



Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi

The Journal of International Social Research

Cilt: 9 Sayı: 45 Volume: 9 Issue: 45

Ağustos 2016 August 2016

www.sosyalarastirmalar.com Issn: 1307-9581

A SOUTHERN FAMILY AND THEIR DISCOURSE

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Abstract

One of the most celebrated American authors of Southern concerns, William Faulkner is remembered as the master of "inner monologues" and "stream of consciousness". Using the writing techniques of modernist writing, especially "inner monologue", he puts into words how the Southernians communicate and how their family relationship was. The family discourse of Bundrens has positive or negative effect on the family relationship in that they criticize each other through "inner monologues" which may ruin them or contribute favorable things to the family relationship. So, the Southern families and their discourses during the hard years of 1920s and 1930s outline how Faulkner has pictured the American South. In addition, poverty and the "poor whites" are critical things in the family relationships.

Keywords: American South, Bundrens, Family Discourse, Poor Whites.

Introduction

The realization of American dream going astray in 1920s and 1930s remains one of the most criticized topics in American literature. The Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression are the two significant social phenomenon which indicate that American dream has lost the sense. The "poor whites" in the literary works are also representing the pictures of that frustration of American society in pre and post-depression years. Witnessing the happenings, authors like Faulkner, Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Caldwell are addressing the situation with their significant fictions. Especially, the "poor whites", who are in the quest of the fictions, clear the meaning of the pictures in those years. So, Faulkner's work *As I Lay Dying* gives a very critical frame of the "poor whites" who struggle to make a life in rural areas of American South. The "destructive being and the ways in which being is destroyed" constitutes the fictions of Faulkner for the unexpected and disturbing events of 1920s and 1930s. Basing on the events in those years, *As I Lay Dying* "describes a basic, suffering human action" (Rueckert, 2004: 50).

1. The Language of the Book

Generally, the structure of the book is very significant in that the first person narration and inner monologues which are given in a fragmentized way make reader to perceive problems from different perceptions and views. The reader sees how the Bundrens struggle to survive and to manage the family problems. The death of Addie centers almost all the happenings in and out of the family. Through the family discourses and the outsider eyes, Faulkner draws and defines social, economic and household picture of the villages and cities of American South. He has a very unique writing style in picturing the family and their responses to the events which misleads the reader as María Ruth Noriega Sánchez states on: "the narrative technique is highly complex: a multiplicity of voices, fifteen in total, express their reactions to death and the journey in fifty nine fragmented monologues, building an intricate image of Addie, her family and the community" (Sánchez, 1998: 51). The language Faulkner applies is first person narration, but this sometimes turns into third person narration when the narrators, as the characters of the novel, talk about each other and the events through the inner monologues. Performing the reading, reader may feel as the listener of the narrators, and try to understand family problems from different perspectives. The direct speeches given within the inner monologues also give reader the feeling of listener when the narrators try to justify themselves through these direct speeches. This kind of inner monologue is defined in Hale by Seymour Chatman and Dorrit Cohn as "to be a direct thought quotation of a character's mind". But, "no narrator intervenes between the reader and the characters" (Hale, 1989: 5-6). So, the reader becomes a listener and directly contacts with the characters' emotional inner world. That is why the language of the novel turns into the language of "speaker" and "listener" as Cohn states on: "Like the language a character speaks to others, the language he speaks to himself will appear valid only if it is "in character": if it accords with his time, his place, his social station, level of intelligence, state of mind, and other fictional facts and circumstances." (as cited in Hale, 1989: 6). The language and the narrative style of the book cited by R.W. Franklin as "non-narrated" discourse (as cited in Hale, 1989: 7). However, the structural confusion of *As I Lay Dying* has an emotional and functional impulse on reader both as a listener and witness which confuses the reader's mind, and also rises his/her curiosity inner world rumour. The

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reader has the feeling of taking part in the novel like a character, and enjoys wrapping himself/herself in different characters and their perceptions of the same events in the same novel. Thus, the structural significance of the book gets its confusing sense from inner world discourses which is as Hale puts forward: "The extended interior monologue should allow the reader to witness an individual as he "really" is, not as he talks, acts, or otherwise appears to others." (Hale, 1989: 9). Moreover, the well-planned and bearing the chronology of plot, "[t]he monologues are made to serve a triple purpose: they establish character, they draw lines of conflict among characters, and they – economically and colorfully – present both plot and description." (Wagner, 1974: 74).

Considering that *As I Lay Dying* questions the "human communication, and the validity and limitations of verbal fictions", family discourse is the key point in inferring the meaning from the family situation. Thus, direct speeches and descriptive language given within structure of inner monologue carry a very important meaning for Bundren family affairs. Taking into consideration the speeches and descriptions, the family could have a more appreciable picture. So, the discourses of a family may be absurd, but should be based on constructive monologues. But, the Bundren family has an insane world; apart from the mother and her death, even the sorrow of the death does not work to meet all the family members to behave in the same direction. Of course, they are taking their mother's corpse to Jefferson, but Jewell is not in cart which is both a physical and spiritual respect for the mother; Darl tries to burn out the barn with the coffin of his mother; Anse is there to have new teeth in city; and Dewey Dell tries to get a doctor or pharmacy in the city in order to get rid of her pregnancy. So, their physical presence on the way to Jefferson does not show their spiritual and domestic meeting. Each of them has a different inner world which is very absurd compared with their physical presence. This is a fragmented family, so is a world which experience the reader how to get involved in it and struggle to survive in a such social life.

2. The Bundrens and Their Discourse: The Problem of Communication

To begin with, there is a family who is unable "to communicate their grief over the loss of Addie Bundren" because of the "inadequacies of language." (Spavento, 2013: 65). The "inadequacy of language among his (Faulkner's) characters" clarifies how they react against social and individual problems (Spavento, 2013: 66). So, to bridge communicative gap between the characters, it is important to see what is unsaid and what should be said. Understanding the intention of the characters through the inner monologues may direct the reader how to cope with such social issues. Within this context, the critical analysis of the characters and their raw discourses and inner world gain importance overwhelmingly. Although Darl is seen as the central character, the events pour out of mother Addie and her coffin throughout the book. During the river scene when they try to cross their mother coffin, it is obvious that family members center around a mother though she is death as Mourad Romdhani makes clear the situation as follows: "They struggle against the violent currents to keep connected to a dead mother's coffin. To keep control of the dead mother's coffin, most of the Bundrens grip a rope tied to them." (Romdhani, 2015: 2).

What makes Darl an outcast character is Addie's extra love for Jewel at first glance, and Darl's personality shapes in an unacceptable way because of the mother Addie. And he does not know where to stay and how to behave as he "does not find validation in his place among the Bundren family" (Spavento, 2013: 74). Being aware of his invalid presence in the family, he sees "himself to be an isolated branch fallen from his family tree" (Spavento, 2013: 74). In a way he is the absent boy of the family seeing his description of himself as: "I don't know that I am. I don't know if I am or not. Jewel knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know whether he is or not" (Faulkner, 2004: 73). In fact, it is mother Addie who can manage to unite the family members, and also "it is [her] dishonest sexual behavior that connects the Bundren family in a web of lies" (Spavento, 2013: 74). Thus, the reactions of the family members to events and each other at home and during the travel to Jefferson stem from mother as a central character and a reason of weak communication and family relationships. "Instead of family loyalty there is mutual mistrust", which can be accepted as the reason of social corruption (Basset, 1981: 133). The mother's secret sexual affair ruins family relationships more drastically when Jewell understands this, and Jewel "displaces his love for mother onto his horse because he knows it hurts her deeply" (Spavento, 2013: 76). Spavento's detection makes the sense that Jewel somehow taking revenge of his mother. So, the meaning of "love" becomes just a word rather than a connection. What gets individuals and the society into the tea pot of "changes" is, of course, the changed and changing environment. So, the journey clarifies the Bundren Family's "move towards fragmented individualism" which shows up at the very beginning of the journey when Jewel insists on riding his horse rather than getting on the cart with other members of the family. Spavento mentions the reason why the family is dispersed by bringing to front environmental factors as follows, "the Bundrens are constantly bound by their socio-economic status. As a rural Southern family during the Great Depression, the members of the Bundren family lack the potential for social mobility because they are chained by their financial limitations. The family unit will not adapt to the changing economy in America as seen by their fruitless journey to bury Addie" (Spavento, 2013: 86).

The communicative and spiritual failure becomes more evident with the death of mother, and the journey of the Bundren family, as Donald Kartiganer asserts, is “*about a break in expression, some failure of the imagination to reconcile form and vision, to create a shape that is not a stasis, change that is not chaos*” (as cited in Spavento, 2013: 86). So, these reasons “*lead(s) each to focus on the immediate needs that can be satisfied. Thus, Anse takes a new wife, Jewel finds his horse, Dewey Dell seeks an abortion, and Vardaman displaces his grief on a fish.*” (Spavento, 2013: 87). This situation gives way to individualistic benefits and fragmented lives of modernist doctrine. As an environmental factor, the changes in the family bring the lives on the bridge of getting lost in crowds during the Great Depression in America. Apart from social mobility in 1920s and 1930s, the individualistic benefits and intentional tendencies of the characters, especially Addie’s, show up as the reason of lack of communication and unification in the family which John Earl Bassett cites as: “*Addie is a lonely woman with too much pride and vanity, so obsessed with violations of herself and her privacy that she is cruel to her family in order to avoid the dangers of affection. She manipulates husband and children as objects to justify her own sanctity, the children to be born in sin mostly out of vengeance or in wedlock as compensation for the sin. She can accept no one as an autonomous identity rather than an object of her needs.*” (Bassett, 1981:126).

The mean of discourse and interaction is language which is a social problem for human experience. Moreover, it is the language that makes selves and identities casted or out casted individuals. In *As I Lay Dying* the primary reason of family conflict is the language which starts with mother Adie and then as a result causes the other characters to display a disapproved picture for the Bundrens. So, the depiction of Bassett (1981) pins the issue: “*Verbal abstractions such as "motherhood" and "love," which Addie rejects, refer to the very human qualities that are the measure of her failure.*” (Basset, 1981: 126). That is why “[e]very member of the family displays toward Addie a latent hostility that seems caused by a sense of betrayal.” (Basset, 1981: 127). Darl’s inner monologues and his description of the other characters make him the key character as Betty Alldredge defines: “*Darl is the chief source of information about almost all personalities and relationships in the novel*” (as cited in Hayes, 1992: 50). The reader learns the unfavorable discourses of Darl and Jewel from the inner perspective of Darl, and also Darl’s inner monologues and discourses imply that “*bond between Addie and Jewel, a concern largely responsible for the tension in the relationship between the two brothers*” (Hayes, 1992: 50). Whatever the reason that urges Darl’s invalidity and disapproved discourses, it is his “*rhetoric of negativity*” that becomes “*a rhetoric of loss*” (Delville, 1994: 64). He cannot manage to get organize with the environment which causes him to be imprisoned. However, if he is “*thinking of home*” he should react as he supposed to (Faulkner, 2004: 74). Besides Darl’s tendencies “*the other narrators outside language are also deeply related to Darl's linguistic failure*” (Delville, 1994: 67). The picture that outlines the core plot and meaning of *As I Lay Dying* can be sum up with the critical depictions of Delville as follows: “*Though Darl may be the most tragic figure of all, the other Bundrens are also emprisoned in their own isolated selves and are virtually incapable of communicating – let alone sympathizing – with each other. Genuine dialogues are rare and they almost never lead to any mutual understanding or compassion. As a result of their isolation, the Bundrens are forced to retreat into positions of immobile and helpless observers.*” (Delville, 1994: 67).

Again, of course it is the “*personally defined language [that] can overcome the division between the public and private selves by forging a union among feeling, action, and words*” (Hale, 1989: 15). The language has a unity importance when it is well-developed by individuals in community. For the Bundrens, it is the very immediate thing that they have to have in the core years of the Great Depression. Ironically, the book itself and the narrative technique have no clear unity like the disunity of language and family discourses. It comes to the surface that the journey gives the opportunity for the family members to know each other better. Their “*real faces*” become obvious under the hard conditions. Otherwise, there is a situation of characteristic secret in the family and “[o]nly she (Adie) can know who she truly is because only she gives meaning to her experience.” (Hale, 1989: 15). “*The negativity of Darl's self-consciousness is reflected by the content of his narration*”, thus “[w]e know that Darl is obsessed with Jewel only because his narration meticulously records Jewel's actions and employs a variety of images to describe them” (Hale, 1989: 16). This negativity of Darl brings out individualistic perspectives of events which also creates disunity in the family. He has so many unacceptable that he becomes a non-respected person in the family as “[h]e is jealous and vindictive, lacking in family responsibility, socially incompetent, and even felonious.” (Handy, 1959: 438).

Chronologically, from the beginning towards the end of *As I Lay Dying*, there are significant direct quotations and narrations of inner monologue technique which may have both positive and negative meaning and effect in communication. So, they could have created positive results in the family if they were said or not said to the related person. And this constitutes a very important social responsibility in order to give a meaning to life. However, irresponsible behaviors and discourses of the characters make the problems worse, apart from the environmental and communal ones. As Darl has a position of narrator like an author, his inner narrative language earns worth to mention most than of the other characters. At the very beginning of the book he praises Cash for doing his work perfectly and repeatedly says: “*a good carpenter, Cash is*”

(Faulkner, 2004: 2), *“Vernon holds the board steady while Cash, bevels the edge of it with the tedious and minute care of a jeweler.”* (p. 71). If Cash was aware of that, he would have good thoughts and discourses for Darl. Later on, Darl’s negativist thinking about Cash creates and brings unwanted sub-conscious. Darl’s thinking to drink water reveals his egoist personality and this feeds up his sub-conscious with negative perceptions, *“if Cash was yonder in the darkness doing it too, had been doing it perhaps for the last two years before I could have wanted to or could have”* (p. 7-8). Narrating with direct quotations the speeches of Jewel cursing the horse as *“[g]et the goddamn stuff out of sight while you got a chance, you pussel-gutted bastard. You sweet son of a bitch”* may be because he wants to reveal his rightness of hating and denigrating Jewel (p. 10). The craftsmanship of Cash and the place where he builds the coffin get different discussions from the family members. For Darl he is *“a good carpenter”* (p. 2), for Jewel it is in the place *“[w]here every breath she draws is full of his knocking and sawing where she can see saying See”* (p. 11), and for Anse as he says *“[s]he wanted that like she wants to in our own wagon, ... she’ll rest easier for knowing it’s a good one, and private. She was ever a private woman. You know it well.”* (p. 15). These characteristic perceptions show that the coffin, mother and Cash have meanings as more as the selves: Mother is love for Jewel, but for Anse she is respectful; Cash is genius for Darl. When it comes to Dewey Dell, in the middle of hard times of 1920s and 1930s, in struggling with the problems that family suffers from she criticizes the family members as follows: *“And Jewel don’t care about anything he is not kin to us in caring, not care-kin. And Cash like sawing the long hot sad yellow days up into planks and nailing them to something. And pa thinks because neighbors will always treat one another that way because he has always been too busy letting neighbors do for him to find out. And I did not think that Darl would, that sits at the supper table with his eyes gone further than the food and the lamp, full of the land dug out of his skull and the holes filled with distance beyond the land.”* (p. 22). Her criticisms might have had positive effect on them if they had known how they are from an outside eye. And Tull eyes Cash while doing his work on building the coffin and says: *“If Cash just works that careful on my barn.”* (p. 28). Tull’s inner perception has a significant importance on Cash’s personality in that if he had knew that he is not careful enough in building the barn for Tull, then he would have done all his best. Darl’s conciliation for sister Dewey Dell, when father and Cash ask fish for dinner, is worth to mention as it has a very important effect on family communication. As she *“never had no time to cook it”*, Darl says: *“Here, sister ... never mind about the fish. It’ll save I reckon. Come on and sit down.”* (p. 54). Tull’s narration of Cora’s personality, which he does not say her directly, also has a positive language function: *“I reckon it does take a powerful trust in the Lord to guard a fellow, though sometimes I think that Cora’s a mite over-cautious, like she was trying to crowd the other folks away and get in closer than anybody else. But then, when something like this happens, I reckon she is right and you got to keep after it and I reckon I am blessed in having a wife that ever strives for sanctify and well-doing like she says I am.”* (p. 63-64). Anse’s consultation to Darl on crossing the river when he asks *“[w]hat do you think, Darl?”* shows how a positive discourse works in uniting a family. While Jewel speaks irreverently about his mother’s grave, *“[w]ho the hell can’t dig a damn hole in the ground?”*, Anse response seems a respectful one for the coffin and her spirituality, *“[i]t aint respectful, talking that way about her grave. ... You all don’t know what it is. You never pure loved her, none of you.”* (p. 214). Anse and Jewel are more related to the mother than the other family members. However, their love and respect for mother Adie and her spirituality is meaningless as much as their individualistic interests concerns. Cash’s empathy for Gillespie and the way he quests the event of burning the barn shows how he reason the case. This would have worked in good return for him and may be for the other members of the family if he had said the following reasoning in words directly to Darl the others: *“Because Jewel is too hard on him. Of course it was Jewel’s horse was traded to get her that nigh to town, and in a sense it was the value of his horse Darl tried to burn up. But I thought more than once before we crossed the river and after, how it would be God’s blessing if He did take her outen our hands and get shut of her in some clean way, and it seemed to me that when Jewel worked so to get her outen the river, he was going against God in a way, and then when Darl seen that it looked like one of us would have to do something, I can almost believe he done right in a way. But I don’t reckon nothing excuses setting fire to a man’s barn and endangering his stock and destroying his property. That’s how I reckon a man is crazy. That’s how he can’t see eye to eye with other folks. And I reckon they ain’t nothing else to do with him but what the most folks says is right.”* (p. 220).

Conclusion

Putting together the 1920s-1930s, the Stock Market Crash of 1929-the Great Depression and William Faulkner, the economic, social, emotional and spiritual mess of that time shows up in the inner world of people as it is in *As I Lay Dying*. The family has nearly no logical unity as a result of that mess, and poverty hits them within (emotional-spiritual) rather than physical (economic) aspects. What remain worth mention are sorrow, mothership-fathership and weak family perception. The things that unit them, alongside mother and her coffin, are personal interests which persuade them to carry the coffin to Jefferson in the hot season. However, the language they use and the way they talk reveal with reasons who respect whom, and how they keep together in cases of evets such as the death mother and the respect for her will, crossing the river

with a coffin and making a life. The secrets of the individuals and their perceptions of the family members and neighbors have shaped the language, positive or negative, they used. After all, the Bundrens is a family of "poor whites" who struggle to survive, and are the sufferers of the mess of 1920s and 1930s. So, the problem of communication gets worse family unity and so does the society. The critical idea in this study to underline is that revealing one's perception of other ones through inner monologue technique may have both positive and negative results for the Bundrens, which Faulkner takes the balance control of that kind of literary language.

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