

RESEARCH ARTICLE**Ethical Apparition of Modern Man and The World in Novels of William Faulkner's**

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Abstract

William Faulkner contemplated with awe the impressive array of his fiction. His 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. The writer's disinclination to do so is understandable, for much of his material comes in some way from the half-understood and turbulent regions of his psyche and is better used than analyzed. Critics are often equally disinclined to analyze, because the exploration of matters psychogenetic involves speculation (though often no more than that involved in assessing literary influence) and, more crucially, a distasteful intrusion into the writer's private life. Yet the marvelous mystery of the creative mind, especially that of a major artist like Faulkner, as it mines and refines the ore of the subconscious, merits such explorations. The writer's psychology ultimately has aesthetic ramifications: it is revealed in patterns of characterization or motif and in modulations of mood and theme over periods of time. Though we may never be able to account for the splendor of what his "voices" told him, an understanding of Faulkner's inner life as a living force in his art does much to illuminate major recurrent psychological patterns in the fiction. It also helps to explain his motives for becoming a writer and for altering the thematic focus and emotional mood of his work at various points in his forty-year career. For the writer's work is the reflection, however shadowy, of his essential self, "A book is the writer's secret life, the dark twin of a man: you can't reconcile them, says a character in Faulkner's early novel" (3). Although the statement appears to insist on the disjunction between a man's life and his art, its second part contradicts the first. Because twinship is the most intimate form of kinship, as Faulkner, who filled his fiction with sets of twins, well knew, if the artist's fiction is the dark twin of his life, the two can be reconciled in crucial ways—morally and philosophically as well as psychologically. Even when the art, the mirror image of the self, is reversed or deep in shadow, it still reflects its creator, in some fashion.

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Key Concept: Faulkner knew that his work was often directly autobiographical. He also conceded on one occasion that it was always indirectly psycho-biographical: “The writer unconsciously writer into every line and phrase his violent despairs and rages and frustrations or his violent prophesies (sic) of still more violent hopes”(8). If many of his characters were based on the outer Faulkner,” their dramas and the other characters in those dramas emerged from the “inner Faulkner,” from his fears and fantasies and from motives that ranged from self-castigation to wish fulfillment. Faulkner’s deep-rooted personal struggles were transmuted into and pervaded his fiction. Thus his inner life “became” his art in the in tensest possible fashion.

Faulkner’s comments about the revisions, however, must be understood relatively, since the handwritten manuscript and the final typed copy reveal numerous deletions, changes, and minor revisions. Among the most notable additions is the much-discussed sentence about the log that “surged up out of the water and stood for an instant upright upon that surging and heaving desolation like Christ ”(3). Generally Faulkner’s polishing of the *As I Lay Dying* manuscript rarely extended beyond the choice of individual words or the rewriting of phrases. Compared to the very extensive revisions that many of his novels underwent before publication-Sartorius, Sanctuary, *Absalom, Absalom!*, The Unvanquished, and Go Down, Moses are examples *As I Lay Dying* seems to have been written in a single burst of creative energy.

In referring to the book as a tour de force, Faulkner may have had several matters in mind. He had written it very quickly-forty-seven days for the handwritten manuscript and an additional month for the typing. The plot, which deals with the adversities suffered by the Bundren family while taking the body of the mother from their home in the country to Jefferson for burial, moves for the most part in a straight line, like the action of the traditional blueprinted novel. That a writer of Faulkner’s ability could narrate it in a few weeks. Time is not surprising. What is remarkable is the form in which Faulkner cast the story; and when he called the work a tour de force, he may have had in mind the form more than the rapidity of composition.

As I Lay Dying consists of fifty-nine narrations or monologues, averaging about two pages in length, delivered by the seven members of the Bundren family and eight “outsiders.” Although Faulkner never explained how he “invented” the form, many of its features have respectable literary antecedents. Its kinship with the Elizabethan stage soliloquy is readily apparent, since in both play and story the character’s private speech reveals whatever portions of his experiences, thoughts, and motives the writer wishes to convey to the audience. The device is particularly useful, since the soliloquy or monologue may be straightforward, ironical, or satirical in tone. In the nineteenth century, such poets as Browning and Tennyson took the soliloquy out of the theatre and refined it into single poems designed to reveal the complexities of the speaker’s character and at the same time to narrate an incident or story. Faulkner’s monologues perform very much the same function in *As I Lay Dying*.

In 1915, however, Edgar Lee Masters, drawing upon the stage soliloquy, its refinements at the hands of the nineteenth- century writers, particularly Browning, and the Anthology, published in

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Spoon River Anthology more two hundred short poems purporting to be epitaphs or speeches from characters possessing the immunities that only death can give. In these monologues, Masters stressed the psychological rather than the physical aspects of the speakers. Instead of attempting to write entire biographies, Masters usually concentrated upon a single but revealing situation. Many of the poems had been published earlier as separate entities, but when brought together in loosely arranged groupings, they seemed related. Often the monologue of one character provides the reader with important information about other characters, and the same incident is related from different points of view. Thus, the interconnection among the monologue allows the reader to make his own judgments of the relative validity of a specific individual's narrative. Despite the looseness of the form and its lack of a unifying, sustained plot line, the reader concludes the book possessing a comprehensive grasp of the Spoon River community. In the Domesday Books, published in 1920, Masters employed a similar technique to unravel the intricacies of Elenor Murray's character and the circumstances of her death. Near the beginning of the poem occurs a passage that seems almost to parallel Faulkner's intentions for Addie Bundren:

In *The New Spoon River Anthology*, published in 1924, Masters continued to utilize the monologue-epitaph form that had been vastly successful in his early books. Although for American readers the immense fascination of the original Spoon River Anthology waned in the 1920s, Masters' work exerted a distinct influence upon Sherwood Anderson and William Faulkner. Anderson greatly admired Spoon River Anthology, which he read immediately after its publication, but he never conceded any influence from Masters. That influence, nevertheless, may be seen in the "new looseness of form" in *Winesburg, Ohio*, in Anderson's statements about "lives flowing past each other,"(55) and in his use of earlier published individual stories to form a novel. Whether Masters' Spoon River monologue technique, as well as the ideas voiced by Anderson, passed directly from Masters to Faulkner or, as is more likely, from Masters and Anderson to Faulkner cannot be firmly established. Anderson's comment about "lives flowing past each other" can be applied to Faulkner's portrayal of the Bundren family, the lives of whose individual members touch but remain isolated-as was Addie Bundren's in life-throughout the journey to Jefferson. One might add that Anderson's insistence that *Winesburg, Ohio* was a novel written according to a "new looseness of form" has a parallel in Faulkner's belief that *The Unvanquished*, *The Hamlet*, and *Go Down, Moses* should be called novels rather than collections of stories.

In *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner retained many of the traditional features of the monologue as practiced by the dramatists and the poets, but he turned them to his own ends and did not hesitate to make innovations of his own. The "epitaph" or after-death setting of Masters monologues survives in Addie Bundren's monologue positioned in the novel four or five days after she was put in her coffin and in the adjacent narratives of Cora and Whitfield that also seem reminiscent of Masters' work. Faulkner followed Masters' precedent in using multiple points of view to tell the story, and he kept the monologues brief. He continued Masters' emphasis upon the psychology of the characters though Faulkner's work shows the effect of more sophisticated theories about thought processes and

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children's mentalities. Like Masters, Faulkner sought to remove himself from the narratives. In this respect, he was more successful than Masters, since Master's critics aren'tained that the speech and opinions of the characters in Spoon River Anthology sounded very much like their creator. In *As I Lay Dying*, no author's voice or representative can be identified. The shift from poetry to prose seems hardly a significant alteration, since Masters' irregular, unrhymed free verse appears to many readers more like chopped-up prose than poetry, and Faulkner's prose often approaches the level of poetry.

Conclusion: Faulkner developed Masters' brief poetical monologues into a highly effective and very flexible device for telling a story, a very different instrument from the lengthy Joycean and Freudian monologues of *The Sound and The Fury*. Many of the monologues of *As I Lay Dying* are straightforward narratives, Faulkner making no effort to render the stream of consciousness. Even when Darl is recounting Addie's death-an even Darl can only imagine since he is miles away from the scene the effect is not that of an interior monologue like Quentin Compton's but that of a narrator speaking I the first person, and the use of italics identifies clearly the change of scenes and the shift to Darl's thoughts. The same appearance of traditional first-person narrative often arises from the speeches of Anse, Cash, and such outsiders as Samson, Armstid, Moseley, MacGowan, Peabody, and Vernon Tull. The interior monologues Faulkner reserved primarily for the unstable members of the Bundren family, Darl, Vardaman, and Dewey Dell, though frequently their narratives contain little or no evidence of though transcription. The result of Faulkner's careful and sparing use of the stream of consciousness in *As I Lay Dying* is a much more readable novel than *The Sound and The Fury*.

Faulkner's signal accomplishment in *As I Lay Dying* is to make the monologue include both narrative and commentary simultaneously without involvement from the author. Thus, the movement of the action from the making of the coffin, to Addie's death, and to the incidents of the journey to Jefferson is narrated through the consciousness of the speakers; and at the same time the private motives and characters of the Bundrens and their friends are firmly established. Faulkner can be highly selective in what information he supplies the reader. He can cut into the journey, for example, at any moment without having to account for a lapse in the narrative. In Addie's monologue, very dramatically but certainly abruptly, he gives the reader an account of her life severely limited yet sufficient to establish her attitude towards living and to define her relationships to those who counted in her life. By using the monologue form in this manner, Faulkner forces the reader to make his own judgments, since the author poses only as recorder.

Faulkner handled his from loosely, not bothering to resolve or correct discrepancies and inconsistencies that would have troubled craftsmen like Hawthorne or Henry James and that continue to irritate attentive.

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