

***Ministry of Higher Education***

***and Scientific Research***

***University of Babylon***

***College of Education for Human Sciences***

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## ***Mortality in *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner***

A paper

Submitted to the Council of Department of English, College of Education  
for Human Sciences, University of Babylon in Partial Fulfillment of  
Requirements for the Degree of B.A in English Language and Literature

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**2023 – 1444**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا ۗ إِنَّكَ

أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ (٣٢)

صدق الله العظيم

# Dedication

**This paper is dedicated to :**

- 1.To The soul of our Martyrs.
- 2.To My great family , my parents my brothers
- 3.To all the professors in my beloved college  
with thanks and respect

# *Acknowledgements*

I wish to express my appreciation and my gratitude to

***MY Supervisor***

**Asst. Prof : Aseel Kadhim Alrkabi (Ph. D)**

To my dear parents, who have made sacrifices for the sake of  
what I have attained.

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## Chapter One

### **A Brief Biography of William Faulkner:**

William Cuthbert Falkner was born 1897 in New Albany Mississippi. He grew up in Oxford the oldest of four brothers. Both parents came from wealthy families reduced to poverty by the Civil War . William was named of his great grandfather. William's father owned a hardware store and livery stable in Oxford and later became business manager of the state university. William did not go to school after the fifth class he left high school to work in his grandfather's bank. William never earned his high school but reader and a lover of poetry. In 1919 Faulkner inter the University of Mississippi as a special student, but he left the next year for New York City. After several odd jobs in New York he left and again returned to Mississippi, where he became postmaster at the Mississippi University Station. He was fired in 1924.

During the years 1926 to 1930 Faulkner published a series of novels, none commercially successful. But in 1931 the success of Sanctuary freed him of financial worries. He went to Hollywood for a year as a scriptwriter and an adviser. Faulkner had married Estelle Oldham, his childhood sweetheart, in 1929, and they lived together in Oxford until his death. He was a quiet, dashing, courteous man, mustachioed and sharp-eyed. He constantly refused the role of celebrity: he permitted no prying into his private life and rarely granted interviews. ("Filming Faulkner's Modernism: James Franco's "As I Lay Dying"" (Peter :12).

Faulkner's most celebrated novels include *The Sound and the Fury* in 1929, *As I Lay Dying* in 1930, *Light In August* in 1932, *The Unvanquished* in 1938 and *Absalom, Absalom!* In 1936 which was a famous work for him. Faulkner was a prolific writer of short stories: his first short story collection, *These 13* in 1931, "A Rose for Emily, Red Leaves, That Evening Sun and Dry September." During the 1930s, in an effort to make money, Faulkner crafted a sensationalist (pulp) perfect novel published in 1931. Its themes of evil and corruption resonate to this day. A sequel to the book, *Requiem For a Nun*, is the only play that he has published. It involves an introduction that is actually one sentence that spans for a couple of pages. He received a Pulitzer Prize for *A Fable* and won a National Book Award for his *Collected Stories*. Faulkner was also writer of mysteries, publishing a collection of crime fiction *Knight's Gambit* that featured Gavin Stevens, an attorney, wise to the ways of folk living in Yoknapatawpha County. (Ruacka :76).

William Faulkner has passed away at the age of 125 in 1962 due to heart attack(Ibid).

## Chapter Two

### *As I Lay Dying*

*As I Lay Dying*, was published in 1930 by William Faulkner. It is one of Faulkner's famous works. The place of novel in Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi. It tells the story of the dysfunctional Bundren family which travels for nine days with the rotting corpse of their wife / mother to fulfill her dying wish to be buried in her hometown. Along the way the Bundrens face all kinds of difficulties, including floods, fires, and injuries. The novel is comprised of fifty-nine chapters narrated by fifteen distinct characters. At the beginning of the novel Addie Bundren lies ill in bed. Out the window she watches her son Cash building her coffin. She dies that evening and the same night a torrential rainstorm washes away the bridge that crosses the river. Addie's dying wish is to be buried in Jefferson, Mississippi, her hometown. So her family places her body in the homemade coffin and sets off despite the flooded river. (Matz :8).

Addie's husband Anse and five children travel by a wagon until they reach the bridge. They are forced to turn around and try to cross the river at different ways . The river is too flooded, and the family loses their team of mules Cash breaks his leg and Addie's coffin is nearly washed away. Cash insists that his leg doesn't pain him even when his father decided to create a makeshift cast from concrete that adheres itself to his leg and he spends most of the remaining journey riding on top of his mother's coffin. (As I Lay Dying Edited by M:18).



When the family reaches the town of Mottson after many days on the road the smell of Addie's decaying body causes alarm and disgust among the townspeople. While in town Dewey Dell the second youngest and only Bundren daughter visits a pharmacy searching for medicine that will terminate her unwanted pregnancy. The Bundren family nearly loses Addie's body a second time when Darl Bundren, the second Bundren child sets fire to a barn in an attempt to burn his mother's decaying corpse. The coffin is saved by Jewel, the third eldest of the Bundren children. (Vickery :71).

After nine days of traveling with Addie's unpreserved dead body the family finally arrives in Jefferson. Darl Bundren is arrested for burning the barn but his family claims he is insane. He is sent to the Mississippi State Insane Asylum instead of jail. The remaining family members borrow shovels to dig Addie's grave. Anse takes the ten dollars given to Dewey Dell for her abortion by the father of her unwanted baby and uses it to buy himself new teeth. He then decides to marry the woman he met while borrowing the shovels and presents her to his children as the new Mrs. Bundren. (Faulkner :23).

### *Mortality in As I Lay Dying*

*As I Lay Dying* is not only about mortality insofar as it concerns Addie Bundren's death. More deeply, the novel explores the theme of mortality by showing each of Addie's family members, loved ones, and other acquaintances offer unique responses to her death, attempting to make sense of the nature of existence. In doing so, these characters realize deeper and more universal things about existence and the transience of human experience. Reflecting on his mother's death, the cynical Darl remarks, "It takes two people to make you, one people to die. That's how the world is going to end." The guilt-ridden Dewey Dell more sentimentally reflects on the fact that she was distracted by personal issues during the time in which her mother died: "I heard that my mother is dead. I wish I had time to let her die. I wish I had time to wish I had." Vardaman's initial reaction to his mother's death is to drill holes in her coffin so she can breathe. As a six-year-old, not yet fully aware of what death means, Vardaman is initially in denial: he thinks that because Addie's physical body still exists, she must still exist and therefore need air in order to keep existing (HONDA Ryohei: The Awareness of Death in *As I Lay Dying*—Addie and Darl. (n.d.).)

**It was not her. I was there, looking. I saw. I thought it was her, but it was not. It was not my mother. She went away when the other one laid down in her bed and drew the quilt up. She went away. “Did she go as far as town?” “She went further than town.” “Did all those rabbits and possums go further than town?” (As I Lay Dying:23)**

The theme of existence and mortality weaves itself throughout this novel as each of the characters processes the concepts of physical death and existence. In this early section of the novel, Vardaman, the youngest Bundren, is trying to understand his mother's recent death, demonstrating his youthful bewilderment as he tries to make sense of what has happened. First, he explains how he doesn't believe that the woman who died could be his mother because she was so different as she became sick. Then he tries to connect her death to what he does understand in an attempt to cope with this difficult loss. (Weinstein : 75)

**I dont know what I am. I dont know if I am or not. Jewel knows he is . . . Yet the wagon is, because when the wagon is was, Addie Bundren will not be. And Jewel is, so Addie Bundren must be. And I then must be . . . (As I Lay Dying:43)**

Darl and Jewel are still not back from their delivery, but Darl is able to see what is happening back at the Bundren home. As Jewel and Darl try to sleep away from home, Darl reflects on the theme of existence and mortality using the past and present tense to be as he questions his own existence (ibid)

In this reflection, Darl also points out that in contrast, Jewel is confident in his existence. Darl's questions about his existence parallel his mother's death as he wonders about mortality in body and soul.(Ibid)

**My father said that the reason for living is getting ready to stay dead. I knew at last what he meant and that he could not have known what he meant himself, because a man cannot know anything about cleaning up the house afterward. And so I have cleaned my house . . . I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of . . . And then I could get ready to die. (As I Lay Dying:63)**

The reader finally hears directly from Addie Bundren, either from the grave or before her death, as she reviews events of her life and marriage, directly connecting to the theme of existence and mortality. This quote highlights Addie Bundren's view on existence, life, and death as she explains her discovery of truth in her father's statement that "the reason for living is getting ready to stay dead." While Addie Bundren has clearly been disenchanted by life, she also seems to have a very real understanding of her purpose, existence, and eventual mortality. (Death In Faulkner's As I Lay Dying - 806 Words | Cram. (n.d.).

*As I Lay Dying* suggests that dying is a relief from the suffering of life. Religious characters in the novel believe that, because death is a reward, it provides the motivation to live one's life well. Get done everything you need to get done, and you'll be granted...death. The physical process of death is a large part of the novel as well, however, so mortality is far from glorified. The smell of a rotting corpse hangs on every chapter, reminding the reader that death is both spiritual and visceral. (LitCharts. (n.d.).

The story discusses a withering mother, not specifying of death as an escape, aside from one of the children expound on death by saying: "he can recall how when he was youthful he trusted demise to be a wonder of the body; yet now he knows it to be just a component of the psyche and that of the brains of the ones who endure the deprivation. The agnostics say it is the end; the fundamentalists, the starting; when as a general rule it is close to a solitary inhabitant or family moving out of an apartment or a town." 19 Faulkner arranged the peruser for the idea of death by portraying the hopeless circumstance of the characters and the earth in which they are living. The house and the encompassing fields are portrayed in a miserable picture. Likewise, the substantial weight demand of the diminishing mother to be specific, she has a desire in particular, to be covered at Jefferson. Addie had articulated the desire to be covered among her kin as of now. At the point when Darl was conceived she needs to depend on other individuals to satisfy their last wish. For Addie, those aides are the individuals from her family (Ansa, Cash, Darl, Jewel, Dewey Dell and Vardaman), yet additionally pariahs like Tull and Samson who offer the Bundren's donkeys and sustenance. *As I Lay Dying Mortality* | Shmoop. (n.d.).

Another scene in which Faulkner depicts the hopeless state of the novel's characters is that about Jewel by saying. "Gem's frayed and broken straw cap a full head over his own particular body.

**" The house is hopeless as well as though it demonstrates that is biting the dust as well "The cotton house is of harsh logs, from between which the clingings has long fallen. Square, with a broken rooftop set at a solitary pitch, it inclines in purge and sparkling flimsiness in the daylight, a solitary wide window in two inverse's dividers giving onto the methodologies of the way." The fields are not in a superior condition," (As I Lay Dying:53)**

The field once more, worn so by feet in blurring accuracy to satisfy the last wish of an expired relative" All are hinting at death however not a passing as an escape. (As I Lay Dying Mortality | Shmoop. (n.d).

## Conclusion

The death of Addie Bundren inspires several characters to wrestle with the rather sizable questions of existence and identity. Vardaman is bewildered and horrified by the transformation of a fish he caught and cleaned into “pieces of not-fish,” and associates that image with the transformation of Addie from a person into an indefinable nonperson. Jewel never really speaks for himself, but his grief is summed up for him by Darl, who says that Jewel’s mother is a horse. For his own part, Darl believes that since the dead Addie is now best described as “was” rather than “is,” it must be the case that she no longer exists. If his mother does not exist, Darl reasons, then Darl has no mother and, by implication, does not exist. These speculations are not mere games of language and logic. Rather, they have tangible, even terrible, consequences for the novel’s characters. Vardaman and Darl, the characters for whom these questions are the most urgent, both find their hold on reality loosened as they pose such inquiries. Vardaman babbles senselessly early in the novel, while Darl is eventually declared insane. The fragility and uncertainty of human existence is further illustrated at the end of the novel, when Anse introduces his new wife as “Mrs. Bundren,” a name that, until recently, has belonged to Addie. If the identity of Mrs. Bundren can be usurped so quickly, the inevitable conclusion is that any individual’s identity is equally unstable.

*As I Lay Dying* is, in its own way, a relentlessly cynical novel, and it robs even childbirth of its usual rehabilitative powers. Instead of functioning as an antidote to death, childbirth seems an introduction to it for both Addie and Dewey Dell, giving birth is a phenomenon that kills the people closest to it, even if they are still physically alive. For Addie, the birth of her first child seems like a cruel trick, an infringement on her precious solitude, and it is Cash's birth that first causes Addie to refer to Anse as dead. Birth becomes for Addie a final obligation, and she sees both Dewey Dell and Vardaman as reparations for the affair that led to Jewel's conception, the last debts she must pay before preparing herself for death. Dewey Dell's feelings about pregnancy are no more positive: her condition becomes a constant concern, causes her to view all men as potential sexual predators, and transforms her entire world, as she says in an early section, into a "tub full of guts." Birth seems to spell out a prescribed death for women and, by proxy, the metaphorical deaths of their entire households.



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