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ADDIE'S INNER TORMENT AND STRUGGLE IN WILLIAM FAULKNER'S *AS I LAY DYING*



Zhang Qiang¹

¹Associate professor of School of Foreign Languages, Shandong Jiaotong University Correspondence: 5001 Haitang Road, Jinan, Shandong Province, China; Visiting Scholar of Beijing Foreign Studies University

ABSTRACT

As I Lay Dying is one of the greatest classics written by American novelist William Faulkner. In this novel, Faulkner created a female character Addie, who had suffered a lot in her whole life. Addie's inner heart was full of torment and she got a complicated personality, which is the root of her tragic life. This paper analyzes the causes of Addie's torment in her inner heart from three aspects: her solitary character, her rational and emotional conflicts and her intertwined love and hatred. The paper also expounds the heroine's relationship with her husband, her children and other people, revealing the personality conflict between them, which is a concrete form of Addie's suffering. At the end of this paper, the author gives a brief account on Addie's Struggle to illustrate Faulkner's expectation and real praise of American women.

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Contribution/ Originality

This study contributes to the existing literature on the female characters in Faulkner's novels. This study analyzes the causes of Addie's inner torment and her struggle with destiny. This study also expounds Addie's positive torment with Faulkner's theme which is quite few among the current studies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Addie is the key character in William Faulkner's novel *As I Lay Dying*. The novel mainly concerns the plot about Addie's death and her funeral journey to her hometown. The main characters include Addie, her husband Anse, her children and neighbors. The writer combined 59 monologues stated by these characters before and after Addie's death in this novel. Faulkner applied a multiple and comprehensive narrative mode, and the switch of characters was full of freedom. The novel is full of reality and fantasy, absurdity and suffering and foolishness and sadness. The whole book is filled with unpredictable fates and opportunities, it is a vivid description of the history of the Southern American social transition. In this novel, Addie's character was very complicated and her inner mind was quite contradictory, very few people could enter her inner heart and understand her. Although she got married, gave birth to five children, got a teaching job, even had an adulterous affair, her whole life was full of loneliness. When she was

young, she was influenced by her father's pessimism: "...the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time" (Faulkner 183). Due to her father's influence and the cruel reality, she was aloof and proud, despising the language. She was eager to be a part of others' life, but she had difficulty in communicating with others, just using extreme behaviors to prove her existence. By describing the strained relationships between Addie and her husband, children and students, Faulkner vividly depicted Addie's suffering in her inner heart and her struggle with the society.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As I Lay Dying is a domestic fiction. The writer targeted at showing relationships among human and revealing issues of human existence through the Bundrens. Hence, some critics probed into the domestic relationships in this novel. "It is a portrait of journey and a family novel" (Bleikasten 90). Andre Bleikasten made such a comment in his book *Faulkner's As I Lay Dying*. In his monograph, there is a whole chapter which discusses the characterization of the Bundrens. However, he approached the family by analyzing the characteristics, while the relationships in the family were not described in detail. He noted that: "the most essential feature of the Bundren is their division," and he concluded that "the story of the Bundrens is about a family adrift, with all its tensions and conflicts it begins with the account of a last agony and ends with scenes of hatred, violence because of their utter isolation" (99).

Because of its unique way of narration, a lot of critics were interested in studying *As I Lay Dying* from the perspectives of style and the way of narration. The writer made all the characters in this novel engage in their unique discourses, thus "centrifugally, each section established the relationship between Addie and the character whose thoughts and observations are being recorded. Linearly, each section contributes to the sequence of actions and events which attributes the plot" (Morris 167).

Women images in Faulkner's work and his attitude towards women are the focus of many scholars. Doreen (1988) described Addie as a terrible mother in *Matricide and the Mother's Revenge: As I Lay Dying*. Diana (1994) reckoned that the character of Addie was the central part in Faulkner's mutant modern version of the traditional patriarchal tragedy in *The Abjection of Addie and Other Myths of the Maternal in As I Lay Dying*. From her perspective, the heroine's figure as a mother has changed into the degraded father or a father figure role.

3. CAUSES OF ADDIE'S TORMENT IN HER INNER HEART

As I Lay Dying is actually a novel with experimental property. Faulkner consciously set up a style of interior monologue in this novel, making 15 different characters equipped with their own vivid personalities. The entire framework of this novel was composed by 59 monologues stated by these characters. Addie's torment in her inner heart is of great significance in the whole novel. Faulkner gave Addie a kind of personality full of complexity, so her inner heart was filled with repeated pains, and her inner activities were also conflictive. In this novel, the complicated relationships between Addie and her children, her husband and her students represent Addie's helplessness toward destiny and emotional distress as a southern-woman in lower-class.

3.1. Torment from Her Solitude

To begin with, Addie was a solitary person, this is the primary cause that why she had experienced varieties of pains and inner-heart sufferings. Addie had struggled with solitude during her whole life and continuously challenging the inherent suffering, but she could never escape from the constraint of solitude. Marriage with her husband and her children's birth did not prevent her from the predicament, but push her into further despair, just as she says, "my aloneness had been violated and then made whole again by the violation"(Faulkner 136). However, Addie did not completely abandon her life because of this reason. She still struggled with her miserable life by exhausting her physical and spiritual strength. In the novel, Addie's neighbor Cora deemed that Addie was a woman

of solitude. Although she lived in a lonely way, she went on living with pride, pretending that she was enjoying a beautiful life. In fact, Addie's life was full of hardships. Because of the frustrations in her life, both of Addie's kindness and affection in her inner heart were haunted greatly. She was tough, but she was lonely in her inner-heart, because when facing various setbacks in life, she was not able to escape from the tragic constraints. All she could do was to protect her only self-esteem.

3.2. Torment from the Conflict between Rationality and Sensibility

The rationality and sensibility in Addie's personality is also very complicated. In the first place, Addie possesses the wisdom of rationality, and Addie had been applying her profound wisdom and insight to understand the world during her whole life. But Addie was also equipped with sincere sensibility, and this kind of sensibility made her ignore the criticism from the secular world. So she was eager to pursue the true love in her inner heart. Although facing a marriage without love, Addie never thought about escaping from the constraint. She still stuck to her responsibility as a mother in spite of the miserable marriage. There is a sole monologue stated by Addie in this novel, and in this monologue she talked about the pain in her heart. Although her neighbor Cora and other people spoke ill of her, she ignored these gossips and stuck to her responsibility as a mother, never complaining or regretting.

3.3. Intertwined Love and Hatred in Addie's Personality

Love and hatred are intertwined in Addie's inner heart. Addie devoted her selfless love to her children, and she tried her utmost to accomplish her mission as a mother. She loved her family as well, and this kind of love was also selfless. As her husband said, no other women could be as diligent as Addie. Addie's kids not only got their mother's warmth and care, but also benefited a lot from the social experience taught by their mother during their growing process. From the memory of her son Darl in the novel, Addie expected that her children could be righteous people, and she always tell them do not cheat others. She demanded that her children should not take deception as their way of making a living even if they are living a poor life.

Nevertheless, Addie was living in a marriage without love, so her inner heart was always in pain. She showed her hatred not only against her husband's laziness, but also her own selfishness. In order to pursue her true love in her inner world, she had an affair with a priest regardless of any cost. But she was hurt by different men over and over, making her very exhausted. As her hatred continuously emerged from her heart, finally an idea of revenging the tragic fate came into her mind, which is an outlet of her intense hatred. Therefore, Addie came up with quite a special idea to abreact her uncontrollable hatred: asking her husband Anse to make a commitment to carry her body back to her parent's hometown after she died. We can infer from the above that Addie is a conflictive character who had intertwined love and hatred in her inner heart. She is a specific figure different from secular women and a complicated figure possessing different personalities. This kind of personality brought her endless torment to her inner heart.

4. ADDIE'S TORMENT FROM THE RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS

4.1. Addie's Torment from the Relationship with Her Children

In the novel *As I Lay Dying*, Addie's psychological activity and her character as a mother is the main component to perfect the heroine's personality. The female figures in Faulkner's eyes can be best illustrated in the relationship between Addie and her children. Addie gave birth to five children: Cash, Darl, Jewel, Dewey Dell and Vardaman. But in her inner heart, these children were different. Cash and Jewel were the two children who received their mother's recognition and acceptance. Cash was a carpenter, who was relatively normal compared with the other children. However, he had been making a coffin for his mother from the very beginning of the story. He lost one of his legs on

the funeral journey. Darl was the only one who had the ability to express his ideas. Moreover, he could express the ideas clearly. So he was assigned by Faulkner as the observer and narrator. But he was regarded as insane by the other family members. At the end of the story, after burying Addie, Darl was sent to a mental hospital by his family. Jewel was Addie and Whitfield's illegitimate, he was Addie's favorite child. Jewel inherited his mother's character of violence. He was similar to Darl, both of them were good at expressing themselves. But influenced by his mother, Jewel thought that language is of no use. He was also sent to the mental hospital by his father. In Darl's monologue, Jewel regarded his mother as a horse, and this reflects that his mother was full of rebellious spirit and obstinate character in Jewel's eyes. Jewel helps Addie "cross" and is her "salvation" (Faulkner 156). Darl and Jewel's attitude toward language indicated Addie's influence on her family, her children and her husband. Dewey Dell, as the only girl in the family, was very helpless under the secular constraint. When she got a premarital pregnancy, she could not turn to her family for help. On the funeral journey, she found a doctor secretly to help her to abort her baby. Because of backward thinking and people's gossip, the doctor refused to help her. In Faulkner's eyes, Dewey represents those girls who were cheated and abandoned by the society in that age. Vardaman was the youngest child in the Bundrens, he was an ignorant boy or we can even say he was an idiot. He confused his mother with a fish. He was the first to cut the fish into pieces, but then he reckoned that it was Doctor Peabody's horse that killed the fish who was also his mother. After her death, Vardaman still repeated a sentence: "That's not my mom..." (Faulkner, 53). This indicates that he was greatly confused by his mother's death. And it also reflects Addie's physical and spiritual constraints on him.

From the overall conditions of each child, we can see that Addie's kids and their family did not have any connection with happiness or harmony, even the children's mental or physical health was difficult to be guaranteed. Under the traditional institutions, women are regarded as machines for producing children and bringing them up, but Addie was not reconciled to this kind of arrangement and did not acknowledge the suffering of being a woman. Unlike the other mothers, Addie did not totally accept the coming of her children and was not willing to foster them actually. She treated her child as an incident or an accidental existence (Morris, 1989). In Addie's eyes the children were no longer valuable to herself.

In this novel, Addie intended to cultivate her children's independent character. She did not want to yield to the crucial reality and she was eager to express her inner heart feelings. She endured her miserable life silently, but resisted it firmly and the torment in her inner heart made her tough, so unconsciously, her children were gradually influenced by her. When the children were growing up, they gradually changed their attitude toward language and their ability of communication and expression became very insufficient. There was no happy or harmonious atmosphere in this family, every child was challenging the traditional constraints under their mother's influence.

4.2. Addie's Torment from the Relationship with Her Husband

Let's see the relationship between Addie and her husband. Addie married Anse for two reasons: the first reason, and also the main reason is that she wanted to get rid of her loneliness. She could hear the voice from her inner heart, so she was eager to find a husband both physically and spiritually. The second reason was that Anse was the owner of a plantation and a house. This provided Addie insurance for marrying Anse. So we can see that Addie was a clever woman. Anse, as a householder, could not do anything for his family. He could not do the house work or farm work, or undertake the responsibility of raising his children. On the contrary, Addie was a strong-minded woman and had intense influence on her children. All the children in the Bundrens inherited her personality traits. After giving birth to the first child, she found that Anse cheated her. In order to revenge on her husband, she answered the call from her rebellious cells in her body and had an adulterous affair with another man. This is the universal symbol of courageous, enlightened and rebellious women in all literary works. She no longer believed the words of Anse,

because she thought words are deceptive. So in 59 chapters of the novel, there is only one chapter which is the monologue of Addie. Beauvoir (1972) described this kind of woman in her *The Second Sex*: “The reason why they always keep silent is partly because they want to appear mysteriously, enjoying the unique experience they have. However, they are also haunted by the contradictions and conflicts they have undertaken.” Addie was haunted by loneliness and secular pressure before she married a man. After she married, she suffered from the life with her husband and giving birth to her children. Addie began to challenge the woman’s place in a family which was set by the southern tradition dominated by patriarchy. A sort of consciousness revived under the depression, intending to destroy the traditional gender structure. The traditional southern culture ignored or not really considered and fully reproduced the southern women’s life experience to a large extent. Therefore, when Faulkner was writing the Southern Myth, he was also overturning it by creating the figure of Addie at the same time. A great novelist never lacks complexity.

4.3. Addie’s Torment from the Relationship with Her Neighbours

Being independent and thoughtful, Addie might be the most educated woman in this novel, but she had an adulterous affair with a priest. Before marriage, she was a primary school teacher. However, she destroyed the image of a good teacher by violence. Addie was not a traditional type of southern rural woman, she was rebellious, pursuing an independent spiritual world. Her husband Anse not only could not meet with her demand of getting rid of loneliness, but could also not sexually satisfy her. So Addie began a passionate love affair with the priest Whitfield. Diane Robert suggests that Addie’s sexual rebellion “attack the law of the Father through its opposite, the Law of Desire.” (Robert 201) Addie could naturally acknowledge this passionate affair, while priest Whitfield did not dare to commit it because of shame. In her neighbor’s eyes, Addie was a perfect wife who could be qualified to take all the house works. In Doctor Peabody’s eyes, although Addie was physically dead, she still put the whole family under her control with her spirit. Apparently, Addie was more thoughtful and independent than her husband and lover.

4.4. Addie’s Positive “Torment” with Faulkner’s Theme

The theme of *As I Lay Dying* is in regard to Addie’s “Dying” journey. On this journey, every member of the family had undergone severe torments both before and after Addie’s death. Faulkner used 59 monologues of 15 narrators to illustrate the key character’s contradiction and conflict in the inner heart from various perspectives. The fact is that behind each narration in this novel there is a consistency made by the writer. The changes in Faulkner’s writing style also support the theme that he intended to express, that is, at the age of transition period, all people including the rural women represented by Addie were experiencing the torment and loneliness just as Addie did. Faulkner used the heroine Addie as a paintbrush to draw a picture of a world which was full of hardships and torments. However, through various narrators’ words we can feel Addie’s toughness and endurance. Therefore, after reading the novel, we do not feel hopeless about our future, and this is what Faulkner believed in: after experiencing and enduring torments the humankind is bound to flourish.

5. ADDIE’S STRUGGLE IN AS I LAY DYING

Faulkner felt deeply about his female characters in his literary career. There is an obvious difference between *As I Lay Dying* and his other works. For example, in *The Sound and The Fury* and *Light in August*, the heroines’ images are absolute good mother or sheer bad woman, but Addie was of complicated personality. She could not be judged simply by the word good or bad, and her character was in accordance with the feature of the complicated human nature. So from another perspective, this novel is more valuable to research and it can bring the readers more

significance by reading it. Although the novel is of short length, it reflects Faulkner's concern and mercy on southern women's life in that period.

In the process of creating the character of *Addie*, William Faulkner combined this figure with intense feminism, endowing Addie another feature: struggling for her life. Addie possessed multiple identities in the novel *As I Lay Dying*: she was a mother, a wife or even a corpse, in the process of transition of the roles her relationship with others also changes. As the story went forward, Faulkner focused on describing Addie's profound influence on her children and family life. Through the various destinies of her children, he further illustrated Addie's values had infiltrated into her children's mind and her family life. Faulkner revealed the independent attitude of Addie, depicting the image of strong-minded and rebellious southern mothers. The writer also made careful comparisons on the relationship between Addie and other family members, emphasizing her feminism's influence and infiltration on her whole family (Jacobus, 1986).

In the face of her husband's deception, Addie quickly revenged Anse by having an adulterous affair with priest Whitfield and giving birth to Jewel. This kind of behavior was regarded as quite rebellious and shameful at that time. However, Addie could state her experience naturally and calmly. Her firm resistance, aspirations for equal rights and independent spirit were highlighted compared with Whitfield's hypocrisy and cowardice. Faulkner expressed his attitude toward women through the 15 narrators' words, on the surface, he did not express his definite attitude as to support or resist woman. But from the deep, he revealed the rebellious and resistant personalities of southern rural women, expressing his expectation and real praise of American women.

6. CONCLUSION

Faulkner created lots of female figures in his novels. These female figures reflect a kind of impressive and prominent feeling, the construction of this kind of feeling makes the female figures more unique and charming. It also reflects the writer's understanding of women in that social situation. *As I Lay Dying* is one of the greatest novels in American literary history. In this novel, William Faulkner endowed the heroine Addie complicated characters. The writer applied very complicated narrative techniques in the whole structure of the novel. The two features endowed this novel more value for reading and research. This novel has also successfully created the figure of rural women with intense rebellious spirit, illustrating their "Torment" and "Struggle" incisively and vividly. Faulkner also revealed Addie's female characteristic which is different from ordinary women, sublimating and enriching the heroine's spiritual world and her female features. This paper analyzes Addie's inner world from two aspects: her torment and struggle, making the readers experience the heroine's complicated inner heart and appreciate Faulkner's accomplishment in literature. The paper also reveals the truths and beliefs implied in this novel, which may bring inspirations and hopes to people.

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