

Family and communication in "as i lay dying"



**ASSIGN
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The concept of family usually suggests the notions of love and communication. If that were universally true, then the entirely opposite of this would be the cliched entity of the dysfunctional family. But William Faulkner's novel "As I Lay Dying" introduces us to an uncommon dysfunctional family, the Bundrens, and their story is told in a very exceptional manner. A wide range of Faulkner's novels are set in the U. S. South, most definitely because he was raised in that region. For that purpose, he created a fictional setting for several of his novels, the Yoknapatawpha County, including this one, where it is depicted as an actively hostile environment, with floods and heat. "As I Lay Dying" chronicles the death of Addie Bundren, the family matriarch, and the subsequent journey to bury her corpse in her family's cemetery several miles away. As the story progresses, we encounter a series of events that range from darkly comic to completely unsettling, with the use of diction and irony.

This book doesn't have a defined point-of-view. Each chapter features narration from one of the various characters in the book, including Addie herself. The narrators consist of family members, friends, acquaintances, and some onlookers. Each narrator provides a different perspective on individuals and events. This element of the novel is perhaps the most important one since it makes the book unique and at the same time it makes it dynamic, since we learn about the background of the members of the family and about their experiences from a different perspective in each chapter.

Indeed, at times the reader can only discern events by comparing information from various narrators. It also emphasizes a major theme in the

novel: every character is essentially isolated from the others. Moreover, the characters in the novel do not communicate effectively with one another. Adding to this, when they do communicate, they only do it through banal statements; we never witness any external expression of emotion, we only observe their inner thoughts.

Misunderstandings ensue due to this lack of communication between the family members. We have Anse, the patriarch, a selfish, lazy, and hypocrite man with a poor language, and the three sons and daughter he had with Addie: Cash, Darl, Vardaman and Dewey Dell. Then there's Jewel, who's the illegitimate lovechild of Addie and the town reverend, but nobody knows this. But out of all these characters, including Vernon and Cora Tull (their neighbors) and Dr. Peabody, the protagonist is, in my opinion, Addie.

Even though she only narrates one chapter and she's dead throughout most of the book, her death and her body in a coffin serve as literary devices to give impetus to the plot and to the character's internal thinking. To some members of the family, like Cash and Jewel (Addie's favorites), the journey to Jefferson to bury her is out of pure devotion, but to others, it's a trip with ulterior motives; for Anse, to get new teeth and for Dewey Dell, to get an illegal abortion. These intricacies may seem tragically comic and ironic at first, but if given more thought, they seem more disturbing than anything. One of the most disturbing things about this novel is the characters of Darl and Vardaman and their constant questioning of identity.

While Vardaman tries to deal with death by identifying his mother to a dead fish, Darl goes deeper into it by questioning his own existence, isolating

himself more from others and falling into madness. One of the questions the novel seems to raise is if whether communication is of relevance or not in our daily lives, and after finishing reading this book, I can say it definitely is, whether we like talking to each other or not. Also, although this novel involves death, abortion and a dysfunctional family, Faulkner's choice of tone is quite defying: a dark, humorous tone, often ironic. Perhaps the most outrageous moment is by the end of the novel when, after all the family has endured and lost, Anse has already gotten a new wife days after Addie has been buried. This kind of turn of events makes it hard to extract some sort of lesson out of the novel.

But besides from humor, Faulkner utilizes another literary device, the "stream-of-consciousness" technique, most notably during Vardaman's and Darl's rants. Through these passages, we delve deep into Faulkner's examination of the human mind and we discover that it is a profound and complex thing, almost unexplainable. Still, are we all destined to end up like Darl, in a mental asylum, just by questioning some of life's complexities? Before we even think to boggle our heads with our own identity, I learned we should first have some sort of self-assurance so we don't lose a sense of self if we discover something unpleasant about ourselves in any personal psychological examination. If one does find anything unlikable, just thinking of people like the Bundrens is enough to cheer one up. Bibliography: -
Faulkner, William "As I Lay Dying"