

Intertextual interpretation: Faulkner's Waste Land: a rhetorical reading of *As I Lay Dying*

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“... a writer don't have to consciously parallel because he robs and steals from everything he ever wrote or read or saw...”W.Faulkner¹

In a famous essay² Faulkner's “best reader”³ Cleanth Brooks highlights how Faulkner, like Joyce, “... began by thinking of himself as a poet ...” and how he used to refer to himself as a “failed poet” (Brooks:1971:247)⁴.

These statements are, in my opinion, well and truly endorsed by Faulkner himself if we remember his “Address upon receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature” in 1950⁵ in which he repeatedly alludes to the literary author (to himself in a word) as “the poet” when he acknowledges his task, his duty as such, if he is to be of any help to his fellow men.

On such special occasion Faulkner delivered a speech which clearly showed his way of conceiving his literature and that of others:

“... Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear ... There are no longer problems of the spirit ... the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing ... the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed ... love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice ...

and Faulkner goes on:

Until he relearns these things, he will write as though he stood among and watched the end of man . I decline to accept the end of man ... I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail... because he has a soul a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance ...

¹ F.L.GWYNN & J.L.BLOTNER (eds), *Faulkner in the University*, N.York, Vintage, 1965, p.115

² “Faulkner as a Poet”, in: C.BROOKS, *A Shaping Joy: Studies in the Writer's Craft*, London, Methuen, 1971, pp.247-69

³ T. INGE (ed), *W.Faulkner: The Contemporary Reviews*, N.York, C.U.P., 1995 (Dedication)

⁴ Note.- See also BLOTNER (1994: 277) and GRESSET (1989:15)

⁵ M.COWLEY (ed), *The Portable Faulkner*, N.York, Viking Press, 1974, pp 723-724

hopeful words that he brilliantly rounds off with his definition of the poet's task:

The poet's, the writer's duty is to write about these things ... The poet's voice need not merely be the record of a man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail ... " (Cowley: 1974: 724).

This Faulknerian creed, in my view, the basis of his most lyrical novel *As I Lay Dying* (1929), prompted me to associate Faulkner with T.S.Eliot, and, more specifically, *As I Lay Dying* with *The Waste Land* (1923), the latter also being a genuine act of faith in man's "prevailing" (*Give ... Sympathize ... Control ...* ll.402,412,419; *Shanti ...* l.433) despite the huge amount of materialism and scepticism which pervades the poem, qualities that are even more prevalent, in my opinion, in Faulkner's book as we shall see.

In addition Brooks cites T.S.Eliot as one of the "discernible influences" in Faulkner's poetry (*The Marble Faun*, 1924) (1971: 248) and so does one of his latest biographers Richard Gray who also adds the French Symbolists as an influence on Faulkner (1994: 91).

Faulkner's famous biographer Joseph Blotner dwells on Faulkner's interest in Eliot when, having just arrived at Yale in 1918, he buys Eliot's hitherto published work (:116), also on how one of Faulkner's closest friends tells in 1921 of the "great influence" of T.S.Eliot on Faulkner (:179), and also how Faulkner's first volume of poetry (*Vision in Spring*, 1921) could have been subtitled "Homage to T.S.Eliot" or "A Tribute to T.S.Eliot" given the constant borrowings from "Sweeney among the Nightingales" and "Prufrock" among other poems by Eliot (:181).

Likewise Blotner enlarges on considering Faulkner's natural poetic gift, his intense devotion to poetry as a reader, writer and critic in 1925 as he went on writing his next volume of poetry (*A Green Bough*, 1933) reminiscent of Keats, Housman, and "inevitably" (Gray :98) T.S.Eliot as he decided to give up poetry in favour of prose (:235).

Yet also in this new era in Faulkner's literary activity Eliot's stamp appears. Faulkner's first novel (*Soldier's Pay*, 1926) takes place during the first fortnight in April, Eliot's "cruellest month" in *Waste Land*, the latter often occupying Faulkner's thoughts by 1925 (Blotner :261) and vestiges of which can be found in *Mosquitoes* (1927) (:326) and later in *Pylon* (1935) (:600-01)⁶.

However the relation I perceive between the Eliotian *W.Land* and Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* is much subtler and goes far beyond the ostensible literary borrowing. But first let us briefly examine the circumstances of Faulkner's work before dealing with the above mentioned relationship.

I

With regard to *As I Lay Dying* we fortunately have a number of authorial details (Blotner :439ff; Gray :151ff). Faulkner started writing the book on October 25, 1929, shortly after the Wall Street crash, giving it its title and composition date whilst carrying out night work at a power station surrounded by furnaces, boilers, dynamos,

⁶ Note.- See also COWLEY (ed), op. cit., p.ix

valves and switches, all dumb witnesses to the new technological progress present in 20th century American society. Faulkner admitted having written the book without impulsiveness, with deliberation, as a challenge to himself and his authorial capacity: "... *I wrote the book in six weeks, without changing a single word, because I knew from the start just where I was going ...*" (Blotner : 442).

The title *As I Lay Dying* had been previously used by Faulkner⁷ who acknowledged having employed the words of the ghost of Agamemnon (murdered by an unfaithful pitiless wife, Clytemnestra, and her lover Aegistus) to Ulysses in Book XI of the *Odyssey* ⁸. Faulkner finished his manuscript on 11th December 1929, 47 days after he had begun it with very few amendments and he sent the typewritten version to Hal Smith (to whom the work is dedicated) on 12th January 1930 (: 448). The work was published on October 6th of the same year (Connolly : 95)⁹.

This short para-textual comment allows me to draw the reader's attention to certain, in principle, circumstantial parallelisms with Eliot's greatest work.

II

The first of these analogies has to do with the time of composition of the two works. Both were undertaken by their authors at times of deep socio-economic crisis: Eliot as we know writes his *W.Land* between 1919 and 1922, the years immediately following the chaos arising in Europe as a result of the First World War and its aftermath; Faulkner writes *As I Lay Dying* in 1929, immediately after the Wall Street crash, with his country on the brink of an unprecedented economic depression.

Other circumstantial similarities are of the scholarly and literary kind and they reveal the authors' respective modernist sensibility¹⁰. Both the Latin epigraph with which the *W.Land* begins (*Satyricon*) and the title of Faulkner's book (*Odyssey, XI*) emphasize the topic of, respectively, divine and human cruelty applied to human beings. In Eliot this has to do with Apollo's cruelty who will not allow the Sybil of Cummae to die, whereas he allows her to grow old and lose her oracular gift, the sense of her life. In Faulkner we are dealing with Clytemnestra's cruelty, who is not happy only with being unfaithful to and murdering her husband, but who even denies him the final merciful gesture of closing his eyes as Agamemnon lies dying.

Also the titles of the works in question conform to erudite and literary sources: two anthropological treatises in Eliot's case and Homer's epic in Faulkner's. This basic seminal debt of both authors to their sources once again, in my opinion, brings the two works closer together.

J.L.Weston's book, as we know, links the Christian legend of the Holy Grail with the pagan myth of the maimed Fisher King. The latter will be retrieved from his painful

⁷ See: T.E.CONNOLLY, *Faulkner's World*, N.York & London, U.P. of America, 1988,p.45

⁸ ...*As I lay dying the woman with the dog's eyes would not close my eyes for me as I descended into the Hades ...*

⁹ New York, Jonathan Cape & H.Smith, 1930

¹⁰ Note.- See for instance: R.C.MORELAND, " Faulkner & Modernism", in: P.M. WEINSTEIN (ed), *William Faulkner*, Cam., C.U.P., 1995,p.17ff

situation by a virtuous knight, who after a dangerous journey through a barren land will attend spiritual Truth and order will be restored. Frazer's work, as we also know, deals with certain sacrificial rites previous to any possibility of regeneration, of material and spiritual fertility (Abad: 62ff).

Well then, both concepts of "journey" and "sacrifice" likewise inspire *As I Lay Dying*, both literally (the whole novel is the story of a painful funeral journey) and symbolically as we shall see.

In addition both authors use a similar method of composition (the so-called mythical method) and their works offer yet another similarity albeit less circumstantial: their essential lyrical nature. The latter is self-evident in *W.Land* whilst in *As I Lay Dying* it shows up paradoxically in two areas the first of which is specific of the novel as a genre: a) narrative technique; b) setting.

Faulkner's narrative strategy in *As I Lay Dying* is lyrically built by means of 59 interior monologues, which range in length from several pages to one only line (p.67)¹¹, delivered as "stream of consciousness" by 15 characters who do not exchange a single word i.e. do not address their monologues to other characters but to the reader and in this way they express themselves, on the one hand, more freely, and on the other more lyrically self-revealing themselves.

At the same time this narrative method reproduces the distortion characteristic of Modernism, which makes *As I Lay Dying* one of Faulkner's most revolutionary works with a madman, a child and a corpse as reliable "points of view": madmen and children tell the truth, and the dead have no longer any reason to deceive us. To the above mentioned lyrical effect also contributes Faulkner's use of language with which I shall deal later.

As regards the setting in *As I Lay Dying* it is of a one-tone spatial nature (the same as in *W.Land*, although in this respect Eliot offers greater variety: natural, urban, open-air, indoor ...) a mainly open-air rural setting whose lyrical side comes out in the symbolic, idealized use of landscape on Faulkner's part, a use, by the way, also present in *W.Land*. In this context *As I Lay Dying* occupies a pre-eminent position in Faulkner's literary output, since in this work we have the first evidence in writing of Faulkner's symbolic universe, of his "mythical kingdom" (Cowley: xi): Yoknapatawpha County¹²: "... they came from some place out in Yoknapatawpha County, trying to get to Jefferson with it ..." (161).

This symbolical Faulknerian universe (Cowley :viii;xvi) has basically negative connotations: the chaos of the "New" South springing from slavery and Civil War, evident in the materialism and selfishness of its inhabitants, often defined as "dead" or "blind", lacking mutual affection, a chaos which turns out to be analogical to the one

¹¹ W.FAULKNER, *As I Lay Dying*. Harmonds., Msx., Penguin Books, 1976. All quotations refer to this edition.

¹² Note.- See also: C.BROOKS, *W.Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha County*, New Haven, Yale U.P., 1968; E.M.KERR, *W.Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha*, N.York, Fordham U.P., 1983

foreseen by Eliot in his *W.Land* in which, somehow, a glimpse of transcendental hope may be perceived.

On the contrary in Faulkner's case the loss seems irreparable and final as borne out by the last words in the book: "... *Meet Mrs. Bundren ...* " (: 208) everything will stay the same or become even worse.

Also as in the case of *W.Land* positive connotations are scarce, having to do with the "Old" South longed for by Faulkner and lucidly personified by beings without any chance: Addie (= dead), possibly Cash, and Darl of whom Cash says at the end of the book: "... *This world is not his world ; this land his land ...* " (:208).

Other intertextual analogies which I perceive between the two works are more specifically literary and I shall deal with them within a rhetorical frame of analysis which will enable me to order the complexity and scope of the materials involved.

III

From the point of view of *inventio* *As I Lay Dying* coincides with *The Waste Land* in: a) central concern: i.e. "Waste Land" theme objectified by Faulkner in the chaos of the "New" South, as I have just said; and b) several subsidiary themes: death, love and religion.

As regards the first point (death), *As I Lay Dying* evokes the processes of "The Burial of the Dead" and "Death by Water" in *W.Land* , given that the whole of Faulkner's book deals with the death and subsequent funeral journey of Addie Bundren up to her place of rest, a journey bristling with material hardships which her family must overcome, a flood to boot.(: 111ff). Still in this context Faulkner himself said of his book: "... *it ... is the story ... of a ritual, devotional service , a religious ceremony, a practice with a symbolic or quasi symbolic significance ...* " (Gresset : 225).

The love theme in *As I Lay Dying* offers a similar focus to that of *W.Land* in so far as both works reproduce situations of: a) lack of interpersonal communication; b) degradation or perversion in love relationships, determined by the essential selfishness of the characters involved and a source of existential emptiness. Let us remember the two episodes in *W.Land* Part II (" A game of Chess ") as well as several passages in Part III (Sweeney, Philomel, Mr. Eugenides, the typist).

In *As I Lay Dying* the lack of communication, of human affection, is one of the most evident aspects ("... the Bundrens are alone as few human beings can be ... " : Gresset : 221) even technically expressed by Faulkner by means of the juxtaposition of monologues apparently unrelated. This seminal or fundamental situation is obviously unable to generate unselfish love-relationships between man and woman (Addie-Anse; Addie-Whitfield; Dewey Dell-Lafe, the former as ready for abortion as Lil in *W.Land* ; Dewey Dell-MacGowan) and, even, the unselfish type of love par excellence, maternal love, undergoes perversion in Faulkner's book: Addie is not at all enthusiastic about the fact: "... *motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn't care whether there was a word for it or not ...* " (:136), and even has her preferences among her children: Jewel is "her" son (: 20, 22, 133) and

Whitfield's (: 17, 139) whereas Darl, D.Dell and Vardaman are "her husband's: "... then I found that I had Darl ... I believed I could kill Anse ... " (: 136); "... I gave Anse D.Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of. And now he has three children that are his and not mine ... " (: 140).

Neither does filial love seem to be more articulate: "... She lived a lonely woman, lonely with her pride, trying to make folks believe different, hiding the fact that they just suffered her..." (: 21), "... You never pure loved her none of you ... " (: 181).

As to the religious theme, whilst in *W.Land* the most extensive type of religious references (Christian or Buddhist) are suggested as a tentative solution to relieve the existential anguish of modern man (" The Fire Sermon"; " What the Thunder said"), the same element in *As I Lay Dying* turns out to be much less hopeful hence, as I have mentioned, the superior existential pessimism that pervades Faulkner's book.

In the latter, the religious aspect can be seen in three characters: Cora Tull, Addie Bundren and Brother Whitfield. The first of these , with her holier-than thou attitude, with her repetition of pious statements (: 10, 21, 22, 132 ...)and stubborn nature (: 10,132, 133) represents a superficial, stereo-typed and fanatical view of religion perfectly summarised by Addie: "... One day I was talking to Cora. She prayed for me because she believed I was blind to sin, wanting me to kneel and pray too, because people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too ... " (: 140).

Addie Bundren represents the sceptical standpoint in religious matters. Perhaps embittered by her father's attitude when she was a child, by her position as schoolmistress in her youth (: 134), by a marriage without love (: 134-40), by several unwanted children (: 136-40), and by being the protagonist in a fleeting adulterous relationship with a parson (: 132, 138-39); she has little time left for transcendental ideas or feelings.

Addie's sceptical stance is observed by Cora early in the book: "... the eternal and the everlasting salvation and grace is not upon her ... " (: 10), and later by the same voice "... She had never been pure religious ... " (: 132). Such a stance appears, say, balanced in the character by a strong, primeval, sort of puritanical conviction of individual honesty and sense of duty (: 101) that shows a similarity between the figure of Addie Bundren and that of Hester Prynne in Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*¹³ . Both commit adultery with a preacher or parson, both idolize their offspring (as shown by the names chosen for the latter: Pearl and Jewel), both seem to lack a feeling of individual guilt, not so social guilt (: 139). Addie decides to abstain from physical relations with her husband (: 139)and, after finishing with Whitfield and giving birth to Jewel, she goes back to her marital duties: "... I gave Anse the children, I did not ask for them... That was my duty to him ... and that duty I fulfilled ... " (: 138).Her basically puritanical attitude induces Addie (like Hester) to admit her "sin": "... My daily life is an acknowledgement and expiation of my sin... " (: 132), which is wrongly interpreted by Cora in her obtuseness as a show of arrogance (: Ibid.) and even sacrilege (: 133) on Addie's part.

¹³ Note.- See K. ONO, " Faulkner and History: *As I Lay Dying* and *The Scarlet Letter* ", in J.COY and M. GRESSET (eds), *Faulkner and History* , Salamanca, Eds. U. de Salamanca, 1986,pp 137-50

Brother Whitfield (who also offers a strong similarity with Arthur Dimmesdale in *Scarlet Letter*) personifies in *As I Lay Dying* the most negative view of religion.

With tremendous puritanical arrogance, he considers himself one of the "elected", capable of a direct relationship with God (: 141). Whitfield shows a purely rhetorical remorse concerning his affair with Addie (: Ibid.), an attitude that reveals his extremely selfish nature ("I " , says Addie, "... merely took the precautions that he thought necessary for his sake ... " : 139, my emphasis) and his essential hypocrisy: for Whitfield Addie dies due to God's will without revealing their "secret" and, consequently, he will not be the one to "profane" it: "... She had sworn then that she would never tell it... let me not have also the sin of her broken vow upon my soul ... " (: 141). The falseness, hollowness, and cynicism of Whitfield's last words in his "role" as parson arouse aversion: "... God's grace upon this house... " (: 142).

Turning our attention to the *dispositio* both *W.Land* and *As I Lay Dying* are on the one hand organised according to a previously mentioned mythical method (p. 48) which in Faulkner's case relates his work to the epic movement of the *Odyssey* given that the Bundrens' arduous journey as well as the particular sacrifice made by some of them (Cash) eventually assume heroic connotations, admirably considered by Cleanth Brooks¹⁴, despite the spurious motivations of other characters.

On the other hand both works in question offer a fragmentary, dialectical, chorus-like organization made up of different perfectly identified "voices" that speak directly to the reader. As a result of this we have rapid access to several points of view concerning the same aspect as well as to a particularly "qualified" voice.

In *W.Land* this particularly qualified voice is, as we know, Tiresias ("... What Tiresias sees is the substance of the poem ... " : Note: 218, my emphasis) whereas in *As I Lay Dying* that voice is, in my opinion, Darl's, or, even, if we think of Tiresias' bisexual nature, such a voice could be the combined voices of Darl and Addie, the two most visionary characters in Faulkner's book. These two doomed representatives of the "Old" South which had to Faulkner's mind so unfortunately disappeared and whose respective misfortunes enhance the pessimism of the work. Concerning this matter we have Gray's rather confused opinion who , in the first place, does not perceive any "authoritative voice" (Gray : 153) and then seems to contradict himself: "... He (=Darl) is the author as observer or even voyeur... " (Ib.:158).

Darl's relevant position in the book is often highlighted by critics¹⁵ . Darl is responsible for the majority of monologues in the book a fact that can be suggestive of, at least, a certain trust on Faulkner's part in this character (madmen voice the truth) and that is why, in my opinion, it is appropriate to apply to Darl the same words that T.S.Eliot did to the prophetic figure of Tiresias formerly quoted.

In *As I Lay Dying* Darl's special nature is frequently emphasized (: 20,22,58). Above all his extraordinary sensitivity and his powers of perception ("vision") which

¹⁴ "Odyssey of the Bundrens", in: *W.Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha County*, New Haven, Yale U.P.,1968, pp. 141ff

¹⁵ BROOKS: 1968; BLOTNER:1994 (1974); GRESSET: 1989; GRAY: 1994...

enable him to know events beforehand (Addie's death : 8, 34, 41, 44), unarticulated aspects (Dewey Dell's pregnancy: 24, 34; Jewel's bastardy: 101, 106, 168; Addie's lack of affection for him: 75) as well as perceiving significant behavioural attitudes in other characters (Cash's sacrifice: 164-66; Anse and Jewel's materialism and selfishness in spite of the appearances: 44 & *passim*). Because everything Darl "sees"¹⁶, and to a certain extent Addie who also has prophetic powers (: 133), is likewise "the substance" of Faulkner's book. Everything Darl sees are but "objective correlatives" of the magnitude of the physical (: 38) and existential (:65) chaos in which these "dead", "blind" characters merely exist, survive rather than live: lack of communication, absence of love, selfishness, materialism, romantic and religious perversion and death. In this context only Darl (and Addie) seems (seem) to miss those "old verities and truths of the heart" (p. 45) so dear to Faulkner.

Addie, whose illness derives from her own awareness of her personal alienation as well as of a generalised alienation that plunges the characters in *As I Lay Dying* into lack of communication (Brooks: 149; Ono: 141), also suffers from "word-phobia" (: 136-40) conveniently expressed by Faulkner when he has her deliver only one monologue in the book.

Addie decides, even in death, to maintain the family unit (or "communion": Gresset : 225), ephemeral and self-interested, by having them promise to have her corpse taken to Jefferson (: 18, 137) thereby making them join forces in a strange common endeavour which turns out to be heroically grotesque.

Darl, lucidly and painfully, understands ("sees") the irreversibility of the situation and even the uselessness of the undertaking as we shall see, that will drive him mad and to confinement in an asylum (: 202-203).

With Addie and Darl's fictional destiny in the shape of death and madness (plus the high personal cost of Cash's sacrifice and Jewel's irrational heroism) Faulkner shows, at least partially, given that at a superficial level the undertaking is carried out, the practically total absence of a future in modern life of his self-confessed faith in humankind (p. 45), hence the essential, pitiless nihilism (the inhabitants of Faulkner's Waste Land cannot even look forward to the comfort of religion) that pervades Faulkner's both southern and universal Waste Land.

Concerning *elocutio* the presence of two levels of language has been widely recognised in *As I Lay Dying* . One of them is demotic, popular, dialectal, so dear to Faulkner (Gray : 162, 90) and evident in the , let us say, conversational passages; the other is more elaborate, "... richly interpretative..." (Beck : 58), "... more dreamlike... and dissociated" (Gray : 156) and can be discerned in the characters' psychological processes and expressed in terms of "stream of consciousness" techniques.

The "elaborate" side of Faulkner's prose brimming with, as has been said, "... flashes of the poetry of rhetoric, a poetry which dwells lovingly on vivid colors and brave words, and seems almost to yearn for the blank verse which the modern

¹⁶ " ... *The land runs out of Darl's eyes ...* " : 93; "... *at the supper table with his eyes gone further... beyond the land...* " : 23

democratic literary tradition has made impossible...¹⁷, is responsible for the strong lyrical effect that pervades *As I Lay Dying*. This effect connects, in my view, with the two seminal lines in American poetry (Whitman and Dickinson) i. e. with the foundations of modern American poetry, T.S.Eliot included.

Faulkner's non-demotic language in *As I Lay Dying* closely links, say, Whitman's prolixity and Dickinson's restraint.

The former can be observed more specifically in the character who, as has been said (Brooks: 165), has the "poetry of madness" (= Darl) ; the latter in the one that has the "poetry of the child" (= Vardaman) whose imperfect grasp of the situation gives rise to most interesting insights¹⁸. Both brothers, the children "of Anse" (p. 50) show a kind of kinship "... not merely biological ..." (Gresset: 217).

Previously I have referred to Darl's special nature as well as to his privileged point of view in the book (pp 51, 52). Likewise Darl has a "gift for language" (Brooks: 146) hence his particular responsibility when it comes to evaluating or assessing the above mentioned lyrical effect.

Darl's gift for language is based on prolixity and is most evident both in the descriptive and reflective sides of his monologues. The latter are deliberately built up in order to highlight a poetic use of language, with lexical and syntactic repetition, a strong phonological bent, and a considerable portion of figurative language.

Word and phrase repetition are self-evident in the descriptive and reflective passages (pp 7, 65, 75, 202...) as a result of which I will not give specific examples. More eye-catching and poetic is, in fact, phonological repetition (alliteration) when the latter is not a consequence of mere word repetition:

"... *Jewel and I come up from the field, following the path in single file I am fifteen feet ahead of him Jewel's frayed and broken straw hat a full head above my own ...*) (p.: 7)

This sound-consciousness is pervasive in Faulkner's book and often has to do with the sibilant / s / sound:

"... *The sound of the saw is steady stirring the dying light so that at each stroke her face seems to wake a little ...* " (p. 42)

"... *The lantern sits on a stump its cracked chimney smeared on one side with a soaring smudge of soot, it sheds a feeble and sultry glare ...* " (p. 61)

or, more briefly :

"... *He sits the horse his lean face suffused up The summer when he was fifteen, he took a spell of sleeping ...* " (p. 99)

Faulkner's care for sound realizations also leads him to onomatopoeia, phonologically and graphically expressed:

¹⁷ Henry Nash Smith, "A Troubled Vision", *Southwest Review*, 16, Winter, 1931, XVI-XVII, quoted in: INGE (ed), op. cit. , p.49

¹⁸ Note.- Still there is the scarcely articulate (one monologue) Jewel who has the "poetry of action" (Brooks:1968: 146) .

"... *the Chuck ----- Chuck ----- Chuck of the adze ...*" (p.8)

But, undoubtedly, the aspect which best contributes to the overall lyrical effect is Faulkner's wide use of figurative language in *As I Lay Dying*.

Sense imagery (visual and auditive) pervades Darl's language. Sight imagery¹⁹ is abundant, precise, and recurrently functional i.e. it plays a significant part in characterization, as, for instance happens with Darl's insistence on Jewel's "pale eyes" (pp: 7,114,144,166) or Cash's "grey face" (pp: 124, 165); and it is also beautiful as in Darl's relish when drinking water out of a cedar bucket:

"... *It would be black, the shelf black, the still surface of the water a round orifice in nothingness, where before I stirred it awake with the dipper I could see maybe a star or two in the bucket and maybe in the dipper a star or two before I drank ...*" (p. 12, my emphasis)

Sound imagery is less frequent (pp: 8,13,77,84,111,113,173,181...) nevertheless Faulkner manages his greatest achievements in this area when he pays attention to the blending of sensory impressions (synaesthesia): sight and touch in several allusions to Jewel's "wooden" face and demeanour (pp: 7,75,84,166...); taste and smell: "... (water) ... *warmish-cool, with a faint taste like the hot July wind in cedar trees smells...*" (p: 12); sight, taste and smell: "... *The sun is poised like a bloody eggthe light has turned copper: in the eye portentous, in the nose sulphurous, smelling of lightning...*" (p.: 34).

This Modernist plasticity (also dear to Eliot) abounds in other Faulknerian images which increasingly become even more far-fetched and disturbing:

- on Jewel on horseback:

"... *Save for Jewel's legs they are like two figures carved for a tableau savage in the sun ...*" (p. 13)

- on Dewey Dell:

"... *Dewey Dell's wet dress shapes for the dead eyes of three blind men those mammalian ludicrosities which are the horizons and the valleys of the earth ...*" (p.:130)

- on the barn:

"... *The front, the conical façade with the square orifice of doorway broken only by the square squat shape of the coffin like a cubistic bug, comes into relief...*" (p.: 173).

Faulkner's images in *As I Lay Dying* even become surrealist, as, by the way, to cease side-tracking for a moment, do some of those used by Eliot in his *W.Land* (ll. 69-70; 380):

"... (D.Dell's)eyes *within them I can see Peabody's back..... perhaps in Peabody's back two of those worms which work surreptitious and steady through you and out the other side ...*" (p.: 81)

"... *Cash broke his leg and now the sawdust is running out. He is bleeding to death ...*" (p.: 164)

¹⁹ See: pp 7,12,13,34,61,77,84,104,111,114,117,124,126,129,130,144,165,166,168,174,175,181...

"... (Jewel) *runs silver in the moonlight* ... " (p. : 173).

Other figurative uses present in the book are Simile and Personification²⁰. Simile is extremely abundant²¹. Darl is prone to proceed by comparison as befits poetic uses of language and his analogies basically offer the "as" / "like" realizations and seem intent on descriptive precision (to name but a few):

"path straight AS a plumb line" (: 7); "eyes LIKE wood" (: 7); "boards ... AS gold, LIKE soft gold" (: 8); "Jewel...flows... LIKE the lash of a whip" (: 14); "drops... big AS buckshot" (: 62); "eyes ... LIKE two round peas in two thimbles" (: 81); "He sounded LIKE a cricket in the grass" (: 106); "His eyes are pale AS two bleached chips" (: 114); "Jewel's horse looks LIKE a patchwork quilt hung on a line" (: 129); "eyes ... LIKE marbles on a gaudy velvet cloth" (: 145) etc.

As the book advances Similes become more far-fetched and richer in implication as in the famous log-passage:

"... *I saw the log. It surged up out of the water and stood for an instant upright upon that surging and heaving desolation like Christ* ... " (p.: 116)

or on the coldness of July water:

"... *It is like hands moulding and prodding at the very bones*... " (p.: 126)

or on the restored peacefulness of the river:

"... *It looks peaceful, like machinery does after you have watched it and listened to it for a long time* ... " (p.: 130)

or on Addie's deep sense of frustration and isolation:

"... *I would lie by him hearing the dark voicelessness coming down like the cries of the geese out of the wild darkness in the old terrible nights, fumbling at the deeds like orphans to whom are pointed out in a crowd two faces and told, That is your father, your mother.* " (p.: 138)²²

Other Simile manifestations are either attributive and singularly concerned with Addie, a coincidence that, as we shall see, associates the sensibilities of Darl and Vardaman:

"... *Your mother was a horse* ... " (: 168)

"... *Jewel's mother is a horse* ... " (: 75)

or predicative:

"... *a rushing straw upon the furious tide of Jewel's despair* ... " (: 78)

Vardaman's "poetry of the child" (p. 53) mainly springs from his imperfect or partial apprehension of the reality that is his mother's death and death in general due to his tender age. Consequently he reacts with the full logic of innocence (i.e. blaming Dr. Peabody (: 45,46), boring holes in the coffin so that his mother can breathe (: 155),

²⁰ pp.: 78, 111, 113, 118, 126 ...

²¹ pp.: 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 61, 62, 75, 78, 81, 101, 106, 114, 116, 117, 125, 126, 129, 130, 144, 145, 168, 173, 174, 175, 202

²² Note.- See Faulkner's *Mississippi Poems*, n° IV ("Wild Geese")

chasing the buzzards over his mother's coffin (: 154, 167) and repeatedly associating in his mind the event of his mother's death and his catching a large fish). This type of logic appears verbally restrained on the formal level of the child's monologues.

Vardaman's poetic use of language makes me think of, as I have mentioned, the formal restraint proper to Emily Dickinson's poetry and later Imagistic manifestations. This use is closely linked, among other things, to the haunting association in the child's mind of both his mother's and a large fish's death, an association that starts in Vardaman's very first monologue (: 45) and that prompts him to make a use of language which is both proper (out of childish logic) and improper (abstract) of a child his age.

Once Vardaman learns of his mother's death he begins to cry and considers his fish: "... *cut into pieces of not-fish now* ..." (: 45), and once his subsequent anger has subsided he thinks again of the fish: "... *Cooked and et. Cooked and et.* ..." (: 48) i.e. done for like his mother. The association goes on in the following monologue through concrete and abstract reasoning:

"... *if Cash nails the box up, she is not a rabbit if she lets him it is not her.....I saw when it did not be her..... now it's all chopped up and tomorrow it will be cooked and et and she will be him* ..." (: 55)

until the child's psychological process finally produces one of the stunning poetic images in the book, a mixture of depth and naivety: "... *My mother is a fish* ..." (: 67), an idea that will not leave him for the rest of the book (: 79,80,120,154,155).

This simple attributive Simile has interesting implications. It connects, as I have said, the sensibilities of the two brothers. For Darl "Jewel's mother is a horse" (: 75,168), he establishes the analogy between Jewel's passion for horses and filial love; for Vardaman his mother's death has been the most important event in his short life after his catching a huge fish (she even smells as the fish does, : 172) therefore both events become analogically transcendent in the child's mind and hence the apparent simplicity and real psychological depth of the association. Vardaman's or Faulkner's analogy, by the way, makes me also think of Trinculo's words in *The Tempest* (II.2) on beholding Caliban: "... What have we here -- a man or a fish? -- dead or alive? A fish, he smells like a fish;..... a very ancient and fish-like smell ..." (ll. 24-27).

The symbolic element that underpins *As I Lay Dying* also offers interesting similarities with the same element in *The Waste Land*. In both works the authors make similar use of symbolism. Faulkner like T.S.Eliot makes use of universal symbols (: land, water, and fire) encompassing a wide range of meaning.

The first one "land" definitely brings the two works together. In this context let us go back momentarily to the destination of the Bundrens' journey: Jefferson (p. 52).

The symbolic connotations of the name (Thomas Jefferson, father of the Declaration of Independence and its egalitarian message) as well as the fact that the Bundrens do really reach it, may deceptively suggest hopeful intimations to the reader. Yet the effect of reaching Jefferson is considerably negative: Darl is put into an asylum,

Addie (the only strand to keep the family together) is definitely buried, and Anse just solves his material problems (false teeth, new wife).

Consequently, Faulkner is using Jefferson's name, say, "in vain" for referring to the capital-city of his Yoknapatawpha County and in so doing the latter ironically mirrors Eliot's *Waste Land* transferred to the State of Mississippi. Faulkner's "New" South in *As I Lay Dying* is just a land of material and above all spiritual poverty, inhabited by "dead eyes" and "blind men" (: 130), a land devoid of Faulkner's "old verities and truths of the heart", a land so utterly lost that it is impervious ("*Meet Mrs. Bundren*": 202) to the nobility of at least one of those "old verities": sacrifice (Addie, Cash), as a result of which its eventual regeneration is much less likely than that of Eliot's "Waste Land". This last statement is made evident by the other two highlighted symbols: water and fire.

The "water" symbol in *The Waste Land* is perhaps the dominant one inasmuch as it turns out to be, in principle, the only remedy to the overall sterility. Consequently the symbol has, on the one hand, positive connotations: water (thunder, rain) heralds and engenders physical and also spiritual regeneration in *The Waste Land* and its inhabitants. But, on the other hand, water in Eliot's poem has also negative traits: the danger of "death by drowning", which in turn becomes something positive: death as the only road to Resurrection. Besides, of all the elements and realms concerned with water used by Eliot only one is exclusively negative: the river (ll. 173 ff; 266ff), and it is precisely the river which is the only constant aquatic realm related to the water symbol in *As I Lay Dying*.

In Faulkner's book the river, "... *the dark current ... the waste and mournful water...*" (:111) basically has negative connotations: danger of almost physical death for Cash and Jewel blindly bent on crossing it with the wagon unbalanced (: 114) despite the tremendous flood splendidly described in what is undoubtedly Darl's best monologue in the book. Likewise this flood passage contains both the work's dramatic and symbolic climaxes (Gresset: 222).

The latter materialises in the famous episode of the "log", which causes the destruction of the wagon, enigmatically compared by Darl to the figure of Christ (" like Christ" : 116). This comparison is extremely eye-catching and profound. The "log" is first "Christ", then "... *the hand of God...*" (: 121) i.e. in all events a transcendental element for Faulkner like, for instance, the "rock" for Eliot in *The Waste Land* . M.Gresset highlights the importance of the object in Faulkner's fictional universe where sight is the major sense: "... An object looms up, imposes itself, becomes obvious, without warning or preparation...", the object is progressively acquiring deeper and deeper implications: "... By virtue simply of being there, this object immediately raises, for whomever looks at it, **the problem of his or her own existence ...**" (Gresset: 223 my emphasis) hence the invariably serious and even ominous tone of Darl's monologue: "... *Before us the thick dark current runs . It talks up to us in a murmur become ceaseless and myriad, the yellow surface dimpled monstrously into fading swirls travelling along the surface for an instant, silent, impermanent, and profoundly significant, as though just beneath the surface something huge and alive walked for a moment of lazy alertness out*

of and into light slumber again. ... etc.” (: 111), as well as the appropriateness of the “log-Christ” analogy.

The setting cannot be more fitting for an existential outburst. The universal river-life analogy seems obvious and so we hear Darl talk of the: “... *single monotony of desolation leaning with that terrific quality..... as though we had reached the place where the motion of the wasted world..... accelerates just before the final precipice as though the space between us were time ...*” (:115 my emphasis).

Plunged into the whirlpools of the river and life, the characters have suddenly to face something static, solid, for which they are not prepared, whose worth they cannot appreciate (except for Darl, by intuition: “like Christ“). In that Faulknerian desolation where the “fish“, the traditional symbol for Christ’s resurrection, has become merely something dead (“not-fish now“ : 45; “ now... chopped up“: 55) and where the characters almost perish physically as they have already perished spiritually, and where only Addie, the dead mother, is “safe“, hence the recovery of her coffin from the waters.

The “fire“ symbol in *The Waste Land* is no less transcendental and gradually comes to be regarded in an increasingly less unfavourable light with three fundamental connotations: a) as a symbol of everlasting damnation (Hell), b) of temporary suffering (Purgatory), c) of purification and spiritual illumination (Buddha, Holy Spirit, in “The Fire Sermon”).

In *As I Lay Dying* the fire- symbol lacks positive connotations. In Faulkner’s book this element shows up fully in the barn fire episode (: 173ff) where it turns out to be radically destructive: “... *an abrupt and soundless explosion as the whole loft of the barn takes fire at once, as though it had been stuffed with powder...*” (: 173) and started with an equally destructive intention by the only character anxious to put an end to the tragically grotesque situation by setting fire to Addie’s corpse (: 184).

Darl’s plans apparently fail in so far as Jewel (after saving the animals) rescues the coffin from the flames (: 176, 178), and in this way Addie’s prophecy becomes partly fulfilled: “... *He (= Jewel)..... will be my salvation. He will save me from the water and from the fire...*” (: 133). And I say partly because in Addie’s circumstances her “salvation“ can only be figurative, can only have a spiritual import, and, in this sense, Jewel does **not** save her, since when he recovers her corpse from the river or from the burning barn he deprives his mother symbolically of both regeneration (by water) and purification (by fire) hence the tragic irony of Faulkner’s book which points to a situation of irreversible chaos, which goes beyond death, and, consequently, as I have repeated in these pages, the greater pessimism pervading the Faulknerian “Waste Land“.

Notwithstanding *As I Lay Dying*, in my view, still fulfils Faulkner’s dictum: “... (man) *will prevail ...*” (p. 45) in the shy , generous, and upright figure of Cash the craftsman who delivers the last monologue in the book (: 206ff). Because Cash has in a basic or rudimentary way the attributes that in Faulkner’s view define or should define the human condition: a) “spirit” (“... *I don’t know if a little music ain’t about the nicest thing a fellow can have...*” : 206), b) “compassion” (“... *What a shame Darl couldn’t be to*

enjoy it too...": 208), c) "sacrifice" and "endurance" (p. 45) as is perfectly reflected in his behaviour throughout the book.

And in this last sense Faulkner's and Eliot's respective "Waste Lands" once again reveal their proximity, hypertext and hypotext coalesce. Eliot's message of "give" and "sympathize" in *The Waste Land* (ll. 402,412,419) can be seen to converge with the aforesaid human attributes of generosity and compassion which also for William Faulkner are the only way out for modern man's existential dilemma.

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