ADDIE'S PARADOXICAL NARRATIVE:

MOTHERHOOD, BODY AND LANGUAGE IN FAULKNER'S AS I LAY DYING

A NARRATIVA PARADOXAL DE ADDIE: MATERNIDADE, CORPO E LINGUAGEM EM *AS I LAY DYING*, DE FAULKNER.

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ABSTRACT: The focus of this paper is one of the discourses present in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*: the section narrated by Addie. I discuss motherhood as presented by her and approximate it from three different feminist discourses by trying to locate her opposition between "words" and "deeds" in relation to the nature/culture dualism. I conclude that the complexity of Addie's narration can be approximated to all the feminist discourses analyzed at the same time that she transcends them all.
Keywords: motherhood; language; body.
RESUMO: O tema deste artigo é um dos discursos presentes em *Enquanto agonizo*, de William Faulkner: o trecho narrado por Addie. Discuto a modernidade conforme apresentada por ela e a aproximo de três discursos feministas diferentes, tentando localizar sua oposição entre "palavras" e "atos" em relação ao dualismo natureza/cultura. Concluo que a complexidade da narrativa de Addie pode ser aproximada de todos os discursos feministas analisados ao mesmo tempo em que transcende a todos eles.
Palavras-chave: maternidade; linguagem, corpo.

[...] *she cannot be identified either as one person, or as two. She resists all adequate definition.*
Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*

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1. A PARADOXICAL VIEW OF MOTHERHOOD

Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930)[2] is narrated by several different voices and thereby there are different perspectives of the same events. Concerning women's sexuality, it has been questioned whether the novel subverts the reigning ideology or whether it supports it (BERGMAN, 1996). Jill Bergman (1996) thinks it is reductive to choose one side, since the novel presents both discourses. I agree with her: having different characters expressing their views allows the novel to bring up different opinions and, more importantly, different discourses and ideologies. Doreen Fowler (2010, p. 317) discusses matricide in *As I Lay Dying*, proposing that, in the novel, "Faulkner creates a feminine voice that *** (*sic*) issues a challenge to paternal structures of meaning." According to her, "Addie Bundren rebels against a patriarchal order that mandates the mother's death [...] and locates the meaning of existence in the body and the living world [...]" (FOWLER, 2010, p. 317). Bearing this in mind, my focus here will be on Addie's discourse, on her "meaning of existence," instead of on her husband's.

Concerning the "Addie" section, I must say that the paradoxical view of motherhood as presented by her intrigues me. One of her sentences gives the impression of her being born of her father alone:[3] "my father used to say that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time. [...] I would hate my father for ever having planted me" (FAULKNER, 1973, p. 134). This hatred emerged when she was irritated with her students — with their "blood strange to each other blood and strange to mine" — while teaching, which was "the only way I could get ready to stay dead" (FAULKNER, 1973, p. 134). She thus likes to whip her students to make

[2] The book we used for the analysis presented in this paper was published in 1973.
[3] Similarities with Athena, born of father alone, of Zeus's head, might bring interesting discussions. They are, however, beyond the objectives of this paper.

them part of her blood: "Now I am something in your secret and selfish life, who have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever" (FAULKNER, 1973, p. 134). She was supposedly planted by her father alone, but the strangeness of her students' blood to her own blood irritates her. The young Addie admittedly felt sexual desire, which the narrator, an older Addie, relates to nature: "In the early spring it was worst. Sometimes I thought that I could not bear it lying in bed at night, with the wild geese going north and their honking coming faint and high and wild out of the wild darkness [...]" (FAULKNER, 1973, p. 135). She thus marries Anse, which is not the beginning of her troubles: "So I took Anse. And when I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it" (FAULKNER, 1973, p. 136). Her "terrible" life begins with maternity, not with her sexual initiation. At the same time, she calls her children — only Cash, Darl and Jewel then — as hers only (opposing her paternal-only origin): "*My children were of me alone*, of the wild blood boiling along the earth, of me and of all that lived; of none and of all" (FAULKNER, 1973, p. 139, emphasis added). Similarly to the Great Mother Goddess,[4] Addie's body is like the earth; she is the only mother, this time denying Anse's seeds, in spite of having denied her mother's body before. When she has only Cash and Darl, she sees herself as fused with her children: "[...] I was three now" (FAULKNER, 1973, p. 137). Paradoxically, later she says: "I gave Anse the children. I did not ask for them" (FAULKNER, 1973, p. 138). She states that she has given her husband three children that are his and not hers, excluding Jewel (born of an extramarital relation) and Dewey Dell: "I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of. And now he has three children that are his and not mine. And then I could get ready to die" (FAULKNER, 1973, p. 140). Antithetically, the same children that were only hers are

[4] For more information on the Great Mother Goddess, see: WILSHIRE, Arleen B. The Uses of Myth, Image, and the Female Body in Re-Visioning Knowledge. In: JAGGAR, Alison M.; BORDO, Susan R. (Orgs.). *Gender/Body/Knowledge*: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992, pp. 92-114.

later Anse's; and at the same time that she refuses monogamy, she fulfills her "duty" of giving Anse children as his wife: she both rebels against and accepts her role in patriarchy.

Addie's paradoxical view of motherhood, of fusion with the maternal body and of repulsion/attraction to the mother's blood, is a recurrent theme in psychoanalytical discourse. Braidotti (1997, p. 65) mentions the relationship of the maternal body with life and death, attraction and repulsion: "We are all of woman born, and the mother's body as the threshold of existence is both sacred and soiled, holy and hellish; it is attractive and repulsive, all-powerful and therefore impossible to live with." Concerning this relationship, Braidotti reminds us of Kristeva's discussion on "abjection"; of Freud's essay about the head of the Medusa, connecting attraction and repulsion to the sight of female genitalia; and of Kristeva's insight of "the female sex as the site of origin [that] also inspires awe because of the psychic and cultural imperative to separate from the mother and accept the Law of the Father" (BRAIDOTTI, 1997, p. 66). She continues: "Woman/mother is monstrous by excess; she transcends established norms and transgresses boundaries" (BRAIDOTTI, 1997, p. 66). This is the feeling that arises while reading Addie's narration: it is as if its excess both shocks and delights; as in (antimaternal) male readings of the female genitalia, Addie threatens and is part of patriarchal laws at the same time.[5]

Bergman (1996) reads Addie's narrative as breaking the bounds between sex and motherhood, showing female sexuality outside procreation. According to her, the connection between sex and procreation explains why living is terrible for Addie: the character is in a "society that demands that biology be destiny for her" (BERGMAN,

[5] Fowler (2010) reads *As I Lay Dying* in Lacanian terms, showing how during the Bundren's quest the sons both try to join and to sever form the mother's body, both enforcing and threatening patriarchal laws. The sight of women as both terrible/threatening and as sacred mothers is also relatable with what De Beauvoir (2011, Vol. I, Part Three, Ch. 1) calls "myths," which are created by men around women: "Both ally and enemy, it appears as the dark chaos from which life springs forth, as this very life, and as the beyond it reaches for: woman embodies nature as Mother, Spouse, and Idea; these figures are sometimes confounded and sometimes in opposition, and each has a double face."

1996, p. 403), and she thus denounces "biology as destiny," providing "a way to break sex from its reproductive function" (BERGMAN, 1996, p. 404). Bergman also mentions that Addie shows the relation to words and deeds as different for men and women, since for the latter it carries the burden of child bearing and rearing. Opposing Bergman in a way, Marc Hewson (2000) tries to reconnect Addie with her children. By analyzing both her sons' actions and her statement that her children were of her alone, Hewson concludes that they have Addie's spirit to fight, or at least not to submit to, patriarchy as represented by Anse. According to him, she makes her children an extension of herself and thus "refuses to validate the masculine dominance which attempts to silence her". Even from her coffin, she is the reason of the trip to Jefferson, which "becomes for her boys a form of education in her ways" (HEWSON, 2000, p. 552). Still according to Hewson (2000, p. 555), "Maternity gives Addie the sense of union which she sought elsewhere but failed to find because motherhood seems to be the only possible relationship that is not necessarily mediated by linguistic communication." Hewson also mentions passages in which her sons' love for her is expressed by actions and not by words.

Addie's relationship to motherhood, child-rearing, language and materiality is so complex and paradoxical that it allows different readings such as Bergman's and Hewson's. Therefore, I propose to analyze whether we can relate Addie to different feminist discourses concerning motherhood and the body in order to see if we can approximate her to one of them or whether her complexity transcends them.

2. NATURE/CULTURE; "DEEDS" AND "WORDS"

An important discussion that I also see as possible in the "Addie" section of *As I Lay Dying* is the questioning of the nature/culture dualism, a recurrent theme in philosophy and of extreme importance to feminism. Different feminisms have

different positions in relation to the nature/culture dichotomy, thus having different goals and different views concerning the achievement of women's liberation. Simone de Beauvoir (2011) saw equality (to men) as the goal of feminism, which aimed to break the vision that biology was destiny to women. She importantly points that there is no such thing as a maternal instinct, but she does this by denying maternity — and therefore nature — as a whole in order to associate women with culture and (male) rationality. Pregnancy is a paradoxical "drama" to her:

> But pregnancy is above all a drama playing itself out in the woman between her and herself. She experiences it both as an enrichment and a mutilation; the fetus is part of her body, and it is a parasite exploiting her; she possesses it, and she is possessed by it; it encapsulates the whole future, and in carrying it, she feels as vast as the world; but this very richness annihilates her, she has the impression of not being anything else. A new existence is going to manifest itself and justify her own existence, she is proud of it; but she also feels like the playing of obscure forces, she is tossed about, assaulted. [...] it [her body] no longer exists for herself alone and then becomes bigger than it has ever been. [...] she is a human being, consciousness and freedom, who has become a passive instrument of life. (DE BEAUVOIR, Vol. II, Part Two, Ch. 6)

Addie's narrative shares similarities with De Beauvoir's point. Her terrible life does not begin when she marries Anse. She does not feel violated by having sex with him, but by having her first child: "And when I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it. […] I knew that it had been, not that my aloneness had been violated until Cash came. Not even by Anse at nights" (FAULKNER, 1973, p. 136). As I have discussed before, Addie shows desire to fuse with her children as well as she feels the burden that they impose on her. Close to De Beauvoir's view, for Addie, motherhood is both enrichment and mutilation; she both possesses and is possessed, and thus she feels that her "aloneness" is violated. De Beauvoir (Vol. II, Part Two, Ch. 6) brings examples and concludes that "there is no such thing as maternal 'instinct'; the word does not in any case apply to the human species." She also mentions and comments on the assertion "[...] that motherhood is enough in all cases to fulfill a

woman: this is not at all true. Many are the mothers who are unhappy, bitter, and unsatisfied" (DE BEAUVOIR, Vol. II, Part Two, Ch. 6). The denial of maternal instinct is relatable to Addie's discourse. When she finds out that she is pregnant for the second time, she regrets it again: "Then I found that I had Darl. At first I would not believe it. Then I believed that I would kill Anse. It was as though he had tricked me, hidden within a word […]" (FAULKNER, 1930, p. 136). However, she does not blame neither the child nor herself, but Anse — not for having sex with her, but for making her pregnant.

The conditions of maternity depend on the husband and on the relationship the woman has had with her mother (DE BEAUVOIR, 2011). Though the importance of Addie's mother is unknown, we are acquainted with her relationship with her husband. When she finds out that she is pregnant of Jewel, after ending her relationship with Whitfield, her reaction is not as negative as it is with Anse's children:

> Then it was over. Over in the sense that he was gone and I knew that, see him again though I would, I would never again see him coming swift and secret to me in the woods […].
> But for me it was not over. I mean, over in the sense of beginning and ending, because to me there was no beginning nor ending to anything then. […] Then I found that I had Jewel. When I waked to remember to discover it, he was two months gone.
> My father said that the reason for living is getting ready to stay dead. I knew at last what he meant […]. And so I have cleaned my house. With Jewel – I lay by the lamp, holding up my own head, watching him cap and suture it before he breathed – the wild blood boiled away and the sound of it ceased. Then there was only the milk, warm and calm, and I lying calm in the slow silence, getting ready to clean my house. (FAULKNER, 1973, p. 139)

Addie is then ready to clean her house to finally die: it is as if after giving birth to Jewel, her favorite child, born of her pleasure, she was ready for death. Before that, there was no "ending," but after his birth there is "warm and calm." She then mentions that she had given other children to Anse to compensate it, as if, by doing this, her duties were fulfilled. The fact that Addie is able to see Jewel's pregnancy differently

from Cash's and Darl's shows that maternity is not always terrible to her. She does not generalize her view of motherhood. The fact that De Beauvoir (Vol. II, Part Two, Ch. 6) sees maternity negatively — "Ordinarily, maternity is a strange compromise of narcissism, altruism, dream, sincerity, bad faith, devotion, and cynicism" — does not fully apply to Addie. She refuses maternity as the only way of experiencing her sexuality and she seems able to love at least one of her children. Her worries transcend their births: what seems to bother her is being defined by her role as a mother, as well as having her sexuality limited to it.

De Beauvoir denies nature to value culture. She sees working as the only way out for women, for it would ensure them social importance: "[...] it is the woman who has the richest personal life who will give the most to her child and who will ask for the least, she who acquires real human values through effort and struggle will be the most fit to bring up children" (DE BEAUVOIR, Vol. II, Part Two, Ch. 6). Concerning Addie, this is partly true and partly not. She lives with Anse and does not have a life of her own; she has given up teaching. However, she did not seem to feel complete when she worked, which was negatively seen as "the only way I could get ready to stay dead" (FAULKNER, 1973, p. 134).

French feminist Luce Irigaray (1993) sees equality as a discourse that has not worked in practice and thus she defends a culture of difference — which is criticized by some as a return to nature. According to Irigaray (1993, p. 20), sexual difference cannot be reduced to an extralinguistic fact of nature, since "It conditions nature and is conditioned by it". It determines "the gender of words and their division into grammatical classes: […] It's situated at the junction of nature and culture." But since patriarchal values have reduced the value of the feminine, "instead of remaining a different gender, the feminine has become, in our languages, the non-masculine, that is to say an abstract nonexistent reality" (IRIGARAY, 1993, p. 20). Following Irigaray, language, while supposedly neutral, is actually male, and thus excludes the feminine.

Similarly, Addie sees a problem in the fact that those who named "motherhood" were not mothers; she sees "words" and "deeds" as separated:

> That was when [when Cash is born] I learned that words are no good; that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at. When he was born I knew that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn't care whether there was a word for it or not. [...] I knew that it had been, not that they had dirty noses, but that we had had to use one another by words like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging and twisting and never touching, and that only through the blows of the switch could my blood and their blood flow as one stream. [...]
> He [Anse] had a word too. Love, he called it. But I have been used to words for a long time. I knew that that word was like the others: just a shape to fill a lack; that when the right time came, you wouldn't need a word for that [...]. Cash didn't need to say it to me nor I to him, and I would say, Let Anse use it, if he wants to. (FAULKNER, 1973, p. 136)

It does not matter how motherhood is called; those who have to call it (men) are not the ones who are there, rearing the children. It is only by action, by whipping them, that Addie feels that they are of the same blood, mother and children. Anse is the one who names what he and she have as "love"; with Cash, she does not need to say it to him, nor him to her.

The decision of not having more children with Anse is not for Addie to take.[6] However, concerning facts that cannot be named such as her relationship with Whitfield, she seems to have agency. Their affair is a product of her desire, and thus it is outside the possibilities of discourse/language in the patriarchal context she lives in, in which sex, for women, equals procreation. Their relationship is confined to the realm of "deeds," never to be referred to by "words." Similarly, Addie describes sin not as a word, but as a "garment":

> I would think of sin as I would think of clothes we both wore in the world's face, of circumspection necessary because he was he and I was I; the sin the more utter and terrible since he was the instrument ordained by God who created the sin, to

[6] When Darl is born and Addie asks Anse to be buried in Jefferson, he answers: "Nonsense [...] you and me ain't nigh done chapping yet, with just two" (FAULKNER, 1973, p. 137).

> sanctify that sin He had created. While I waited for him in the woods, waiting for him before he saw me, I would think of him dressed as sin. I would think of him as thinking of me dressed also in sin, he the more beautiful since the garment which he had exchanged for sin was sanctified. I would think of the sin as garments which we would remove in order to shape and coerce the terrible blood to the forlorn echo of the dead word high in the air. (FAULKNER, 1973, pp. 138-139)

Here we have a very pagan view of religion: it was God who created the sin to sanctify it; and the existence of sin only makes Whitfield's garment even more beautiful for her eyes to see, since it was sanctified. Here, the word "sin" itself is only an echo above the lovers. In their social context, it is used for something that cannot be pronounced, as a sacred euphemism for something unmentionable. Her affair with Whitfield and the paternity of Jewel are not named among her family; they are only hinted by Darl. When words fail, Addie has her agency. (Female) Experience and language are thus different things for her since male experience serves as a mold to name experience as a whole, as a supposedly "human" experience which is actually male. Irigaray (1993, p. 20) mentions that vocabulary related to women is often denigrating, objectifying them in relation to men: "This accounts for the fact that women find it so difficult to speak and to be heard as women. They are excluded and denied by the patriarchal linguistic order. They cannot be women and speak in a sensible, coherent manner." Addie finds her way of speaking by dealing with the material world or by materializing words into tangible things such as clothes or switches.

Concerning childbirth, Irigaray mentions:

> How can the natural suffering a woman experiences during childbirth be separated from the artificial suffering society imposes upon her? I think most women still experience childbirth alone, that no one allows them to talk about it as *subjects*, but rather they are always valorized as *mothers*, and thus as having suffered. They are identified as such and pass on this identity they bear as a *talion*: to be a woman, you must suffer. (IRIGRAY, 1993, pp. 101-102)

Indeed, there is more than one male narrator in *As I Lay Dying* that admits that women suffer and have hard lives, but not necessarily pointing a need for a change.[7] In Addie's case, childbirth is a social obligation when it comes to having her husband's children. However, with Jewel, as aforementioned, it is different. She seems to talk about it as a "subject," but as a subject that does not feel comfortable with words, since they always present her as a "mother." Addie's issue with motherhood seems close to the following statement by Irigaray (1993, p. 103): "But if motherhood is forced upon them [women] as their inescapable fate, following on from some 'original sin,' then it becomes an unbearable injustice for women: the deprivation of their subjective rights." Likewise, it is not maternity, but forced maternity what Addie denies.

Ecofeminist Ynestra King (1992) reconnects women with nature, criticizing male rationality that explored earth as well as women. Her goal is not equality *per se*, but denying both nature and culture and thus leaving the nature/culture dualism — she sees maternity as both natural *and* social. Concerning women's relation to nature, King (1992, p. 129) emphasizes the social dimension of it: "Part of the work of feminism has been asserting that the activities of women, believed to be more natural, are in fact absolutely social. […] Giving birth is natural, although how it is done is very social, but mothering is an absolutely social activity." In Addie's case, though she denies (male) language, choosing materiality instead, she has social functions such as motherhood, marriage, and relationships in general, not to mention her brief career as a teacher. She is also close to nature, for her sexuality before marring is expressed through natural tropes, as well as the birth of her children: "My children were of me

[7] In his narration, Tull quotes Anse's speech: "It's a hard life on women, for a fact. Some women. I mind my mammy lived to be seventy and more. Worked every day, rain or shine; […]" (FAULKNER, 1973, p. 26). In Moseley's section, when he denies selling abortive medication to Dewey Dell, he meditates: "Then I looked at her [Dewey Dell]. But it's a hard life they have; sometimes a man… if there can ever be any excuse for sin, which it can't be. And then, life wasn't made to be easy on folks; […]" (FAULKNER, 1973, p. 166).

alone, of the *wild blood boiling along the earth, of me and of all that lived*; of none and of all" (FAULKNER, 1973, p. 139, emphasis added). Addie is in-between the social realm, while bringing children to it, and the natural realm: she is close to the wilderness; she has something wild in her; her body is close to the earth, to "all that lived." This is precisely where King (1992, p. 130) situates mothering: "The process of nurturing an unsocialized, undifferentiated human infant into an adult person — the socialization of the organic — is the bridge between nature and culture." King reinforces that the ideal of (feminist) freedom is leaving the nature/culture dualism: "As feminists, we shall not develop an ideal of freedom that is neither antisocial nor antinatural" (KING, 1992, pp. 133-134). I am inclined to say that Addie's narrative, concerning her social and natural relations, can be seen as out of the dualism. I would not say that she is a proto-ecofeminist, because, among other reasons, this is not the point of this work. However, her complexity seems to make it difficult to situate her in one side of the nature/culture dualism, and thus I believe she somehow transcends it.

3. CONCLUSION

Cora says that she prays for Addie, whom she sees as "blind to sin"; about this, Addie synthetizes: "[...] because people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too" (FAULKNER, 1973, p. 140). According to Addie, actions are more important than their corresponding words; thus she refuses to pray for salvation with Cora. Belonging to the realm of culture, words and religion do not carry meaning for Addie. She has lived a life based on actions, close to nature. But she also discredits nature as a locus imposed on women by patriarchy: she denies the imposition of motherhood as well as the fact of being reduced to it.

As I have discussed, Addie separates sexual desire from motherhood and denies biology as destiny, but not maternity as whole: she thinks that her duty to bear and

rear Anse's children is terrible, but she is able to love Jewel — accepting him right away — and alludes that she and Cash showed love without words. She denies (male) language, by which things are named by those who have not personally been through them (such as motherhood), but she makes her own attempts — through materiality and even through words, in her narration — to express herself. She can create meaning by other means, acting thus socially. She denies the nature that imprisons her and the culture that allows others to speak for her. At the same time, she has a close relationship to the earth and is still a social subject.

The paradoxical nature of Addie's narration, its complexity, allows us to approximate it to De Beauvoir's (2011), Irigaray's (1993) and King's (1992) discourses, but somehow it transcends the three of them. Addie's narrative is also between Bergman (1996) and Hewson (2000) and, most likely, beyond my paper: she is a difficult character to grasp. In spite of her disapproval of words, she has led me to write; in spite of her death, she is the reason of her family's (material) quest, which is the main theme of *As I Lay Dying*. Through the novel, we come back to the realm of words, and the cycle continues.

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