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LIFE AND DEATH IN THE 1930s RURAL SOUTH: GENDER, POVERTY, AND SPIRITUAL DISILLUSIONMENT IN WILLIAM FAULKNER'S *AS I LAY DYING* (1930)

Abstract

This article explores how poverty and cultural expectations shape life, death, and mourning in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. Focusing on Addie Bundren, it highlights the intersection of gender, class, and spiritual disillusionment in the rural South of the 1930s. Addie's emotional isolation, her relationship to religion and motherhood, and her disconnect from the rural community reveal the limited roles available to women and the failure of traditional belief systems during economic hardship. The grotesque treatment of her body, the crude funeral rituals, and the family's self-serving motivations during the burial journey all demonstrate how difficult socioeconomic conditions distort mourning. By combining feminist interpretations of Addie Bundren with cultural theories of emotion and historical sources – such as funeral customs and the social realities of the American South during the Great Depression – this article reframes mourning and emotional deprivation in *As I Lay Dying* as shaped by poverty, gender norms, and cultural expectations that demand survival and silence rather than the expression of grief or emotional needs.

Keywords: gender; class; American South; death; emotional deprivation; William Faulkner; *As I Lay Dying*

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ŽIVOT I SMRT NA RURALNOME JUGU 1930-IH: ROD, SIROMAŠTVO I DUHOVNO RAZOČARANJE U FAULKNEROVU ROMANU *DOK LEŽAH NA SAMRTI* (1930.)

Sažetak

Ovaj rad istražuje kako siromaštvo i kulturna očekivanja oblikuju život, smrt i žalovanje u romanu *Dok ležah na samrti* Williama Faulknera. Usre-dotočujući se na Addie Bundren, rad ističe isprepletenost roda, društve-noga položaja i duhovnoga razočaranja na ruralnome Jugu 1930-ih. Addie-na emocionalna izoliranost, njezin odnos prema religiji i majčinstvu te od-vojenost od seoske zajednice otkrivaju koliko su uloge dostupne ženama bile ograničene te kako su tradicionalni sustavi vjerovanja zakazivali pod teretom ekonomskih poteškoća. Groteskan odnos prema njezinu tijelu, surovi pogrebni rituali i sebične motivacije članova obitelji tijekom puta na ukop odražavaju način na koji teški socioekonomski uvjeti iskrivljuju proces žalovanja. Kombinirajući feminističke interpretacije Addie Bun-dren s teorijama emocija i povijesnim izvorima – poput pogrebnih običaja i analize društvene stvarnosti američkoga Juga tijekom Velike depresije – ovaj rad vidi žalovanje i emocionalnu nedostupnost u romanu *Dok ležah na samrti* kao oblikovane siromaštvom, rodnim normama i kulturnim očekivanjima koja zahtijevaju preživljavanje i šutnju, a ne izražavanje tuge ili emocionalnih potreba.

Ključne riječi: rod; društveni položaj; američki Jug; smrt; emocionalna nedostupnost; William Faulkner; *Dok ležah na samrti*

Introduction

The narrative of William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* centers on the death of Addie Bundren, whose "unusual" final wish to be buried in Jefferson, forty miles from her rural northern Mississippi home, places a heavy burden on her impoverished family. As the Bundrens transport her decomposing body in a mule-drawn wagon, they must navigate treacherous terrain, summer heat, and public scorn. However, this difficult journey also reveals deeper social and emotional disturbances, as the characters' actions often seem strange or emotionally inadequate.

Combining theories of emotion with the historical and social context of the rural South in the 1930s, this article examines the interconnectedness of emotional deprivation, class, and gender in the novel. Emotional deprivation is understood as the characters' inability to articulate care and grief, and the damaged forms of attachment that structure their family relationships. Class is approached through Raymond Williams' understanding of the term as denoting social divisions in which social position is made rather than merely inherited (1983, p. 61), while gender is understood, following Joan W. Scott, as "a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and . . . a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (1986, p. 1067).

Through close reading, the article integrates feminist interpretations of Addie Bundren with Batja Mesquita's cultural theory of emotion from *Between Us: How Cultures Create Emotions* (2022). Mesquita's view of emotions as shaped by culture is especially valuable for examining the Bundrens' emotional lives not merely as private psychological states, but as outcomes of social relations, family structures, poverty, gender expectations, and cultural norms. To provide historical context, the article references historians such as Jack Temple Kirby, whose work highlights the social realities of the American South during the Great Depression, and Zoey Alderman-Tuttle, whose research on Depression-era tenant farmers in the Piedmont South contextualizes rural practices surrounding death and burial. Critics such as John T. Matthews and Cheryl Lester have examined the novel in relation to historical conditions. Matthews

places *As I Lay Dying* within the contexts of modernization, capitalism, consumer culture, and the machine age, while Lester interprets the Bundrens' journey in terms of rural depopulation, migration, poverty, and social dislocation. Although Matthews and Lester analyze the historical forces shaping the novel, their discussions do not specifically address gender or the Bundren family's emotional responses to Addie's death and burial. This article addresses these aspects by shifting focus from historical pressures alone to how such pressures are registered within family relations, mourning, gendered expectations, and emotionally deprived forms of attachment. It argues that the Bundrens' actions should not be read merely as grotesque, eccentric, or psychologically individual, but as emotional responses shaped by class, gender, and the pressures of the Depression-era rural South.

Class, Gender, and the Historical Realities of the Rural South

Although Faulkner may have needed six weeks to finish As I Lay Dying (1930)[1], the novel, considered "one of modernist literature's most thematically abstract and aesthetically elite works" (Matthews, 1992, p. 83), has been the subject of extensive scholarly analysis for years. The novel follows a family grappling with the trauma of their mother Addie's death while also depicting the disappearance of the old Southern ways. Given how important Southern culture was for Faulkner – his "sense of history and his sense of participation in a living tradition" (Brooks, 1990, p. 2) are central to his writing[2] – this article interprets the actions and

[1] "I wrote *As I Lay Dying* in six weeks without changing a word" (Faulkner qtd. in Atkinson, 2005, p. 18).

[2] In a 1957 interview at the University of Virginia, where he served as the school's first Writer-in-Residence, Faulkner was asked about authors who wrote about a disappearing South, the aristocracy's attachment to old ways, and writers who revolted against them. He replied: "He's [the writer] writing about people. He is using the material which he knows, the tools which are at hand, and so he uses the instinct or the desire or whatever you will call it of the old people to be reactionary and tory, to stick to the old ways. It's simply a condition, and since it is a condition it lives and breathes, and it is valid as material." ("Faulkner in the University") The interview with William Faulkner can be heard here: https://faulkner.lib.virginia.edu/display/wfaudio31

motivations of the characters as deeply influenced by the harsh socio-economic realities of the rural American South in the 1930s.

As I Lay Dying was published in 1930, during a period of significant demographic and economic upheaval in the South – a region that, as Kirby describes, endured "a long period of persisting rural poverty, of sharecropping and mule power, and of semiprimitive backwoods and mountain cultures" (Kirby, 1987, p. xiv). By 1960, nearly nine million people had left the region. The South was the last area to undergo modernization, and the resulting changes were experienced with "pain, shock, and anguish" (Lester, 2005, p. 32). Modernization accelerated the collapse of rural life: depleted land, the boll weevil, and falling crop prices devastated small farmers, while events such as World War I, the Great Depression, and New Deal programs forced rural Southerners to choose between clinging to a disappearing way of life or adapting to a new, often disorienting, social and economic system. With cotton prices collapsing in the late 1920s – the worst occurring in 1929, the summer before Faulkner began *As I Lay Dying* (Matthews, 1992, p. 84) - the small farmer became economically endangered and struggled to survive by selling labor and other goods, such as timber, on the market. The old aristocracy was disappearing, and to write about this vanishing world felt, in Faulkner's words, like an attempt "if not the capture of that world and the feeling of it as you'd preserve a kernel or a leaf to indicate the lost forest, at least to keep the evocative skeleton of the desiccated [sic] leaf" (Faulkner qtd. in Matthews, 1992, p. 84).

Although *As I Lay Dying* does not make these historical conditions its explicit thematic center, they remain embedded in the Bundrens' poverty, social marginalization, and responses to Addie's death. Addie's wish to be buried in Jefferson brings these issues into focus, driving the novel's action and revealing crucial differences between her and Anse. Her desire to leave the rural space of her married life and be buried in town highlights the divide between country and town that runs throughout the novel, exposing broader social, historical, class, and gender tensions.

Anse's hostile attitude toward town is evident from the beginning of the novel. Anse has not been to town for twelve years and repeatedly

tells people, "if he ever sweats, he will die" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 17). He criticizes roadwork because roads represent movement and change: "Durn that road . . . A-laying there, right up to my door, where every bad luck that comes and goes is bound to find it" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 26). For Anse, movement means disruption, risk, and loss of identity. When he first meets Addie and learns she is from Jefferson, he feels compelled to justify himself: "I got a little property I'm forehanded; I got a good honest name. I know how town folks are, but maybe when they talk to me" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 106). Throughout the novel, he expresses resentment toward the townspeople and the ease of their lives: "Nowhere in this sinful world can an honest, hardworking man profit. It takes them that runs the stores in the towns, doing no sweating, living off of them that sweats. It aint the hardworking man, the farmer. Sometimes I wonder why we keep at it… But now I can get them teeth. That will be a comfort. It will" (Faulkner, 1935, pp. 110-11). Anse's fixation on the new teeth he plans to buy in Jefferson highlights the broader rural–urban divide in the novel, where the town represents both temptation and a threat to traditional ways of life.

Addie's wish to be buried in town separates her from her husband and children, who were raised in the country and feel inferior to townspeople. When Dewey Dell reflects on her sexual encounter with Lafe, she regretfully says, "I don't see why he didn't stay in town. We are country people, not as good as town people" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 40). Vardaman, Addie's youngest son, fantasizes about owning an electric toy train but believes he cannot have it because he is a country boy: "Why aint I a town boy, pa?" (Faulkner, 1935, pp. 65–66). When the Bundrens arrive in Mottson and Jefferson with Addie's eight-day-old corpse, they are met with contempt and ridicule for their perceived backwardness. Upon their arrival, people remark, "It must have been like a piece of rotten cheese coming into an ant-hill" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 125). The doctor is shocked to see Cash's broken leg "fixed" with cement: "God Amighty, why didn't Anse carry you to the nearest sawmill and stick your leg in the saw? That would have cured it" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 146). Dewey Dell is dismissed by the pharmacist Moseley, who patronizes her for trying

to buy an abortifacient: "[G]o back home and tell your pa, if you have one, and let him make somebody buy you a wedding license… Me, a respectable druggist, that's kept store, and raised a family, and been a church member for fifty-six years in this town" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 124). The Bundrens face contempt from both white and Black townspeople, who see them as socially inferior and label them as members of a lower class. These tensions between town and country stem from the harsh conditions of rural life in the South, where poverty drives people to desperate acts for survival. This social context also explains Addie's alienation, as her emotional isolation is inseparable from the class and gender conditions in which she lives.

Faulkner presents Addie as an intelligent woman, a fact underscored by her work as a schoolteacher – the only socially acceptable profession for unmarried women in the rural South of the 1920s. As a schoolteacher, Addie cannot connect with her students, who seem incapable of feeling as deeply as she does. This compels her to whip them in an effort to make them connect with her: "I would look forward to the times when they faulted, so I could whip them… I would think with each blow of the switch: Now you are aware of me!" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 105). Addie's behavior can be read as a desperate attempt to bridge "the unbridgeable void between her being and their beings" (Flaum, "Elucidating Addie Bundren in *As I Lay Dying*") resulting from her students' difficult socioeconomic position. In the prime of her life and driven by vitality, Addie simply "takes" Anse (Faulkner, 1935, p. 105). However, when she gives birth to Cash, her first son, she feels the inadequacy of words for her new role: "That was when I learned that words are no good; that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 106). The next pregnancy, with Darl, feels like a betrayal: "Then I found that I had Darl. At first, I would not believe it. Then I believed that I would kill Anse. It was as though he had tricked me, hidden within a word like within a paper screen and struck me in the back through it" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 107). Addie does not want to have any more children, but Anse replies, "Nonsense . . . you and me aint nigh done chapping yet, with just two" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 107). Addie realizes she was deceived into

this life "by words older than Anse or love, and that the same word had tricked Anse too" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 107), which prompts her to recall her father's bleak words: "the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 108) - an echo of a Calvinist credo in which the true reward awaits people after this earthly life. Addie's awareness of the emptiness, insufficiency, and inadequacy of words leads her to create her own system of beliefs as a survival mechanism:

> . . . Addie inverts the word "sin" so that it takes on a positive and creative meaning for her. Words such as "terrible" and "violation" also become positive in Addie's consciousness, as they signify passion, power, and feeling. Likewise, although Addie says that names do not "matter," she loads Jewel's name with meaning. Re-appropriating and manipulating language becomes a means for Addie to negotiate power within a culture she finds stifling and "dead." (Wood, 1993, p. 108)

In a world that forbids passion, sin, and desire, and offers death as salvation, Addie transforms language to survive and begins an extra-marital affair with the minister Whitfield, believing that "man must assert himself through some unique gesture to indicate that he has lived" (Brooks, 1990, p. 153).

Addie's feelings about motherhood, sexuality, and religion set her apart from other women in the South, who were expected to lead more conventional lives: "As wife of a struggling farmer in the South, Addie would have been grounded in her body, including how much work she could do and how many children she could bear" (Wood, 1993, p. 104). Anse thus comments on the dying Addie:

> It's a hard life on women, for a fact. Some women. I mind my mammy lived to be seventy or more. Worked every day, rain or shine; never a sick day since her last chap was born until one day she kind of looked around her and then she went and taken that lace-trimmed night-gown she had had forty-five years and never wore out of the chest and put it on and laid down on the bed and pulled the covers up and shut her eyes. (Faulkner, 1935, p. 23)

Addie is often described as "traditionally mute" by feminist theorists (Wannamaker, "Viewing Addie Bundren Through a Feminist Lens"). She does not leave her unhappy life and fulfills her duty as a wife: "I gave Anse the children. I did not ask for them. I did not even ask him for what he could have given me: not-Anse. That was my duty to him, to not ask that, and that duty I fulfilled" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 107). However, although Addie does not leave her husband, her inner life is quite rich. She silently takes revenge, making a power move: "my revenge would be that he would never know I was taking revenge. And when Darl was born I asked Anse to promise me to take me back to Jefferson when I died" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 107). While Addie appears to lead a conventional life, her wish to be buried away from her family is controversial, as shown in the words of her neighbor and foil, Cora Tull: "A woman's place is with her husband and children, alive or dead. Would you expect me to want to go back to Alabama and leave you and the girls when my time comes, that I left of my own will to cast my lot with yours for better and worse, until death and after?" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 19). Cora's words express a communal moral code that defines womanhood by endurance, marital loyalty, and the expectation that a woman's identity and place remain bound to her family even after death, leaving no room for separation or autonomy. Building on Addie's alienation from her family and community, the next section examines how socioeconomic conditions further distort the Bundrens' relationships and emotions.

The Rural South and Emotional Deprivation

From the very beginning of the novel, the Bundrens are depicted as poor residents of the rural South, whose lives are shaped by poverty, hard physical labor, emotional deprivation, and social marginalization. Addie's miserable life, the family's dire financial situation, and their status as poor farmers are underscored by Addie's impending death. When Dr. Peabody arrives as Addie is near death and remarks, "He has wore her out at last" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 29), the harsh reality of Addie's life becomes clear. Similarly, Tull, Addie and Anse's neighbor, reflects after

Addie's death, "Wherever she went, she has her reward in being free of Anse Bundren" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 59). Anse's neglect of Addie is evident because he calls the doctor only when Addie is already dying and beyond help: "Damn the money . . . Did you ever hear of me worrying a fellow before he was ready to pay?" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 31). This negligence reflects a common practice among poor Southern farmers, who delayed calling doctors and relied on home remedies until it was too late (Alderman-Tuttle, 2012, p. 13).

In poverty, death was a familiar, domestic experience, endured within the family rather than entrusted to professionals. Viewing death as an everyday reality, the Bundrens treat home-built coffins as normal, relying on Cash instead of purchasing a casket. Cash constructs Addie's coffin while she is still alive, holding the boards to the window for her approval – an act that adds a grotesque intimacy to the scene: "She is propped on the pillow, with her head raised so she can see out the window, and we can hear him every time he takes up the adze or the saw" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 11). The ominous sound of Cash's adze echoes through the novel like a ticking clock marking death's approach: "Chuck Chuck Chuck" (Faulkner, 1935, pp. 8-9). Though practical and cost-saving, making the coffin at home also reveals how poverty enforces emotional restraint; the emotional toll is evident in Jewel's words: "I said if you'd just let her alone. Sawing and knocking, and keeping the air always moving so fast on her face that when you're tired you can't breathe it, and that goddamn adze going. One lick less. One lick less… One lick less. One lick less and we could be quiet" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 14).

When Addie dies, her children cannot afford to grieve; both Dewey Dell and Cash are forced by their father, Anse, to immediately continue with their lives as if nothing has happened. In *Between Us: How Cultures Create Emotions* (2022), Batja Mesquita describes emotions as "part and parcel of our social and cultural lives" (p. 26), shaped by our cultures and communities. Consequently, Dewey Dell's and Cash's emotions are shaped by their impoverished surroundings. The following quote, though lengthy, is important because it shows how Cash and Dewey Dell, in shock from their mother's death, are forced to immediately snap

out of it and continue with their tasks. Both are unable to move from their mother's body and stand still, as if frozen, ignoring their father's words:

> "She taken and left us," pa says. Cash does not look at him. "How nigh are you done?" pa says. Cash does not answer. He enters, carrying the saw. "I reckon you better get at it," pa says… Cash looks down at her face. He is not listening to pa at all. He does not approach the bed. He stops in the middle of the floor, the saw against his leg, his sweating arms powdered lightly with sawdust, his face composed… Cash is not listening. He is looking down at her peaceful, rigid face fading into the dusk as though darkness were a precursor of the ultimate earth, until at last the face seems to float detached upon it, lightly as the reflection of a dead leaf. "There is Christians enough to help you," pa says. Cash is not listening. After a while he turns without looking at pa and leaves the room. Then the saw begins to snore again… Pa looks down at the face, at the black sprawl of Dewey Dell's hair, the outflung arms, the clutched fan now motionless on the fading quilt. "I reckon you better get supper on," he says. Dewey Dell does not move. "Git up, now, and put supper on," pa says. (Faulkner, 1935, p. 33–34)

In the previous quote, one sees how their social position and financial difficulties force Cash and Dewey Dell to suppress their emotions. Dewey Dell, described as a "pawn in a patriarchal setting" (Tebbetts, "Treasure in the Ground: Getting Mother's Body's Dialogue with *As I Lay Dying*"), responds to her father as a servant responds to a master, leaves the room and is immediately diverted from her grief, becoming absorbed in her own thoughts about her unwanted pregnancy and about Dr. Peabody, who could be a solution to her problem: "*You* [Dr. Peabody] *could do so much for me if you just would. If you just knew*" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 34; italics in original). She has no time for grief because she must worry about her own future, as she will soon become a mother herself: "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. It is because in the wild and outraged earth too soon too soon too soon. It's not that I wouldn't and

will not it's that it is too soon too soon too soon" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 76). She is unable to process the loss: "I don't know whether I can cry or not. I don't know whether I have tried to or not. I feel like a wet seed wild in the hot blind earth" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 42).

The same self-centeredness appears in Anse, who, when Addie dies, awkwardly strokes Addie's quilt but immediately turns to his own needs: "God's will be done . . . Now I can get them teeth" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 34). This grotesque shift to shopping for teeth crystallizes how mourning is distorted by need; Anse's grief, if he feels any, is displaced into consumer desire. His thoughts are not about Addie, but about himself, because now, with Addie dead, he can go to Jefferson and get a set of false teeth. Juxtaposing Addie's death with the family's self-centeredness, creates a shocking effect on readers but also reveals the ugly side of poverty.

While Anse and Dewey Dell do not grieve because they are absorbed in their own thoughts and desires, Cash, Addie's oldest son, must focus on building a coffin. The rural South demands a cold approach to death; thus, while Addie is dying, no one feels sorry for Cash. Instead, they admire his skill, as shown by Jewel's words: "One lick less until everybody that passes in the road will have to stop and see it and say what a fine carpenter he is" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 14), once again illustrating Mesquita's understanding of emotions as culturally shaped. When Addie dies, Cash does not cry but instead lists numerous reasons why he made it on the bevel:

> *I MADE it on the bevel.*
> *1. There is more surface for the nails to grip.*
> *. . .*
> *13. It makes a neater job. (Faulkner, 1935, p. 53)*

His obsessive reasoning, spanning thirteen points, transforms carpentry into ritual. This suggests that, for Cash, grief is displaced into technical precision; he cannot cry for his mother, but he can measure, cut, and bevel her coffin. As Mesquita explains, in some cultures, emotions are "located in action as much as in feelings, and… [there is] no clear distinction between the two" (2022, p. 41). In a cultural context

where emotional expression is suppressed by poverty and masculine expectations, craftsmanship becomes the socially accepted outlet for mourning. Instead of engaging in the process of "grief work" first proposed by Freud (Mesquita, 2022, p. 47), which holds that feelings need to be expressed, Cash suppresses his grief. Mesquita notes that psychologist David Matsumoto and his colleagues "found emotional suppression to be highest in national cultures that are strong on social order, norms and traditions, and power hierarchy, and lowest in national cultures that prioritize the individual and their feelings" (2022, p. 51). Although Matsumoto's study concerns national cultures, similar pressures of social order, tradition, and hierarchy can also be observed in the rural South. The Bundrens' emotional deprivation, shaped by their socioeconomic circumstances, is most evident in their muted responses to Addie's death. None of the children cry; only Dewey Dell briefly erupts when she "flings herself across Addie Bundren's knees" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 32), while Vardaman retreats in shock, "his pale face fading into the dusk like a piece of paper pasted on a failing wall" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 33).

Some critics blame Addie for her children's emotional detachment. Robert J. Kloss argues that Addie's dominance prevents her sons from connecting with women, citing their neighbor Eula Tull's remark: "I reckon Cash and Darl can get married now" (1981, p. 429). Olga Vickery describes Addie as "the source of the tensions and latent violence" within her children (qtd. in Kloss, 1981, p. 430). Yet these interpretations overlook the structural forces that shape Addie herself. Her emotional distance stems not from cruelty but from a loveless marriage, social repression, and economic deprivation; her detachment becomes a survival strategy rather than an act of malice. In resisting the community that silences her, she unintentionally disrupts her own family, most notably in the relationship between Darl and Jewel. Darl, who deliberately calls his mother "Addie," demonstrates his emotional distance even before her death. Lacking a stable maternal connection, he processes loss through spiraling self-negation: "I cannot love my mother because I have no mother" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 60). His jealous attempt to remove Jewel from Addie's deathbed reflects a family in which affection has

always been unevenly distributed, with Jewel as Addie's favorite, as seen in Darl's conversation with Dewey Dell:

> *"What you want, Darl?" I say.*
> *"She is going to die," he says. And old turkey-buzzard Tull coming to watch her die but I can fool them.*
> *"Then why are you taking Jewel?" I say.*
> *"I want him to help me load," he says. (Faulkner, 1935, p. 22)*

Moreover, when Darl takes Jewel with him to earn three dollars instead of staying home with their dying mother, it reveals the pressure of poverty: for the Bundrens, the need for money disrupts conventional mourning, care, and family presence. In contrast to the emotionally distant Darl, Jewel embodies the opposite distortion: Addie's exclusive, intense attachment creates in him a fierce, almost violent love, evident in his fantasies of protecting her and in sacrificing his precious horse. What Addie gives Jewel is "a destructive love, one in which Jewel has adopted his role as projection of Addie to express her rage against others" (Bassett, 1981, p. 129) - Jewel projects his mother's pain and isolation through violent love.

When Addie dies, each family member is affected differently, but these feelings are never openly expressed in the novel. Instead, Addie's family focuses on their own troubles, desires, and needs: Cash becomes morbidly preoccupied with building a coffin; Darl, deprived of his mother's love, descends into madness; Jewel feels an aggressive, possessive love; Dewey Dell experiences anxiety over her pregnancy; and Vardaman is confused and cannot comprehend his mother's death. Addie's children cannot grieve and must fend for themselves. Instead of dealing with their pain properly, they turn to themselves and their personal reasons for wanting to take Addie's body to Jefferson: Dewey Dell seeks an abortifacient, Cash wants a graphophone, Anse wants a new set of false teeth, and Vardaman wants bananas and a toy train. To escape the hardships of farm life, they seek material comforts, as Cash explains: "Seems like when [a fellow] comes in tired of a night, it aint nothing could rest

him like having a little music played and him resting" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 157). John T. Matthews attributes this to the process of modernization, which includes the increasing commodification of daily life, the spread of mass-market desires, and the mechanization of ordinary experience. These forces fuel the Bundrens' desire for manufactured products such as false teeth, bananas, electric toys, and mechanically reproduced music (Matthews, 1992, p. 79). For the Bundrens, the town is a "consumer paradise where everyone is made a child by wanting something better than he or she is entitled to, where every worker fantasizes about leaving the sweated-out land and sweated-out house on the other side of the river" (Matthews, 1992, p. 93). Building on this argument, because the Bundrens live in the rural South and lack even basic everyday goods, the trip to town seems to offer a temporary solution to some of their problems and a brief respite from their daily hardships. Yet such thoughts seem inappropriate, since the primary reason for going to Jefferson should be Addie's burial rather than fulfilling their own desires and needs. Calvinist funerals were typically simple, often held without a preacher and attended only by close relatives and neighbors (Alderman-Tuttle, 2012, p. 20), but Addie's funeral is even simpler. After the grave is dug, Addie is unceremoniously lowered into the ground, an event not even described in the narration. Instead, the narrative shifts to Darl being seized by family members and handed over to be taken to an asylum, with Dewey Dell, desperate because she believes Darl knows about her secret pregnancy, being the first to grab him: "But when we got it filled and covered and drove out the gate and turned into the lane where them fellows was waiting, when they come out and come on him and he jerked back, it was Dewey Dell that was on him before even Jewel could get at him" (Faulkner, 1935, p. 144).

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that in *As I Lay Dying*, poverty in the Depression-era South leads not only to material deprivation but also to emotional deprivation – a lack of space and resources for grief, love,

and connection. The collapse of the old South, the shock of modernization, and extreme poverty create an environment where people cannot afford to feel and must focus on survival. The Bundrens' inability to grieve, connect, or love is rooted in this world of poor roads, exhausted soil, failing farm economies, and religious cultures of endurance. Addie, "stuck" in the countryside, realizes that her surroundings leave no room for emotions, harming her well-being and her relationship with her children. As a coping mechanism, Addie creates her own private system of beliefs about language and religion. However, Addie is not the only one who suffers. Her children, raised in the same harsh conditions, also seem emotionally deprived. Mesquita's theory, referenced in this article, helps explain the characters' emotional deprivation as resulting from their emotions being shaped by culture, lower social status, and social environment, which push them toward self-centeredness rather than empathy or solidarity. When Addie dies, these limitations become even more apparent.

By combining feminist interpretations of Addie Bundren with historical and social context and cultural theories of emotion, this article shifts critical attention from individual pathology to the structural conditions that shape grief, motherhood, and family relations in *As I Lay Dying*. Rather than viewing the Bundrens' emotional deprivation as a moral failure or psychological deficiency, the analysis demonstrates how poverty, modernization, and cultural norms that prioritize survival, restraint, and silence over emotional expression create forms of emotional deprivation that distort mourning itself.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest that could affect the publication of this work.

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