the historical and material conditions of the modernising South, as it repeatedly considers how individuals respond to the upheavals of modernity. According to Ross (1975), the novel's evolving temporal structure is not a technical problem but a way to depict the fluid and disruptive nature of consciousness. Meaning in *As I Lay Dying*, from this point of view, is more a matter of perception than of plot progression.

The fractured structure of the novel is also widely studied from a stylistic perspective. Olga W. Vickery (1995) suggests that although the novel appears to be disjointed and contradictory on the surface level, the deeper stylistic structures provide unity of meaning and narration. However, Kartiganer (1979) argues that meaning in *As I Lay Dying* is generated by conflict and suspense, not resolution. These studies suggest that rupture is a conscious device in the novel, enhancing the representation of a reality perceived as manifold and subjective.

One of the most important sites of decentralisation in the novel is language. Addie Bundren's distrust of verbal expression has been variously interpreted. As Sundquist (1983) has argued, Faulkner's concept of language is a substitute for, rather than a reflection of, lived experience and words become unreliable as a medium of representation. As O'Donnell (1984) notes, meaning in *As I Lay Dying* is not conveyed through direct expression but produced through metaphor and indirect language. These observations suggest that the language of the novel does not merely fail to represent experience directly, but rather foregrounds the distance between experience and linguistic representation.

The instability of consciousness has been another much-discussed aspect of the novel. Critics have argued that Faulkner portrays consciousness as unstable, opaque, and hidden even from the self

(Bleikasten, 1990; Weinstein, 1992). Within this context, Darl's self-conscious narrative authority has been read as a destructive force rather than a constitutive one.

Fragmentation in *As I Lay Dying* has also been linked to the historical situation of the American South. Critics have interpreted the novel in terms of the cultural dislocation, economic hardship, and loss of faith in progress that marked the region in the early twentieth century (Matthews, 2009; Moreland, 1990). This vast body of scholarship notwithstanding, the relationship between fractured narration and the ethics of recognition has been comparatively overlooked. Fragmentation is generally seen in current readings as either a formal marker of modernism or a symptom of individual and regional trauma. The article builds on these readings by asking a different question: not only how suffering is rendered in the novel's dispersed voices, but also whose suffering is heard, acknowledged, and answered in the Bundren family. It argues that Faulkner's distribution of narrative authority makes suffering visible to the reader, but does not allow for intersubjective acknowledgement or for an ethical response on the part of the characters.

Hence, the present article draws on trauma theory selectively to explore the novel's linguistic and conceptual discontinuities. Trauma, writes Cathy Caruth, is "the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth, 1996, p. 4). Dominick LaCapra's (2001) distinction between "acting out," in which a traumatic past is compulsively relived as if it were present, and "working through," which allows for a certain critical distance from it, further explains why traumatic experience resists integration into narrative memory. These accounts are used in the present study not as a general explanation of the novel's fragmentation but because they draw attention to a specific problem that the novel repeatedly stages: suffering may be expressed, and even insistently repeated, without being received or acknowledged by others.

The discussion is in three stages. The first section examines the distribution of narrative authority in the novel's polyphonic form without the production of dialogue, and how that distribution affects the recognition of Dewey Dell's suffering. The second part is about the limits of language and is developed through two different examples: Addie's dichotomy between words and lived experience and Vardaman's traumatic metaphorization. The third section looks at Darl, Jewel and Cash, and demonstrates how self-consciousness, bodily action and rationalisation place the characters within the family economy of recognition and how Darl's narrative authority results in institutional exclusion.

Methodological approach

This study employs a qualitative method that relies on a close reading of the primary text, *As I Lay Dying*. The article deals with the interpretation of narrative voice, linguistic form, and subjective perception of reality, not with measurable data, so close reading is appropriate. The passages were selected according to two criteria. First, they are moments in which a character's suffering is articulated through a marked disruption of narrative form, like a change of voice, a temporal shift, a metaphorical substitution, or a breakdown of syntax. Secondly, those are moments when that expression is met, or is not met, by the responses of other characters. The analysis focuses on Vardaman's response to his mother's death, Addie's monologue after death, Dewey Dell's encounters with the druggists in Mottstown and Jefferson, the fire at Gillespie's barn and Darl's consequent commitment, and a limited number of passages concerning Cash's and Jewel's responses to loss.

Each theoretical reference is assigned a specific analytical function. Bakhtin's polyphony is used to

describe the distribution of narrative authority among independent voices. It is used here with an important caveat, because Bakhtin arrived at the concept through his reading of Dostoevsky, whose characters confront each other in open ideological dialogue. Faulkner's narrators live alongside each other as autonomous consciousnesses, but rarely engage in true dialogue. The article therefore reads *As I Lay Dying* as polyphony without dialogic acknowledgement. Caruth's and LaCapra's accounts of trauma are used to interpret specific scenes in which loss returns through repetition and metaphor, rather than to explain fragmentation in general. In particular, Wittgenstein's reflections on the limits of language are used to clarify, by contrast, Addie's opposition between words and lived experience. Each reading starts with an analysis of narrative voice, temporal disruption and linguistic form, and then introduces theoretical concepts to illuminate how these textual features contribute to the development of the article's main argument about unequal recognition.

Polyphony without dialogue: Narrative authority and recognition

As I Lay Dying is known for its departure from the narrative development of the traditional realist novel. Faulkner's formal choice to divide the story among fifteen narrators instead of a single controlling narrator prevents the reader from reconstructing the coherent story that is typically anticipated. This distribution of voice can be explained by Bakhtin's concept of polyphony. Bakhtin says that "the consciousness of the creator of a polyphonic novel is constantly and everywhere present in the novel," yet "the author's consciousness does not transform others' consciousnesses (that is, the consciousnesses of the characters) into objects, and does not give them secondhand and finalizing definitions" (1984, pp. 67–68). Faulkner similarly refuses to subordinate his characters to a single interpretive authority in *As I Lay Dying*. But unlike the characters in Dostoevsky's novels, the Bundrens hardly speak to one another. Each character stands alone, but this autonomy leads neither to genuine dialogue nor to the equal recognition of suffering.

Fragmentation shapes perception from the first chapter. Darl's opening monologue suggests narrative clarity at first: "Jewel and I come up from the field, following the path in single file" (Faulkner, 1930/2004, p. 1). But a close reading of the text reveals that Darl's narration is very much detached. His voice is authoritative, self-conscious, observational, as if watching from a distance. His superior awareness, which frequently surpasses that of the other narrators, never turns him into a privileged narrator. His voice is heard along with the other characters whose accounts may sometimes contradict or overlook his point of view. This tension foreshadows Darl's fate, where his perceptiveness is not appreciated by the family.

This splitting of narrative voice becomes more evident as the novel progresses. The major events, such as Addie's death, the building of the coffin, the crossing of the river, are narrated by more than one narrator, whose stories vary a lot but also fill in each other. Cash, for instance, is often very mechanistic in describing events. In "I made it on the bevel," he foregrounds the making of the coffin, not the fact that his mother died, turning grief into a craft (Faulkner, 1930/2004, p. 72). Such differences are not merely differences in the account of one event but are indicative of different cognitive structures and perceptual frames in which loss is registered.

The disjointed structure of *As I Lay Dying* hinders the transmission of knowledge and raises ethical questions, as each member of the Bundren family undertakes the journey for private reasons. Anse presents the trip to Jefferson as the fulfilment of his promise to Addie, but his incessant appeals to God and to his own hardship coincide with his desire for new teeth, and the novel's ending, in which he takes

a new wife, only heightens the suspicion of his stated intentions. Jewel's fight to save the coffin from the flooded river and the burning barn is a fierce devotion to his mother, but it is not verbalised. It is expressed in anger and silence.

Dewey Dell's situation complicates the ethical problem and is the clearest illustration of unequal recognition. She is unmarried and pregnant by Lefe, and her private purpose in going to town is to secure an abortion. Most of the family does not know about her pregnancy; only Darl seems to know of it without being told (Faulkner, 1930/2004, p. 22), and she sees his knowledge not as an act of understanding but as a threat. In Mottstown, the druggist Moseley refuses her request and lectures her on morality (Faulkner, 1930/2004, pp. 180–187). In Jefferson, the drugstore clerk MacGowan pretends to be a doctor and gives her a worthless remedy and promises to “give you the rest of it and perform the operation” when she returns at ten o'clock that night (Faulkner, 1930/2004, p. 228). The “operation” occurs in the cellar of the store, where he provides her with capsules of talcum powder, and the story suggests that he preys on her desperation to gain sexual access under false pretences (Faulkner, 1930/2004, pp. 228–229). The episode is thus more accurately described as sexual exploitation through deception than as a straightforward assault. Its significance for the present argument lies as much in its narrative form as in its content. The scene is narrated by MacGowan, not Dewey Dell, and her experience has no room in his casual, self-satisfied voice. Her suffering is thus twice displaced: it is unsaid in the family and can only be said in the town by the voice of the man who exploits it. Minrose C. Gwin's (1989, p. 56) question of “whether we as feminist readers benefit from reading Faulkner” is relevant here because women's experience in Faulkner's canonical, male-authored fiction cannot be taken at face value. Dewey Dell's distress is not merely overlooked in this context; it is structurally marginalised by the very distribution of voices that makes it legible to the reader.

Vardaman's attempts to make sense of his mother's death, discussed in the following section, are likewise met with no response from the adults around him. In none of these situations does language provide a common ground for family members to share their losses and their motives. The characters live in the same spatio-temporal environment, but they are not related to each other emotionally or ethically; their togetherness is a sign of forced proximity, not of solidarity.

Through this narrative technique, Faulkner invites readers not just to see a broken world but to feel its instability. The reader, like the characters, must make his/her way through contradictory and paradoxical points of view. The discontinuity of the narrations thus mirrors moral fragmentation: the narrators cannot coalesce into a unified voice, and so cannot constitute a morally unified community. And by bringing each voice directly to the reader, the novel simultaneously allows suffering to register on the page, even where it is unacknowledged within the family. The next sections will address the gap between narrative visibility and interpersonal recognition.

The ethical fragmentation of *As I Lay Dying* is also inseparable from the material and economic conditions of the Bundrens, which are indicative of the larger historical setting of the rural South. The American Civil War was a major source of cultural trauma for many Southerners in the nineteenth century because it “destroyed families, decimated economies, and ruined property” (Shaver, 2024, pp. 35–36). While the novel does not directly share in this history, the journey to Jefferson is made amidst poverty, physical hardship, and hostile natural conditions that make survival more urgent than ethical consistency. The flooded river nearly takes the coffin and drowns the mules, representing the family's material resources as vulnerable to natural forces (Faulkner, 1930/2004, pp. 132–141). Addie's body begins to decompose, turning grief into a physical burden. Under such pressures, family members turn

inward: Anse's obsession with his teeth, Dewey Dell's pregnancy, Jewel's physical struggle. Fragmentation in the novel is thus not just based on consciousness but also on socio-economic circumstances that make material hardship more urgent than communication.

Trauma and the boundaries of language

Language in *As I Lay Dying* fails to function as adequate communication at moments of traumatic rupture. Language does not express experience: it shows the limits of language itself, and makes visible the distance between the signifier and the signified. The novel's failure of language corresponds to the discontinuous structure of consciousness, but this failure is expressed in different ways by different characters. Addie's monologue depicts language as an abstraction, removed from the experience of the body, while Vardaman's narrative shows a child's mind grasping for metaphor to understand a loss it cannot yet comprehend.

Addie's view of language can be explained by the earlier philosophy of language of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein affirms in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* that "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" and "what we cannot think we cannot say either" (Wittgenstein, 1922/2001, 5.6, 5.61). For Wittgenstein, experience can be articulated only to the extent that language allows, and the limits of language therefore mark the limits of intelligibility. But Addie's position is different in one important respect: she does not say that what cannot be said cannot be experienced, but that what is most intensely experienced is falsified when it is put into words. The particular shape of Addie's distrust is made explicit by contrast, set within Wittgenstein's formulation: the limit of language is not the limit of her world but rather the point at which language and lived experience diverge.

The most explicit example of this linguistic crisis is Addie Bundren's monologue, which is placed after her death and interrupts the forward movement of the journey. Reflecting on her marriage and motherhood, she concludes "that words are no good; that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at" (Faulkner, 1930/2004, p. 155). Later she remembers Cora's prayers for her, noting that "people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too" (Faulkner, 1930/2004, p. 160). For Addie, words such as "love," "sin," and "motherhood" are social abstractions that name relationships lived in fact through the body: pregnancy, childbirth, labour, and physical contact. Her denial of language therefore comes not from intellectual doubt but from embodied experience. Such categories not only fail to reflect experience, but they also obscure the contradictions within it.

Addie's rejection is not just of particular words but of language as a system. The failure of words to coincide with what they signify suggests that the gap between experience and expression is structural, not accidental. Language in Addie's narrative does not bond people together, but increases isolation by establishing a false sense of shared meaning. A useful counterpoint is provided by Wittgenstein's later remark that "where our language suggests a body and there is none: there, we should like to say, is a spirit" (Wittgenstein, 1953/2009, §36). Wittgenstein warns against the projection of non-existent entities onto words, while Addie accuses words of emptying out the very bodily reality they claim to name. Hence her suffering is made intelligible to the reader by her monologue precisely by insisting that it cannot be adequately communicated to others.

Vardaman's reaction to his mother's death demonstrates the failure of language in a different register, one that is cognitive and emotional rather than philosophical. His section, "My mother is a fish" (Faulkner, 1930/2004, p. 73), consisting of one sentence, is best read not as childish confusion, but as a

metaphorical operation through which an incomprehensible loss is made thinkable. On the day Addie dies, Vardaman has caught and cut up a large fish (Faulkner, 1930/2004, pp. 24–25, 59). The image of the fish, alive just a moment before and then reduced to a lifeless body, appears as the concrete source domain through which he approaches the abstract target domain of death. Caruth's description of trauma as an experience "not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (Caruth, 1996, p. 4) explains why this metaphor does not resolve his grief. The sentence replaces an image for an event that cannot as yet be assimilated.

Likewise, LaCapra's concept of acting out, whereby a traumatic past is compulsively re-lived rather than worked through (LaCapra, 2001), is relevant for Vardaman's return to the fish image during the river crossing, when he calls out to Darl, "You knew she is a fish but you let her get away" (Faulkner, 1930/2004, p. 135). It also shows his fear that his mother cannot breathe inside the closed coffin (p. 59), leading him to bore holes through its lid, two of which go into her face (p. 65), and his later belief that she "got out through the holes I bored, into the water" (p. 179). Significantly, these expressions of loss are not interpreted or responded to by the adults around him. Vardaman's trauma is alive in the narrative, but it goes unacknowledged in the family.

Darl's narration is a third, and opposed, relation to language. Where Vardaman's language is under pressure from loss, and Addie has a distrust of language altogether, Darl's fluency results in an excess of self-reflection that destabilises rather than stabilises identity. Taken together, these different varieties of linguistic failure suggest that the failure of communication in the novel is not random but systematic, and that it is intimately connected with trauma, embodiment and the ethics of recognition.

Dispersed identities and the limits of recognition

The modern self in *As I Lay Dying* is shown as something that fluctuates under the pressures of consciousness, the body, language, and social expectation. Identity is not presented as stable or innate, but rather as something that is constantly disturbed, broken, and remade by experience. This instability is reinforced by the novel's presentation of space: "a runnel of yellow neither water nor earth swirls, curving with the yellow road neither of earth nor water, down the hill dissolving into a streaming mass of dark green neither of earth nor sky" (Faulkner, 1930/2004, p. 43). Darl describes on the rain-soaked road where the wagon wheel breaks. In this passage, the dissolution of spatial boundaries is analogous to the loosening of the ties that might hold the family together.

To establish temporal disintegration, Faulkner also privileges subjective perception over linear progression. The narrative shifts constantly between memory, present experience and reflection, thus denying the establishment of a unified temporal frame. Addie's posthumous monologue, for instance, allows past and present to cohabitate in the text. Darl expresses this psychological idea of time when he says that "the space between us were time: an irrevocable quality" and that time "now runs parallel between us like a looping string" (Faulkner, 1930/2004, p. 130). Here time is not measured in days or years but in emotional distance. The delays, interruptions and repetitions of the journey substitute linear progression with recurrence. Spatial movement loses its capacity to create meaning in a parallel way: the journey to Jefferson appears linear, yet it is constantly interrupted by floods, delays and accidents. After the river crossing, even the ground seems unstable: "Even the mud there is not still. It has a chill, scouring quality, as though the earth under us were in motion too" (Faulkner, 1930/2004, p. 143).

The most obvious example of this identity crisis is Darl Bundren. Darl's consciousness is extraordinarily

lucid, but as he attempts to place his being in rational and temporal terms, his sense of self becomes caught in a circular logic. This is evident from the following excerpt:

In a strange room you must empty yourself for sleep. And before you are emptied for sleep, what are you. And when you are emptied for sleep, you are not. And when you are filled with sleep, you never were. I don't know what I am. I don't know if I am or not (Faulkner, 1930/2004, p. 71).

Identity here wavers between “are,” “were,” and “not.” The borderland between sleep and waking produces a space in which the self cannot safely identify itself. Darl's consciousness is not a consolidating centre of the self but a dissolving force. His language estranges experience from the body rather than grounding it. This extreme inwardness becomes socially more and more intolerable, and the consequences are most visible in the events leading up to his institutionalisation. Near the end of the journey Darl sets fire to Gillespie's barn, in which Addie's coffin has been placed for the night, apparently to end the grotesque journey by destroying the decaying body. Jewel is able to save the coffin from the flames, but is badly burned in the process. In Jefferson, Darl is seized and committed to the state asylum in Jackson. Cash rationalises the family's decision in pragmatic terms: “It was either send him to Jackson, or have Gillespie sue us” (Faulkner, 1930/2004, p. 213), for Gillespie has somehow learned that Darl started the fire. Cash also notes that Vardaman saw Darl set the fire and “swore he never told nobody but Dewey Dell” (p. 213). This implicates Dewey Dell who has a secret that Darl knows in his betrayal. Jewel demands, “Catch him and tie him up” (p. 213), and when the men come to take Darl away, Dewey Dell jumps on him “like a wild cat” (p. 218). Darl's confused statement to Cash: “I thought you would have told me” (p. 218) shows his awareness that he is being excluded by the same family he has been watching.

Thus, the family's decision to institutionalise Darl is motivated by material concerns and Dewey Dell's wish to conceal her secret, not by moral considerations of his condition. Jewel, who saved the coffin, bears no cost for the family's decision, whereas Darl, who tried to bring the journey to an end, is excluded from the family altogether. In the final section, as he is taken to Jackson, Darl speaks of himself in the third person, and his repeated “Yes yes yes yes yes” (Faulkner, 1930/2004, pp. 233–234) signifies both a mental breakdown and a bitter recognition of his exile. His incarceration is less a therapeutic process and more a form of social control. Darl's fate thus reveals a fundamental paradox of the modernist subject in the novel: greater awareness does not ensure recognition but increases the danger of exclusion.

However, Jewel's identity is based on bodily action. He only recounts one section and builds his identity through physical action, not thought. He shows his love for Addie in endurance and risk, most dramatically when he carries her coffin out of Gillespie's burning barn:

“Jewel!” Dewey Dell cries; “Jewel!” ... I hear her scuffling and struggling as pa and Mack hold her, screaming, “Jewel! Jewel!” But he is no longer looking at us. We see his shoulders strain as he up-ends the coffin and slides it single-handed from the saw-horses (Faulkner, 1930/2004, pp. 202–203).

But Jewel's quietness does not make up for fragmentation. His rejection of language results in social disconnection rather than inner unity, and his devotion is plain to the reader, but hardly articulated within the family. The novel thus implies that the modern self is displaced not only by the superabundance of consciousness but also by its exclusive dependence on the body.

Cash Bundren, for his part, attempts to make his life liveable by means of rationalisation. He imposes order on the chaos of mourning with lists and procedures. His section on the construction of his mother's

coffin, given in the form of a numbered list, shows his attempt to ground his identity in work and discipline: “1. There is more surface for the nails to grip. 2. There is twice the gripping-surface to each seam. 3. The water will have to seep into it on a slant” (Faulkner, 1930/2004, p. 72). This systematisation is a way of coping for him, but the limits of this system are exposed with the breaking of his leg during the crossing of the river. Cash's rationalisation is insufficient to produce a coherent self, and Cash articulates the family's pragmatic reasoning in committing Darl, demonstrating how rational order can be used for exclusion as well as for survival.

Conclusion

As I Lay Dying is one of the most important modernist novels because its fractured structure continually interrogates meaning, identity, and representation. Faulkner dismantles the realist narrative paradigm, based on a consistent self, on progressive narration and on effective communication, through multiple narrators and a halting movement in space and time. This rupture is not a stylistic excess, but that which makes the complexity of experience sayable.

This article has argued, however, that the novel's fragmentation is both a formal marker of modernism and a way of exposing unequal ethical recognition. By giving interior voices to characters who cannot reach one another, Faulkner allows suffering to become perceptible to the reader without guaranteeing that it will be heard or answered within the family. Vardaman's metaphorical attempt to understand his mother's death goes unexamined, Addie's suspicion of words makes her most intense experiences a monologue to no one, Dewey Dell's pregnancy and exploitation are either hidden or narrated by her exploiter, and Darl, the most perceptive of narrators, is cast out of the family when his insight threatens its interests.

The distribution of narrative authority in *As I Lay Dying* thus sets up a hierarchy of recognition rather than a democracy of voices. Some kinds of suffering, like Jewel's physical devotion or Cash's endurance, are tolerated because they help to complete the journey. Others are ignored. Darl's is eventually excised from the family altogether. The novel links language, trauma, narrative perspective and social exclusion to show that the modernist crisis of representation is inseparable from an ethical crisis of response. The fragmented narration in Faulkner's novel is best understood, then, not as a mere linguistic device but as a form that makes visible the gap between suffering and its recognition.

There are some limitations in this study. The analysis is primarily focused on the novel itself and the historical and socio-cultural context in which it was written has not been studied in detail. The novel has also been read mainly in terms of theories of language, trauma and polyphony, so that approaches like cognitive narratology and ecocriticism have not been applied. This may point to two directions for future research. First, the relationship between fractured narration and recognition can be examined in other modernist novels that address trauma and discontinuous subjectivity. Second, interdisciplinary studies might explore how the narrative strategies of novels like *As I Lay Dying* respond to the socio-historical circumstances of the early twentieth-century American South.

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