



UNIVERSIDAD DE OVIEDO

Faculty of Humanities

Department of English, French and German Philology

BACHELOR THESIS

BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN ENGLISH STUDIES

A Study of the Southern Gothic: William Faulkner

2002-23 Academic Year

Author: Andrea Fernández Fernández

Supervisor: Marta Fernández Morales

Oviedo, 15 May 2023

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
1. Theoretical Framework	3
1.1. <i>Historical Precedents</i>	3
1.2. <i>Literary Roots of the Southern Gothic</i>	4
1.3. <i>The Southern Gothic: Characteristics</i>	6
2. The Southern Gothic: William Faulkner and <i>As I Lay Dying</i>	9
2.1. <i>William Faulkner: Life, Work, and Literary Style</i>	9
2.2. <i>As I Lay Dying: Constructing its Characters through the Southern Gothic Characteristics</i>	14
Conclusion	27
Works Cited	29

Introduction

This dissertation studies the literary subgenre of the Southern Gothic focusing on the analysis of its most representative features and how these can be used in the construction of the characters in a novel. For this purpose, the work *As I Lay Dying*, written in 1930 by the American author William Faulkner, one of the most representative writers of the genre, will be used as corpus.

With regard to its structure, this research paper is divided into two distinct parts. The first one is devoted to the creation of a theoretical framework that will help the reader become familiar with the origins and formal characteristics of the Southern Gothic as a literary subgenre. With this aim in mind, I have decided to divide this part into three different sections. The first is devoted to the study of the historical precedents that laid the foundations for the emergence and subsequent consolidation of the Southern Gothic as an autonomous literary subgenre. To this end, special emphasis is placed on the profound social, cultural, and economic changes experienced in the southern states after their defeat in the American Civil War. A second section analyses the literary roots of the Southern Gothic by focusing on Dark Romanticism or American Gothic and Literary Naturalism, two literary movements that served as the bases for the establishment of some of the most representative characteristics of the subgenre. The last section of this part develops an exhaustive analysis of the unique characteristics that make the Southern Gothic a totally different style in literature, not only American but universal. The second half of this dissertation is centred on the analysis of the Southern Gothic through the figure of William Faulkner, an American writer known as one of the greatest and best representatives of this subgenre, concentrating on his work *As I Lay Dying* (1930). Divided into two sections, the first focuses on Faulkner's life, work, and literary style, emphasising his stylistic peculiarities by perfectly combining the elements of the Southern Gothic with those of modernism. The final section of this second part discusses how Faulkner used the most important features of the Southern Gothic to bring his characters to life in *As I Lay Dying*.

My interest in articulating my dissertation around the figure of Faulkner dates back to a research project done in my penultimate year of high school for the subject *Universal Literature*. In that task I had to investigate the life and work of the most influential modernist storytellers of the 20th century. Although I also learned about such important English-speaking authors as James Joyce or Virginia Woolf, and others such

as Marcel Proust or Franz Kafka, William Faulkner was the one who most managed to capture my attention for his very particular way of narrating his stories and his unique and unrepeatable way of looking at and understanding the world around him. It was his work *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) that introduced me for the first time to the literary universe of the Southern Gothic, the object of study of this project. However, I decided to choose *As I Lay Dying* as corpus because of the unique way in which the author builds its characters and its plot, making use of the characteristics of this subgenre.

The methodology used to carry out this research work has been based, fundamentally, on the close reading of Faulkner's novel. I have consulted different sources and academic articles that study his technique and work as well as the Southern Gothic literary movement itself. I consider it important to mention that, given the length of a dissertation such as this one, and taking into account the large number of narrative voices contained in *As I Lay Dying*, the analysis of the construction of its characters through the features of the Southern Gothic focuses only on seven of them. In this way, it is the members of the protagonist family, the Bundrens, who are studied, as they are the most important figures in the plot.

Bearing in mind everything that I have mentioned in this introduction, I believe that the interest of this dissertation lies in bringing the reader closer to a literary current that may not be too well known. My intention, therefore, is to encourage the reader to approach works that, while not easy to read due to their harsh subject matter, their sometimes erratic and flawed characters, and their peculiar style, reflect the darker reality of the American South.

1. Theoretical Framework

The first two sections below are devoted to the development of a theoretical framework in relation to the literary genre of the Southern Gothic, presenting both the historical framework in which it emerged and the literary precedents that laid the foundations for its appearance and subsequent consolidation as an autonomous genre. Next in order, the last section of this part deals with the characteristics of the Southern Gothic that make it a different subgenre within American literature.

1.1. Historical Precedents

The origin of the United States as a nation was, from the moment of its birth, marked by violence and armed conflict. It came into being after the outbreak of the War of Independence that pitted the original Thirteen Colonies against the British Empire and culminated in the victory of the former in the late 18th century. The country's expansion was not without violence. Although some territories were peacefully annexed by purchase from other countries – as in the case of Louisiana in 1803 – the conquest of other territories such as Florida, California or most of the lands that make up today's southwest took place through the outbreak of armed conflicts. The publication in 1845 of “Annexation”, an article written by John L. O’Sullivan, laid the foundations of what is known as Manifest Destiny, which was “used to express the belief that it was the destiny of the United States to expand across the American continent” (Mountjoy, 2009, p. 9), justifying episodes such as the Trail of Tears, which occurred in the 1830s, or the existence of slavery in the southern states, as it perpetuated “the idea of racial superiority” (Mountjoy, 2009, p. 13).

Although the Declaration of Independence of the United States held that all men were equal, the country was divided in two socially, politically, and economically distinct zones. While the northern states fostered an economy based on industrialisation and trade, the southern states were organised in a slave system that based its wealth on the exploitation of cotton, tobacco, and sugar plantations. As new territories were added to American soil, the differences between the two areas became more pronounced: the rapid industrial and commercial development of the North, as well as the appearance of a strong Republican Party and the quick spread of abolitionist ideology, as slavery came to be seen as “a profound economic, political, religious and moral problem” (Ayers, 2005, p. 13), only widened the gap between North and South. All this, coupled with

other factors such as the election as President of the country of Abraham Lincoln, who had a deeply abolitionist ideology, caused the southern states to proclaim their secession in 1860, thus creating the Confederacy. The economic and political interests of the North, pitted against the interests of the Confederate states, eventually triggered the Civil War, an armed conflict that lasted four long years from 1861 to 1865, and ended with the victory of the North, the dissolution of the Confederacy on May 5, 1865, and the abolition of slavery throughout the country. In addition, the defeat of the Confederacy meant the destruction of the infrastructure vital to the functioning of the southern states, which based their wealth and economy on slave labour. The radical change in society and economic decline completely transformed the southern way of life. The loss of social, cultural, and religious values led to the emergence of the Southern Gothic as a literary genre, which provided an unadorned portrait of the American South.

1.2. Literary Roots of the Southern Gothic

The Southern Gothic has its roots in American gothic literature, which in turn grows out of the European gothic novel, established as a genre in England in the late 18th century with the publication of *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764) by Horace Walpole. Known for offering a counterpoint to the “Enlightenment principles by giving voice to irrational, horrific, and transgressive thoughts, desires, and impulses” (Bjerre, 2017, p. 2), European gothic literature resorts to dark and mysterious atmospheres and supernatural monsters that were often used “as metaphors for some sort of human temptation the hero must overcome” (Pagan, 2018, n. p.). Gothic works seek to produce emotional anguish in readers by resorting to gruesome settings such as graveyards or old haunted castles and a perverse and unhealthy sexuality, transporting them to a world full of violence and death.

In the United States, Gothic literature became known as Dark Romanticism or American Gothic. Emerging in the 19th century, this subgenre is influenced by Transcendentalism, a philosophical movement that “adopted a utopian vision of human as able to transcend all that by means of the God-given spiritual powers of the human mind” (MacDonald, 2008, pp. 92-93). However, it differs from this in that its vision of human beings, nature, and divinity is much more pessimistic, and “transports readers to a terrifying new world where evil is much more apparent” (Howard, 2015, p. 2). As a

consequence, the characters appearing in works belonging to Dark Romanticism tend towards self-destruction and sin. This can be reflected in the figure of Captain Ahab, a character in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), whose obsession with killing the whale turns him into "a man gripped by a deadly monomania which will destroy him and his companions with him" (Hume, 1969, p. 287). Although the authors of this genre tend to present evil in the form of supernatural characters such as vampires, demons or ghosts, others such as the well-known Edgar Allan Poe advocate horror that "is diversified, explores new dimensions" (Cute, 2019, p. 18) in stories such as "Ligeia" (1838) or "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839). In texts of this style, nature, far from being a demonstration of the divine, is presented as shadowy, decadent, and mysterious, and the world is depicted as a place where disappointment and immorality are the order of the day confronting "the American Dream narrative by consistently pointing out limitations and aberrations in the progressive belief in possibility and mobility" (Bjerre, 2017, p. 2). These literary pieces are also known for their exploration of the dark side of the human soul, religious fanaticism, madness, and mystery, as seen in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), where the author "deliberately overshadows the text with the dark Puritan domination over all social and political structures" (Yahya Al-Hilo & Jubran, 2022, p. 49).

The Southern Gothic takes from Dark Romanticism the pessimistic view of man and the world and, although it presents supernatural and mysterious elements, it does not seek to create suspense with them. Instead, they are used as a tool to show the reader social and cultural issues affecting the southern region of the United States, using "old estates of old planters instead of terrible old castles, and living people instead of ghosts" (Isroilovich, 2022, p. 380) to present a horror that is more real and closer to the reader. In this way, Southern Gothic stories highlight the shadows of society, inspiring a feeling that provokes "the terror of the life-threatened creature, wholly at the mercy of forces that are neither controllable nor understandable" (Clemens, 1994, p. 2) by presenting characters trapped in settings and situations from which they are unable to escape.

Another source of inspiration for the Southern Gothic is the new Literary Naturalism, a movement that shows in its works the social and economic problems affecting the underprivileged classes of society, making use of "characters whose fates were the product of their heredity, their environment, and chance circumstances that rarely worked in their favour" (Campbell, 2011, p. 499). Naturalism attempts to capture

human misery in its texts and considers that the function of authors is to portray the dark side of reality. In the words of Frank Norris, American journalist and novelist and one of its greatest representatives, in his work *The Responsibilities of the Novelist and Other Literary Essays*:

The function of the novelist of this present day is to comment upon life as he sees it. He cannot get away from this; this is his excuse for existence, the only claim he has upon attention. How necessary then for him – of all men – to be in the midst of life! (1903, p. 282)

The Southern Gothic draws from Naturalism the ability to portray the deepest misery of human beings and the cruellest side of society by focusing on ugliness and the most disadvantaged social classes. It is also characterised by its emphasis on the decadence of southern society, inequality, and the disintegration of morals and family structures, as “it becomes obvious that not only was familial dysfunction a preeminent theme within Southern Gothic literature, it also served as a sort of basis for other, more commonly recognised, gothic elements within the narrative” (Davis, 2014, p. 7). All these elements coming from Literary Naturalism, together with those previously mentioned from Dark Romanticism, allowed the establishment of the bases of the Southern Gothic as a subgenre of its own, which will develop a series of its peculiar characteristics that will be studied in the following section of this paper.

1.3. The Southern Gothic: Characteristics

According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the Southern Gothic can be defined as “a style of writing practiced by many writers of the American South whose stories set in that region are characterised by grotesque, macabre, or fantastic incidents” (2023, n. p.). As mentioned in the previous section, this subgenre arises from the mixture of Gothic literature – specifically the American Gothic or Dark Romanticism – and Literary Naturalism, and therefore has features that come from both movements. However, it has other elements of its own that make it stand out as an independent and unique form within American literature.

While it uses attributes of Gothic literature to explore and criticise social issues as well as the marked tendency to portray human misery characteristic of Naturalism, the

Southern Gothic dissects the reality of the American South, providing a violent and merciless vision of it. In this way, one of the most representative aspects of the genre is the usage of fantastic and supernatural elements, making use of them not like Gothic literature, characterised by the presence of landscapes full of mystery and scenarios that arise from the author's imagination. In contrast, the Southern Gothic resorts to it to emphasise the fact that reality itself may cause more horror if possible, harbouring monsters far worse than any vampire, demon or ghost. This can be clearly reflected in works such as Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* (2005), where the main antagonist, Anton Chigurh, is a violent and remorseless psychopath. It is precisely because of the real world's capacity to hurt and produce terror that the Southern Gothic has a unique ability to convey human anguish and fear.

The Southern Gothic uses irony to present a South that is far removed from the bucolic and embellished image presented in earlier literature, destroying it in order to show the reader the hidden aspects behind it: a privileged white society built on slavery and subjugation, pain and suffering. In this way, the South is portrayed as a sick and decadent land that is conducive to the existence of an equally sick society. The characters are presented as flawed beings, incapable of changing their destiny, and tending towards madness. Moreover, the lines between good and evil are blurred, so that the protagonists cannot be categorised as good or evil in the manner of heroes or villains in other literary genres, but are simply different. Through irony and twisted humour, the situations in which the literary subjects are involved sometimes border on the absurd, which can be seen in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* (1952), where a character starts a conversation with the protagonist without realising that he is dead. The vision of the South and its inhabitants provided in the Southern Gothic can be clearly reflected in the words of Florence King, American novelist and essayist: "build a fence around the South and you'd have one big madhouse" (1975, p. 1).

The grotesque stands as a fundamental characteristic of the Southern Gothic, being embodied by figures such as Lymon Willis in Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe* (1951), who, in addition to suffering from achondroplasia, is a hunchback. Used not only as a literary device but as an element that becomes part of the story itself as a character, authors such as Spiegel argue that "so regularly does he appear, and so distinctive is his appearance, that the very southern-ness of the novel can often be defined by his presence; that is, his presence attests to the fact that we are in the

fictional universe of the South” (1972, p. 428). These subjects, presented in outlandish and deformed appearances, serve to show society that “his deformity is real, that it is there, and will continue to be there because it is the deformity of the society (that produced it) as well as his own” (Spiegel, p. 431).

Like its characters, the landscapes and settings presented in the Southern Gothic are a faithful reflection of the South depicted in these works. Towns and small cities with an evident economic decay, old abandoned plantations, and swamps, do nothing but contribute to the elaboration of an image of the physical destruction of the South and its people. Moreover, it also shows the devastation and the profound emptiness and unease of a society that lives anchored in the past without understanding its present and with total uncertainty and no hope for the future. In the words of William Faulkner, a figure on whom this study will focus later: “[L]ike our rivers, our land: opaque, slow, violent; shaping and creating the life of man in its implacable and brooding image” (2004, pp. 38-39).

The fusion of characteristics from Gothic literature and Naturalism, together with original aspects of its own, such as the geographical specificity of its works and the use of irony, the grotesque, and a rather twisted humour, make the Southern Gothic a unique literary subgenre. Although it may be unknown to part of the public as it is confused with the Gothic, its existence is still present today in the literary scene with authors such as Ron Rush with *One Foot in Eden* (2002), the aforementioned Cormac McCarthy with his 2005 novel *No Country for Old Men*, Brian Panowich with *Bull Mountain* (2015) or Jesmyn Ward, with *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017). The success of their works has managed to revive the deepest American South known through universal literary figures such as Flannery O’Connor, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, Truman Capote or William Faulkner. It is precisely on the latter that this dissertation will focus in order to carry out, in the following part, an in-depth study of the Southern Gothic through one of his works.

2. The Southern Gothic: William Faulkner and *As I Lay Dying*

In this part of the dissertation, I will proceed to study the Southern Gothic through the figure of William Faulkner and his work *As I Lay Dying* (1930). Divided into two sections, the first will be devoted to Faulkner's life and work, as well as to the characteristic style that distinguishes him within the literary panorama and which earned him such important accolades as the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1949. The second section will be centred on an analysis of the construction of the characters of *As I Lay Dying* as an instance of the main features of the Southern Gothic.

2.1. William Faulkner: Life, Work, and Literary Style

William Cuthbert Faulkner was born in New Albany on 25th September 1897 into a traditional southern family. The female figures in his household greatly influenced both his work and his life: his mother and maternal grandmother instilled in him a love for reading, and he inherited his artistic talent from them. Another figure who proved decisive for him was his nursemaid, Caroline 'Callie' Barr, a black woman who showed Faulkner the real situation of African-Americans in the South of the United States. Such was her importance in Faulkner's life and work that he dedicated his collection of short stories *Go Down, Moses* (1942) to her: "To Mammy / Caroline Barr / Mississippi / [1840-1940] Who was born in slavery and who gave to my family a fidelity without stint or calculation of recompense and to my childhood an immeasurable devotion and love" (2013, n.p.).

After the outbreak of the First World War (1914-18), in which Faulkner took part as a pilot, the conception of the world as it had been known up to that point was shattered. The notions of security and certainty that laid the foundations of the American Dream and the Roaring Twenties collapsed, giving rise to a collective sense of uncertainty and unease. All of this led to the appearance of the Modernist movement, characterised by being "experimental, formally complex, elliptical" (Childs, 2017, p. 2) and the artistic vanguards, which had a decisive influence on Faulkner's work. It should also be borne in mind that, in addition to the convulsions of the interwar period, the difficult economic and social situation in the United States due to the Great Depression (1929) and the Dust Bowl (in the 1930s) led to a negative view of the world and the future.

Gifted with an extraordinary creative ability, Faulkner did not adapt to the norms imposed by the educational system and, after spending only one year at university, where he made his first incursions into the literary world by writing for the college newspaper *Mississippian*, he quit his studies to begin his career as a writer. For several years, he was forced to combine his literary activity with various odd jobs – as a postman or a painter – that had nothing to do with his aspirations as a writer. Phil Stone, lawyer and Faulkner’s mentor, helped him enormously in his early career, bringing him into contact with the works of great writers which had a notable influence on him, such as James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922). Joyce’s influence on Faulkner can be seen in the way they both use very long and unstructured sentences and in the use of time, marked by continuous time jumps. However, his most notable influence was undoubtedly the technique of the stream of consciousness: Faulkner, who had already used it in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), relied on it to write entirely *As I Lay Dying* (1930), a work that will be discussed in more detail later and in which Faulkner built each character through the thoughts and looks of the rest.

In 1924 Faulkner published his first book of poems, *The Marble Faun*, but soon abandoned poetry when he realised that prose served as a better vehicle for expressing what he really wanted to convey. His first novel, *Soldier’s Pay*, appeared in 1926, telling the story of a wounded veteran’s return home during the course of the First World War. On the advice of Sherwood Anderson, the American short-story writer and novelist, Faulkner began to situate his plots in the South of the United States. Thus, the first of his works set in the fictional county of Yoknapatawpha was *Sartoris* (1929), whose protagonist, Colonel Sartoris, one of his best-known characters, is based on the figure of his great-grandfather, who was a colonel on the Confederate side during the Civil War.

In the same year, Faulkner also published what would become his most canonical work, *The Sound and the Fury*, which would make him one of the greatest literary references of the 20th century, and whose title was inspired by the lines of one of Shakespeare’s best-known plays, *Macbeth*:

Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (2018, p. 127)

With a structure that was totally atypical for the time, the novel deals with the decline of a traditional southern family, the Compsons. Divided into four parts, the story unfolds in an unusual way: while the first three are told in the first person by the family's three male siblings, the fourth is narrated in the third person from the point of view of Dilsey, the family's African-American maid. Using the stream of consciousness technique, Faulkner presented the characters indirectly, constructing them through how they are seen by others. The work also features continuous time jumps and makes use of long sentences with a peculiar form of punctuation that forces the reader to read carefully so as not to miss any detail.

A year later, in 1930, Faulkner published *As I Lay Dying*, a work in which, using the interior monologues of fifteen different characters, distributed in 59 sections and again set in the fictional county of Yoknapatawpha, he deployed modernist and avant-garde resources which, combined with the characteristics of the Southern Gothic, resulted in one of his most representative works. In 1931 he published *Sanctuary*, which tells the story of the abduction and rape of a young college girl during the Prohibition era (1920-33). The novel contained so many macabre elements that "Faulkner's publisher balked at releasing this study of human evil, set in the author's fictional Yoknapatawpha county, Mississippi, and asked him to rewrite it" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2015, n.p.).

In 1932 Faulkner published *Light in August*, considered not only one of his best novels, but also one of the best works of 20th century American literature. In it, marginalised characters such as Joe Christmas, a mulatto man; Joanna Burden, an activist for the rights of the Afro-American population; Lena Grove, who sets out to find the father of her child, or the Reverend Hightower, who "is not only old and flabby and cuckolded, he is so marginal as to be tolerated by his neighbors in Jefferson only in the way in which, anthropologists tell us, communities tolerate certain persons as shameless ones" (Welsh, 1999, p. 131), move through a space charged with racial segregation, misogyny, sex and misunderstood religion. This novel reflects the darker side of the human soul, employing hard-hitting and direct dialogue.

After publishing several successful novels but lacking money to support his family, Faulkner entered the film industry, where he worked during the 1940s as a screenwriter for the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer production company. In 1936 he published another of his great literary pieces, *Absalom, Absalom!*, in which he again experimented, causing his writing to grow and evolve. The title of the work refers to a biblical quotation: “And the king covered his head, and cried with a loud voice: O my son Absalom, O Absalom my son, O my son” (King James Bible, 1903, Samuel 19:4). This novel is characterised by its use of time, which is opposed to a linear and ordered structure, turning it into an additional character. With four different narrators, one of whom, Quentin Compson, was already a protagonist in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), it narrates the decadence of the Stupen family, marked by violence, racial conflicts, and the characters’ darkest desires. *Absalom, Absalom!* is considered by many to be Faulkner’s most enigmatic and complicated work to understand, as “[t]o penetrate Mr Faulkner’s sentences is like hacking your way through a jungle” (Dowling, 1989, p. 13).

Without ceasing to surprise readers and critics, Faulkner again innovated with the publication of *The Wild Palms* (1939), where he presented two completely independent stories which were interspersed in what was a new exercise in experimentation and originality. A year later he published *The Hamlet* (1940), which was originally intended to be a stand-alone novel but ended up becoming the first part of a trilogy devoted to the Snopes, another of the southern families belonging to the fictional universe of Yoknapatawpha County. The other two parts of the trilogy, *The Town* (1957) and *The Mansion* (1959), completed the story dedicated to them. Another of his most representative works is *Go Down, Moses* (1942), a collection of seven stories that tell the story of the McCaslins and the Beauchamps. *The Reivers: A Reminiscence* (1962) is the last novel written by Faulkner, who died the same year. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1963, the work is totally different from Faulkner’s other books, as it presents a more traditional narrative procedure, leaving aside the complicated literary techniques that characterise most of his writings. The novel, as Bassett points out, seems to be “intended to round things off, to be the coda to a grandly orchestrated symphony” (1986, p. 53).

Faulkner’s literary legacy was recognised internationally when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1949. His importance and influence “spanned not only the United States but also Latin America, specifically the writers of the ‘boom’

generation of the 1960s and 1970s” (Mongor-Lizarrabengoa, 2009, p. 8), influencing the work of such important authors as Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa. However, many readers are reluctant to enter his universe because of the difficulty of his novels. The themes of his work are difficult to digest and his twisted style, full of nooks and crannies and shadows, is not to everyone’s taste. His stories show the profound change experienced in the American South after the Civil War, and are full of violence, pain, poverty, and racial and social conflict. However, Faulkner not only reflects the darker, sicker side of the South, but also shows it as a land full of beauty, creating his own universe through the fictional county of Yoknapatawpha.

Faulkner’s style, more widely framed within Modernism, is a perfect example of the blending of narrative experimentation with the specific characteristics of the Southern Gothic. Although elements can be found in his prose that are also present in other authors, Faulkner manages to endow his works with a completely differentiating personality: “[h]e not only gave the narrative of the novels a profound connotation, but also made it have a unique charm” (Guan et al., 2017, p. 24). The way he constructs his long, loosely structured sentences and his expressive narrative, which counts with the twisted humour unique to the Southern Gothic and touches of exaggeration, cause the reader to be bewildered. The use of interior monologues and the absence of chronology make his works difficult to read and obscure their message. On the one hand, it is precisely this absence of chronology that makes the events presented in a confusing and convoluted way, one of the most characteristic aspects of Faulkner’s writing, and also one of the most difficult to understand. On the other hand, the use of interior monologue is a predominant feature of his works, to the point that some of them, such as *As I Lay Dying* (1930), are composed entirely by them. In this way, the reader discovers the story through the thoughts of the characters, witnessing their deepest feelings and secrets. Dialogue is also widely used by Faulkner, as can be seen in *Light in August* (1932), or in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), using it to provide important information to the reader.

The themes existing in his works are dealt with as only a person from the South could. The deep knowledge of his land, the racial conflicts of a population in which slavery has not been overcome – neither by the white population, who lost their privileges after the Civil War, nor by the black population, who continues to endure a deeply rooted and normalised racism – family, poverty, and violence are common to his novels. The way in which Faulkner presents his protagonists through the stream of

consciousness of others, and the fact that although each character or family appears in a major work in which their story is told but also in others by the author, forces the reader to consume them in order to get to know them in all their depth and complexity. Thus, for example, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) tells the story of the Compsons, but Quentin Compson has also an important role in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), as he is one of the narrators of the story. All of Faulkner's characters have traits that identify them as southerners and as people who live anchored in the past, a past that, knowing it will not return, they are unable to overcome.

Undoubtedly, the creation of a universe of his own where most of his stories take place is another great distinguishing feature of Faulkner's prose. The fictional county of Yoknapatawpha, whose geography "is essentially the large-scale geography of Lafayette County" (Aiken, 1979, p. 331), Mississippi, is not only a place in which he set his works, but a complete exercise of ingenuity and creativity, a portrait where all the characteristic features and elements of the American South, its people, its customs, and its legends, are brought together. Devised in such a way that it is furnished down to the smallest detail, Faulkner populated it with his characters, establishing it as the home of distinguished and aristocratic families fallen into decline after the American Civil War, presenting a place where the Compsons (*The Sound and the Fury*, 1929), the Stupens (*Absalom, Absalom!*, 1936) or the McCaslins (*Go Down, Moses*, 1942) live, suffer, and tell their stories.

Faulkner wrote about the South as only a writer who truly and deeply knows and loves the subject he is writing about could do. There are many of his works that would serve as the basis for a study of the Southern Gothic subgenre, but among all of them *As I Lay Dying* (1930) is a perfect example, not only for its characteristics, but also for the quality of its narrative. For all these reasons, the next section will be devoted to a detailed analysis of how Faulkner used the different elements of the Southern Gothic subgenre in the construction of the characters in this novel.

2.2. *As I Lay Dying: Constructing its Characters through the Southern Gothic Characteristics*

As I Lay Dying (1930) is, besides one of the most representative works in Faulkner's literary production, one of the best examples of the way in which the characteristics of the Southern Gothic are used in the construction of the characters of a novel. With

fifteen different narrative voices, the plot presents the Bundrens' eventful journey through the territories of the fictitious Yoknapatawpha County to reach its capital, Jefferson, where they must, at the request of the defunct herself, bury the recently deceased matriarch of the family. Composed of the parents, Anse and Addie, and their five children, Cash, Darl, Jewel, Dewey Dell, and Vardaman, the Bundren family is revealed to the reader as the interior monologues of its own members and their neighbours unfold. The temporal fragmentation present in the work also contributes to the creation of a partial portrait of each of the characters, who are not really known until the end, when a complete composite of each of them is achieved.

The work, structured in 59 sections, introduces the reader to the murky, decadent, and violent universe so typical of the Southern Gothic, marked by constant time jumps and a great symbolic load. Within the fifteen narrators that Faulkner uses to unravel the story, two different types of voices can be distinguished: those of the family members themselves and those of the characters that surround them and help the reader to complete the dense plot. In a dissertation such as this one, it is impossible to deal with each one of these narrative voices, so, although all of them are important for the total understanding of the work, the focus will be on the members of the Bundren family.

As he does in other novels, such as *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) or *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), in *As I Lay Dying* Faulkner articulates the story around the institution of the family, which is used “as a catalyst for more recognizable Southern Gothic tropes, such as decay and death” (Davis, 2014, p. 2). In order to show how Faulkner used the most representative characteristics of this subgenre to bring the members of the Bundren family to life, a brief description of each of them will be given to help the reader get to know them and facilitate the understanding of their subsequent analysis in relation to the Southern Gothic.

Addie Bundren, the mother, is a reflection of what is expected of a woman in the 1920s in the deep South of the United States – constant dedication to the family developing the role of caretaker, in addition to working hard both in household chores and in the field – and “it is her death which is the catalyst for the action of the narrative” (Alldredge, 1978, p. 4). A former teacher, she marries Anse without being in love. For her, far from being her refuge, her family is a prison in which she feels totally deprived of her freedom. The loss of identity that her marriage entails causes her, in an act of

rebellion and revenge against her husband, to have an affair with Reverend Whitfield, from which her son Jewel is born.

Anse is presented through the comments of the other characters as a despicable and lazy man. Deeply selfish, “he is a parasite, not a provider or model for his children” (Bassett, 1981, p. 127). He wants to pretend that he will do everything possible to fulfil his wife’s last wish, but his real intentions are quite different, as everything he does is only based on his own interests. He never assumes his guilt, as he justifies all his actions as if they were God’s will.

Cash, a carpenter and the eldest of the Bundren siblings, is portrayed as a logical thinker and perfectionist. Although he may come across as cold and even tactless for building his mother’s coffin outside her window, where she can see it, this is his way of showing his love for her. In a story marked by the reflection of human misery and plagued by characters whose motivation is only their own interest, Cash, “with his self-denial, self-restraint, integrity, and human dignity” (Matthews, 1992, p. 75) proves that in the literary universe created by Faulkner there is also room for goodness.

Darl is undoubtedly one of the most interesting and complex characters and is the one who delivers most of the novel’s monologues. Possessing apparent supernatural abilities – a point that will be developed below – Darl is able to sense and narrate Addie’s death even without being present, and to know the secrets of the other characters that go unnoticed by the rest. Presented as an unbalanced man who makes many of the other narrators uncomfortable, Darl plays a decisive role in the narrative.

Jewel, the third of Addie’s children and the illegitimate son of Reverend Whitfield, has characteristics that set him apart from the rest of the family. Dry and angry, he saves his mother’s coffin twice in the course of the narrative and is capable of sacrificing his most precious possession, his horse, in order to carry out Addie’s last wish. He shows deep resentment towards Darl and seems the most distant from the rest of the family members: while the others make the journey to Jefferson in the wagon carrying Addie’s coffin, he is the only one who rides separately.

Dewey Dell is the Bundren’s only daughter, who “suffers from her mother’s privacy, falling victim to the very aspects of sex and motherhood that Addie claims tricked her” (Mischker, 2013, p.71) as she is secretly pregnant with a child that she does not want. Her position within the family upon Addie’s death seems to be to replace her

in the role of caretaker and, as an unmarried woman, her hidden intention in making the journey to Jefferson is to get an abortion.

Vardaman, the youngest son, is the narrator of several sections of the novel. His thoughts and language are more convoluted and difficult to decipher, as he is a young child who “experiences a tremendous amount of psychological devastation in a relatively brief span of time” (Heck, 2008 p. 3), as he witnesses, among other things, the death of his mother. In his childish thinking, he identifies his mother as a fish, pierces her coffin thinking she needs holes to breathe, and blames Dr Peabody for her death.

Having introduced the members of the family, I will proceed to present the analysis of the features of the Southern Gothic in relation to the construction of Faulkner’s characters. In this way, the focus of attention will be first placed on the use of literature to explore the most silenced and hidden parts of society, turning it as a form of social critique. Thus, in *As I Lay Dying* both the figure of the woman and her role in the southern society of the 1920s have a lot of weight within the narrative coming across as one of the oppressed parts of society. Hence, the female figures of the novel have a great importance in the development of the plot since, as Sells argues:

Importantly, the men’s chapters in the story tend to move the plot along while the women’s narration created and develops much more of the folklore and mythology of Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County. These women also offer musings on the topics that most fascinate Faulkner: family origins, and his own concept of *blood*. (2017, p. 11)

Therefore, Addie Bundren acts as the engine of the plot: it is her agony with which the novel begins, and her desire to be buried in Jefferson that gives rise to the family’s journey. In the only monologue where Addie stars, she expresses her conviction that life is nothing more than a preparation for death, and that death itself is the goal of life: “I could just remember how my father used to say that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time” (Faulkner, 2004, p. 153).¹ She marries Anse despite not loving him and, seeing it as an obligation and not as something she really desires, she gives him children whom she also does not seem to love either, having an idea of motherhood as something that deprives her of her freedom and her

¹ To avoid unnecessary repetitions, I will proceed to quote this work only with the page number. All the references are from the 2004 Vintage Classics edition referenced below.

own identity. She is no longer Addie, the teacher, but Anse Bundren's wife and the mother of his children: "[A]nd when I knew that I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it" (p. 155). In a vindication of her agency and dominion over her own body, Addie has an affair with Reverend Whitfield and the result is Jewel, whom she truly loves for being only *her* son and not Anse's, a predilection that is highlighted in one of Darl's monologues:

And at times when I went in to go to bed, she [Addie] would be sitting in the dark by Jewel where he was asleep. And I knew that she was hating herself for that the deceit and hating Jewel because she had to love him so that she had to act the deceit. (p. 113)

While Addie is the driving force behind the action of the novel, the narrative voice of her daughter, Dewey Dell, does not carry the same weight as that of her mother, sharing her importance in the plot with the other members of the family. However, her life seems to be a continuation of Addie's. Pregnant with a child that she tries to get rid of throughout the story, her attitude and thoughts are confused and not very revealing of her personality. Upon the death of her mother, she conveys a sense of emptiness of feeling due to her obsession with getting an abortion, and such is her negative conception of life that her thoughts lead her to compare herself to a cow she must milk: "You'll just have to wait. What you got in you ain't nothing to what I got in me, even if you are a woman too" (p. 57). The lack of a trusted female figure to whom she can turn makes her feel alone in the world. Such is her confusion that she is unable to understand what she is feeling:

You don't know what worry is. I don't know what it is. I don't know whether I am worrying or not. Whether I can or not. I don't know whether I can cry or not. I don't know whether I have tried or not. I feel like a wet seed wild in the hot blind earth. (p. 57)

The only one who knows her secret is her brother Darl, with whom she has such a special connection that they are able to communicate without speaking. However, his knowledge of her pregnancy makes him hated by Dewey Dell, who even dreams of killing him. Like Addie, Dewey Dell sees motherhood not as a source of joy but as a

stigmatising situation that can mark her for life, her pregnancy and her own sexuality being two aspects that shame her and define her character, as can be reflected in another dream she has in which she floats above all the men in her life. This passage may be related to the idea of female sexuality expounded by Sigmund Freud, who explained that any woman “acknowledges the fact of her castration, and with it, too, the superiority of the male and her own inferiority” (1931, p. 229). In this way, Dewey Dell’s sexuality, extensible to the rest of the female characters that appear in *As I Lay Dying*, is a guilty one. Constantly surrounded by male figures, Dewey Dell suffers from isolation due to her womanhood. Her sexual encounter with Lefe, from which she becomes pregnant, is, in the southern society of the time, a serious transgression that only affects her.

Continuing with the use of literature as a form of social criticism, Faulkner highlights in his novel the existence of another part of society that also suffers oppression, inequality, and discrimination, starting with the Bundrens themselves, who belong to the so-called “white trash”. The term, whose origins go back to the racial segregationist past of the southern United States, is “an insulting way of referring to white people who are poor and badly educated” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023, n. p.) and is used by the economically solvent white population. Although there are no African-American characters in the novel, it shows the inequality suffered by this part of Southern society when the Bundrens arrive in Jefferson, as the houses in which they live in the suburbs are described as “negro cabins” (p. 210).

As mentioned in the first part of this dissertation, the use of literature as a weapon of social criticism is an aspect that the Southern Gothic extracted from Literary Naturalism, as well as a marked tendency to show human misery and the darker side of society. Directly related to this last aspect and seeking to reflect the shadier side of the human soul, the Southern Gothic makes use of religious symbols that characterise not only its stories but also its characters. In *As I Lay Dying*, “[r]eligion is an especially important storehouse of symbolic values” (Warwick, 1992, p. 84). Biblical allusions are constant, and religion is used to justify attitudes that are only attributable to the protagonists. In this way, Anse resorts to God to define all the troubles that befall his family as divine design, thus evading his carelessness and guilt, and the passage in which Vardaman assures that his mother is a fish clearly evokes Jesus’ Last Supper. Cash, the eldest son, is a carpenter, and at the beginning of the novel readers learn that

he wants to build the best possible coffin to ensure that his mother will be comfortable after her death. As one of the few characters who can be described as selflessly good, he shares a profession with Christ and is one of those who suffer the most throughout the narrative, losing a leg he had previously broken repairing a church roof. With regard to Jewel, “the product of the adulterous union of Addie and Whitfield, Faulkner uses symbolism and allusions to present, in some instances, an inverted Christ figure. Instead of a divine birth, Jewel is born illegitimate. He is also, ironically, born of a ‘holy’ father” (North, 2009, pp. 39-40). The torrential rain that starts to fall in page 60, just after Addie’s death occurs, can be seen as another reference to the atonement for sins as was the biblical Flood, and the fire, produced by the burning that almost incinerates Addie’s coffin almost at the end of the novel, in page 199, has always been seen as a source of purification.

In addition to the images related to religion, in *As I Lay Dying* another symbolic aspect that has great relevance is the treatment of the dead body and, consequently, the question of disrespect. The title of the work was inspired by Book XI of Homer’s *Odyssey* (8th century BC) where Agamemnon narrates his death and blames his wife for not wanting to close his eyes while he was dying, not giving him the necessary coins to pay Charon, the boatman of the underworld, so that he could pass to the world of the dead. It is this lack of respect for Agamemnon’s corpse that is carried out in *As I Lay Dying* with Addie’s body, beginning with the way she is placed inside the coffin – upside down – to prevent her wedding dress from being crumpled. This is a double insult, since that dress represents for Addie the beginning of the life she always hated. The piercing of her face in Vardaman’s attempt to get her to breathe and the beginning of the journey to Jefferson – started three days late because of waiting for Darl and Jewel to return home from a job – having her body already begun to give off a strong stench, is just another disrespect to her. As much as she asked to be buried in Jefferson and given the circumstances, it would have been much more respectful, as Samson, a neighbour of the Bundrens, points out, to turn around and bury her in New Hope: “you’ve got to respect the dead themselves, and a woman that’s been dead in a box four days, the best way to respect her is to get her into the ground as quick as you can” (p. 100). However, the family continues its journey in the constant company of the vultures. Their arrival at Jefferson, and Addie’s burial, is nothing more than a further expression of disrespect to her: they simply dig a hole and cover her with earth.

Seeking to emphasise the idea that, sometimes, reality itself can be more sinister than fiction, Faulkner resorted to the use of supernatural elements to provide a stark portrait of a region of the United States still anchored in the country's darker past. In *As I Lay Dying*, these play an important part in the composition of the story, appearing mainly through the characters of Addie and Darl. Thus, "Faulkner allows Darl to narrate events that he does not physically witness" (Hale, 1989, p. 17) and Addie, as will be explained below, is able to predict actions that will occur after her death.

In this way Addie, who dies in section twelve of the book, breaks the barriers between life and death appearing much later as narrator, when her body is already in full decomposition, hers being a "voice of one giving an account of her life, explaining and justifying her action in an existence in which is no longer capable of action" (Handy, 1959, p. 447). In one of the sections narrated by Cora Tull, a neighbour of the Bundrens and a devout religious woman, mention is made of a phrase Addie said to her after Cora reproaches her for her predilection for Jewel: "He [Jewel] is my cross and he will be my salvation. He will save me from the water and from the fire. Even though I have laid down my life, he will save me" (p. 152). Although at first glance it may seem an arbitrary comment, Addie's words end up being premonitory: during their trip to Jefferson, when the family tries to cross a bridge that had been washed away by the river, swollen by the heavy rains of the previous days, the coffin falls into the water and it is Jewel who saves it. Later, while the Bundrens are sleeping in a neighbour's farmhouse, a fire in the barn where the coffin is deposited is about to incinerate it, and it is again Jewel who saves it.

Darl, for his part, is one of the most important characters in the novel. Endowed with premonitory abilities, he is not only able to know in advance the exact moment of Addie's death, but he is the one who narrates the scene without even being present. He is also privy to the secrets of other characters, as in the case of Dewey Dell's pregnancy, or to truths about others that they do not even know themselves, such as the fact that Jewel is not Anse's son. The strangeness of his personality and his unsettling look make others talk about him, as is reflected in one of the sections narrated by Vernon Tull, one of the family's neighbours:

He [Darl] is looking at me. He don't say nothing; just looks at me with them queer eyes of hisn that makes folks talk. I always say it ain't never

been what he done so much or said or anything so much as how he looks at you. It's like he had got into the inside of you, somewhat. (p. 109)

The others' conception of him as a strange man is mentioned several more times throughout the narrative by various characters, including, for example, his own father. When it is time to set out for Jefferson, Jewel refuses to get into the wagon with the rest of the family when Anse tells him that he cannot take his horse with him, so the family sets out on the journey without him. Darl, however, not only knows that Jewel will join them, but is able to say exactly when and where he will. When he sees his prediction fulfilled and Jewel joins Addie's funeral procession with the others as he had said, Darl begins to laugh, and Anse emphasises in his stream of consciousness that "it's doing such things as that that makes folks talk about him" (p. 91), as Darl may appear to be an unbalanced man in the eyes of the others.

The very exploration of the concept of madness is, within Southern Gothic literature, recurrently used as an element that highlights the very degradation of society. However, "Faulkner's use of madness encodes a region that is in itself idiosyncratic, bizarre, and, in many ways, distorted" (Finney, 1992, p. 45), being mainly present in *As I Lay Dying* in the character of Darl. It is very clear from the beginning of the narrative that Darl does not understand the world in the same way as the rest of the characters, being the only one who perceives his mother's funeral procession as a farce. He knows that most of the family members are not going to Jefferson to honour his mother's wish, but have ulterior motives without which they might not otherwise have ventured on a nine-day journey that from the start seems doomed to go wrong. His father wants new teeth, Dewey Dell is seeking an abortion, and even Cash, who has no hidden motive for the trip, wants to buy a gramophone in Jefferson and is bringing his tools to earn some money by doing some repairs for some neighbours on the way back. Vardaman, in his innocence, wants to see a toy train.

Although at the end of the novel the other characters see him as a disturbed man, "the nature of his [Darl's] insanity and even the question of whether he is in fact insane, are not easy to determine" (Pallister, 1978, p. 619). After a more than a week's journey during a hot summer and with his mother's body already decomposing, the Gillespies, neighbours of the Bundrens, offer the family to stay the night and propose to keep Addie's coffin, which is already emitting an unbearable stench, in the barn. Darl, after

having a conversation with Vardaman in which he claims that he can hear Addie talking to God inside the coffin asking him “to hide her away from the sight of man” (p. 195), sets fire to the barn with the intention of incinerating the coffin in an attempt of giving his mother’s battered body a rest. Vardaman, witnessing his actions, promises Dewey Dell that he will not tell anyone. However, it is she herself who gives Darl away, causing their father to sacrifice him by committing him to an asylum so that he will not have to pay compensation for the damage caused by the fire. Darl’s actions, which could be described as those of a madman, make other characters doubt. His brother Cash reflects: “when Darl saw that it looked like one of us would have to do something, I can almost believe he done right in a way” (p. 214). Darl’s final monologue, in which he speaks of himself in the third person and laughs uncontrollably, highlights the very madness of a world in which a family is capable of sacrificing one of its members for self-interest.

Vardaman’s behaviour and his illogical and convoluted thinking could also be seen as symptoms of incipient madness. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that this is a young boy who has witnessed his mother’s death at too young an age to be able to assimilate and process it. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, the subgenre of the Southern Gothic grew out of the trauma experienced by that region of the country after the changes brought about by defeat in the Civil War, and it is an aspect that is also reflected in the novel. Being “Addie who is at the root of the psychological problems in her children” (Alldredge, 1978, p. 6), the most conspicuous reflection of trauma in *As I Lay Dying* is Vardaman.

According to Ellis, “Faulkner’s narrative montage develops all members of the Bundren family through analogies with animals, plants, and other elements of the natural world” (1990, p. 409), so it is not surprising that Vardaman identifies his mother with a fish he caught before her death. In his fragile, immature, traumatised mind, Vardaman’s statement of “[m]y mother is a fish” (p. 73) is the denial of a child unable to assimilate the death of his mother. He identifies the fish with a living being, and it is by catching it and killing it that it becomes something else (food). That is why, when Addie dies, he thinks that she is no longer his mother, since now she has to be something else:

My mother is a fish. Darl says that when we come to the water again I might see her and Dewey Dell said, She's in the box; how could she have got out? She got out through the holes I bored, into the water I said, and when we come to the water again I am going to see her. My mother is not in the box. My mother does not smell like that. My mother is a fish.
(p. 179)

Thus, in his childish thinking, Vardaman comes to the conclusion that his mother is a fish and that, somehow, she is still alive. Vardaman's stream of consciousness provides the most complex sections in the novel, and is yet another example of Faulkner's mastery in being able to put himself in the shoes of a young boy to reflect his thoughts as he did in another of his best-known works, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) with the character of Benji, the mentally handicapped brother of the Compsons.

Continuing with the study of the distinguishing elements of the Southern Gothic used by Faulkner in the construction of the characters in *As I Lay Dying*, it is obligatory to mention, due to their importance within the subgenre, the use of grotesque and macabre elements. These are used to highlight the sickly atmosphere prevailing in the South of the United States, a region neglected by many and anchored in the past. Fear, the frustrations of the protagonists, violence, and sexual impulses, among other elements, lead to situations that border on the absurd, surprising the reader and immersing them in a world where the deformed and the irrational saturate everything.

As Gillum argues, "*As I Lay Dying* is the Faulkner novel that operates most consistently in the mode of the grotesque. It's a travesty of funeral ritual, and mockery of the ideal of family solidarity" (2009, p. 14). Addie's mere demand to be buried with her family in Jefferson when she is not attached to them is nothing short of absurd. The reasons for her request seem to be ambiguous. On the one hand, there is the desire to get away from her husband, whom she despises. On the other hand, it seems to be as an act of revenge against him by forcing him to start a journey knowing that Anse is inaction made person, as he lives at the expense of the work of others, avoiding any activity that might involve effort for him. He is only really willing to go on such a journey because he has a hidden motive, as he wants to get new teeth. In the hard times his family is experiencing, Anse is presented as "one of Faulkner's most accomplished villains" (Brooks, 1990, p. 154), as he makes no attempt to be helpful and, moreover, takes

advantage of Cash and Dewey Dell's money, sells Jewel's horse, his most prized possession, without his permission, and sacrifices his son Darl in order not to pay the Gillespie's compensation money for the fire he caused in their barn. Anse is the cause of all his family's problems, which is clearly reflected in Dr Peabody's comment to Cash when, at the end of the book, he tries to fix his leg: "God Almighty, why didn't Anse carry you to the nearest sawmill and stick your leg in the saw? That would have cured it. Then, you all could have stuck his head into the saw and cured a whole family..." (p. 221). However, the grotesqueness of Anse's character lies not only in his psychological traits, as he is also physically deformed: "Pa's feet are badly splayed, his toes cramped and bent and warped, with no toenail at all on his little toes, from working so hard in the wet in home-made shoes when he was a boy" (p. 8).

The grotesque and macabre are present throughout the whole novel, beginning with Addie's own agony, as she witnesses her son Cash building her coffin, the last thing she sees before she dies. The way she is placed inside the box, upside down so that her dress does not get wrinkled when her body will be subjected to all sorts of misfortunes along the journey as the decomposition of her corpse becomes more and more evident, is utterly grotesque. The way in which Vardaman, in his childish ignorance, thinks that his mother needs to breathe inside the coffin and, by puncturing it, pierces her face, on its part, is presented as an undeniably macabre element in the narrative. Another example of the use of the macabre can be seen in the aforementioned river incident, in which the Bundrens are about to lose Addie's coffin and Cash breaks his leg. The solution the family comes up with in order to continue the journey is to pour cement directly onto the leg and have Cash make the rest of the journey on top of the coffin. Dewey Dell's attempts to have an abortion are unsuccessful, and she is tricked in Jefferson by a man who, pretending to be a pharmacist, takes advantage of her ignorance and forces her to have sex with him.

The journey that gives rise to the novel is, in itself, one of the most grotesque elements to be found in the work. Although it may seem that it is the main reason for the internal disintegration of the family, this could not be further from the truth, as it is merely the trigger for all the tensions that the family had already been carrying. From the beginning, Darl's jealousy towards his brother Jewel is revealed when Darl says: "[a]lthough I am fifteen feet ahead of him, anyone watching us from the cotton-house can see Jewel's frayed and broken straw hat a full head above my own" (p. 1). Later,

knowing that Jewel is their mother's favourite and that she will die before they manage to return, Darl takes him away to do a job for which they will be paid three dollars, thus preventing his brother from being present at the last moments of their mother's life. Such jealousy is well-founded, since "[t]he novel's central irony is Addie's rejection of Darl from the moment of his conception, for it is Darl who loves Addie passionately" (Merrill, 1994, p. 408). In the same way, Dewey Dell's deep resentment towards Darl's knowledge of her secret leads to her being the one who turns him in, causing him to be admitted to the mental institution. Addie is never presented as a loving mother, as she is only able to love Jewel because he is not Anse's son, and she does not do so in any overt way. Jewel, for his part, does not show his emotions beyond his characteristic anger either, and his only monologue perfectly reflects his desire to have his mother all to himself: he identifies the presence of his neighbours with that of vultures "[w]aiting, fanning themselves" (p. 11), and thinks that, if he could, he would protect her from the rest of the family. Nevertheless, he is only able to openly express his love for his mother through his horse, to the point that Darl expresses: "Jewel's mother is a horse" (p. 82).

When the Bundrens finally arrive in Jefferson, the narrative never describes Addie's burial, which is deeply ironic, given that this act had been the reason for the journey in the first place. Once buried, Addie belongs to the past and seems to have been forgotten, as she is only mentioned again once by Anse as a coercion of Dewey Dell to give him the money she had for the abortion. The novel's disconcerting ending, with Addie freshly buried and Darl on his way to a mental institution, is marked by the resignation of the rest of the Bundren siblings as their father appears joyful with his new teeth, a new gramophone Cash wanted for himself, and a woman none of them know, whom he introduces as the new Mrs Bundren. Gone are Cash's loss of his leg, Darl's madness, Jewel's anger, Dewey Dell's pregnancy and Vardaman's trauma: "Addie has disappeared altogether, and along with her, any high motivation for the journey, which turns out to be more a disposing-of than a tribute" (Gillum, 2009, p. 20), which makes the novel a perfect example of the Southern Gothic literature.

Conclusion

This dissertation has focused on a study of the Southern Gothic subgenre and how one of its most representative authors, William Faulkner, used its characteristics as the basis for the construction of the characters in one of his best-known novels, *As I Lay Dying* (1930). Faulkner went a step further, building Yoknapatawpha County, a unique universe of his own, which he brought to life and in which he captured the very essence of the Southern Gothic in an unsurpassed way. After a detailed study of both this literary movement and Faulkner's life, work, and style, I have carried out an analysis of the aforementioned novel, which is considered to be one of the masterpieces belonging to this subgenre. Marked from its first pages by the disturbing and decadent atmosphere so typical of the Southern Gothic, this dissertation has demonstrated how Faulkner resorts to its basic elements to bring to life the Bundrens, the protagonist family, and all the other characters they encounter along the journey they undertake, marked by fatality and the existence of grotesque, macabre, and supernatural elements. All this has allowed me to demonstrate that the particular and exclusive characteristics of this subgenre foster the construction of characters that are totally different from those that can be found in novels belonging to any other literary genre.

As seen throughout this research paper, the Southern Gothic emerged as a form of social critique seeking a way to show the world that dark and silenced part of a South which, until its defeat in the American Civil War, had been portrayed in the literature of the time through a bucolic and totally idealised image. After the dismantling of the southern social and economic structures, sustained by slave labour, society was stuck in the desire for a past that would never return and the impossibility of moving towards a new future of progress and hope. Faulkner's critique in *As I Lay Dying* emphasises a part of society that, condemned to remain in the background, is the focus of his work: the female figure. Thus, Addie Bundren is "emotionally and structurally the heroine" (Kerr, 1962, p. 7), as the whole story revolves around her. This is a recurrent element in Faulkner's literary production, with female characters who, although deprived of a voice as they were condemned by the society of their time, are the true cores of his works. A clear example of this is Caddy Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) who, despite not having her own narrative voice unlike her three male siblings, is the central axis of the novel. Marked by a society that belittles and disregards them, Faulkner's female characters play a fundamental role in his works, and it is

demonstrated in *As I Lay Dying* that it is not only them who sustain the plot, but they are vindicated as an essential part of society.

Although I have focused on Faulkner's aforementioned work, many other novels could have served as examples for a study such as the one I have undertaken. My personal admiration for the author has been the main reason to focus on his figure in order to carry this dissertation out, but it is absolutely necessary to point out that the Southern Gothic is one of the most equitable literary currents that can be found within the literature of the early 20th century. Thus, great female voices chose this subgenre to criticise the society in which they lived, such as Carson McCullers or Flannery O'Connor. The Southern Gothic also served as a vehicle, years later, for authors such as Toni Morrison – the first African-American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993 – to write about people of her race from her own point of view, addressing in her works “consistent topics like plantation manors, women and the black experience through the Southern Gothic tradition” (Spencer, 2020, n. p.).

This study has also sought to bring the Southern Gothic subgenre closer to the reader. Although it may at first appear to be an old-fashioned literary style whose “texts are often concerned (and perhaps even ‘obsessed’) with the past” (Cothren, 2015, p. 224), this could not be further from the truth. Not only is it a subgenre that has experienced a resurgence in recent years thanks to authors such as Donald Ray Pollock with his novel *The Devil All the Time* (2011) or Jennifer Clement, with her work *Gun Love: A Novel* (2018), but it has also found its place on television and cinema screens. In this way, great successes such as the series *True Blood* (2008-2014), *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) or *True Detective* (2014-2019) and films such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962) and *A Time to Kill* (1996) are immersed in the dark and sickly atmosphere portrayed by the Southern Gothic, giving irrefutable proof that this subgenre is more alive than ever.

Works Cited

- AIKEN, CHARLES S. (1979). Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County: A Place in the American South. *Geographical Review*, 69(3), 331–348. <https://doi.org/10.2307/214889>
- ALLDREDGE, BETTY (1978). Spatial Form in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. *The Southern Literary Journal*, 11(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20077601>
- AYERS, EDWARD L. (2005). What Caused the Civil War? *North & South: The Official Magazine of the Civil War Society*, 8(5), 12-18.
- BASSETT, JOHN E. (1981). *As I Lay Dying*: Family Conflict and Verbal Fictions. *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 11(2), 125-134. <https://doi.org/10.2307/30225019>
- BASSETT, JOHN E. (1986). "The Reivers": Revision and Closure in Faulkner's Career. *The Southern Literary Journal*, 18(2), 53–61. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20077798>
- BJERRE, THOMAS ÆRVOLD (2017). Southern Gothic Literature. *Research Paper*, 1-21. [10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.304](https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.304)
- BRITANNICA, T. EDITORS OF ENCYCLOPAEDIA (2015). *Sanctuary*. In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Retrieved February 23, 2023, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sanctuary-novel-by-Faulkner>
- BRITANNICA, T. EDITORS OF ENCYCLOPAEDIA (2023). *Southern Gothic*. In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Retrieved February 6, 2023, from <https://www.britannica.com/art/Southern-Gothic>
- BROOKS, CLEANTH (1990). *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*. Baton Rouge: LSU Press.
- CAMBRIDGE DICTIONARY (2023). *White Trash*. In *Cambridge Dictionary*. Retrieved March 14, 2023, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/white-trash>
- CAMPBELL, DONNA (2011). American Literary Naturalism: Critical Perspectives. *Literature Compass*, 8(8), 499-513.
- CHILDS, PETER (2017). *Modernism*. New York: Routledge.
- CLEMENS, VALDINE (1994). *The Return of the Repressed: Gothic Horror from "The Castle of Otranto" to "Alien"* [Doctoral thesis, University of Manitoba]. https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/xmlui/bitstream/1993/17880/1/Clemens_The_return.pdf

- COTHREN, CLAIRE R. (2015). *The Evolving Southern Gothic: Traditions of Racial, Gender, and Sexual Horror in the Imagined American South* [PhD thesis, Texas A&M University] <http://library.tamu.edu/>
- CUTE, LOREDANA ALEXANDRA ANDREEA (2019). *An Approach to the Gothic Aesthetics in Edgar Allan Poe's Storytelling* [BA thesis, Universidad de Almería]. <http://repositorio.ual.es/handle/10835/7987>
- DAVIS, REBECCA (2014). "The Old Fierce Pull of Blood": Family and the Southern Gothic [Master's thesis, Wake Forest University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences]. https://wakespace.lib.wfu.edu/bitstream/handle/10339/39333/Davis_wfu_0248M_10526.pdf
- DOWLING, DAVID (1989). *William Faulkner*. London: Macmillan Education.
- ELLIS, REUBEN J. (1990). Faulkner's Totemism: Vardaman's "Fish Assertion" and the Language Issue in *As I Lay Dying*. *Journal of American Studies*, 24(3), 408-413. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875800033727>
- FAULKNER, WILLIAM (2004). *As I Lay Dying*. London: Vintage Classics. (Original work published in 1930).
- FAULKNER, WILLIAM (2013). *Go Down, Moses*. New York: Harper Perennial Classics. (Original work published in 1942).
- FINNEY, MARGARET A. (1992). *Versions of Madness in Southern Short Fiction: Chopin, Faulkner, and O'Connor*. [Master's thesis, University of Tasmania]. <https://eprints.utas.edu.au/19612/>
- FREUD, SIGMUND (1931). "Female Sexuality". In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited by James Strachey, 221-244. New York: Vintage Books.
- GILLUM, MICHAEL (2009). "Great God, What They Got in That Wagon? Grotesque Intrusions in *As I Lay Dying*". In *The Grotesque*, edited by Harold Bloom, 13-22. New York: Infobase Publishing.
- GUAN, JINGJING; GE, YANHUI; LIU, HAORAN; QIAO, YUTAO; CHEN, GANG; CHENG, QIANGUANG; CHENG, QINGJIE; XIAO, JUNMING & WUANG, SHUANG (2017). A Study on the Narrative of William Faulkner's Novels. *Springer Nature*, 123, 22-25.
- HALE, DOROTHY J. (1989). *As I Lay Dying's* Heterogeneous Discourse. *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 23(1), 5-23. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1345576>

- HANDY, WILLIAM (1959). *As I Lay Dying*: Faulkner's Inner Reporter. *The Kenyon Review*, 21(3). 437-451. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4333963>
- HECK, LISA (2008). *Vardaman Bundren and Sartoris Snopes: An Unlikely Brotherhood*. [Master's thesis, Xavier University]. https://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=xavier1352494838
- HOWARD, MORGAN (2015). A New Genre Emerges: The Creation and Impact of Dark Romanticism. *English Class Publications*, 12, 1-9.
- HUME, ROBERT D. (1969). Gothic versus Romantic: A Reevaluation of the Gothic Novel. *Modern Language Association*, 84(2), 282-290. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1261285>
- ISROILOVICH, UMRZAQOV ISLOMION (2022, June 27). *Description of the Special Properties of the Southern Gothic in the Works of William Faulkner*. International Multidisciplinary Conference, Manchester, England. <https://conferencea.org/index.php/conferences/article/view/936/889>
- KERR, ELIZABETH M. (1962). *As I Lay Dying* as Ironic Quest. *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 3(1), 5-19. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1207376>
- KING, FLORENCE (1975). *Southern Ladies and Gentlemen*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.
- KING JAMES BIBLE (1903). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1769).
- MACDONALD, KEVIN (2008). American Transcendentalism: An Indigenous Culture of Critique. *The Occidental Quarterly*, 8(2), 91-106.
- MATTHEWS, JOHN T. (1992). *As I Lay Dying* in the Machine Age. *New Americanists 2: National Identities and Postcolonial Narratives*, 19(2), 69-94. <https://doi.org/10.2307/303451>
- MERRILL, ROBERT (1994). Faulknerian Tragedy: The Example of *As I Lay Dying*. *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 47(3), 403-418. <https://doi.org/10.2307/45237197>
- MISCHKER, CLAIRE B. (2013). *Matrices of Disorder: Class, Race, and the Policing of Normative Southern Femininity in William Faulkner's The Sound and The Fury, As I Lay Dying, Sanctuary, and Requiem for a Nun*. [Doctoral thesis, University of Mississippi]. <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd>
- MONGOR-LIZARRABENGOA, DAVID (2009). *The Influence of William Faulkner on Garcia Marquez's Leaf Storm*. [Master's thesis, San Diego State University].

- <https://search.proquest.com/openview/9df07e4dee01ba0a8e39883f247750f3/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750>
- MOUNTJOY, SHANE (2009). *Manifest Destiny: Westward Expansion*. New York: Chelsea House.
- NORRIS, FRANK (1903). *The Responsibilities of the Novelist and Other Literary Essays*. New York: Doubleday, Page & Company.
- NORTH, RICHARD (2009). *An Examination of William Faulkner's Use of Biblical Symbolism in Three Early Novels: The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, and Light in August*. [Master's thesis, Liberty University]. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1065&context=masters>
- PAGAN, AMANDA. "A Brief History of Gothic Horror". New York Public Library (blog). New York Public Library. October 18, 2018. Retrieved February 6, 2023, from <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2018/10/18/brief-history-gothic-horror>
- PALLISTER, CHARLES (1978). Fate and Madness: The Determinist Vision of Darl Burden. *American Literature*, 49(4), 619-633. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2924781>
- SELLS, HANNAH (2017). "*Held Together with Lies*": *Faulkner's South and the Southern Gothic as a Genre for the Oppressed* [Master's thesis, Oakland University]. <https://our.oakland.edu/bitstream/handle/10323/4429/Held%20Together%20With%20Lies%20--%20Faulkner%E2%80%99s%20South%20and%20the%20Southern%20Gothic%20as%20a%20Genre%20for%20the%20Oppressed.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y>
- SHAKESPEARE, WILLIAM (2018). *Macbeth*. New York: Global Grey. (Original work published 1623).
- SPENCER, JEAN L. "The Killing Joy of Southern Gothic Literature". *Elysian Magazine*. Elysian: Women Inspiring Women. December 22, 2020. <https://readelysian.com/southern-gothic-literature/>
- SPIEGEL, ALAN (1972). A Theory of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction. *The Georgia Review*, 26(4), 426-437. <https://doi.org/10.2307/41396901>
- WARWICK, WADLIGTON (1992). *As I Lay Dying: Stories out of Stories*. New York: Maxwell Macmillan International.

WELSH, ALEXANDER (1999). "On the Difference between Prevailing and Enduring". In *New Essays on Light in August*, edited by Michael Millgate, 123-147. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

YAHYA AL-HILO, MUJTABA MOHAMMEDALI & JUBRAN, HAIDER SAAD YAHYA (2022). Ideological Manipulation Strategies of Religion and Emotional Deception: A Study of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 13(1), 49-55. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.13n.1.p.49>