As I Lay Dying: An Analysis Of Dewey Dell

William Faulkner or with the full name, William Cuthbert Faulkner is an American novelist. He wrote As I lay Dying in 1930. It is told that the stream consciousness and the multiple narrations were used while it was being written. The plot of the book is: “The book is narrated by 15 different characters over 59 chapters. It is the story of the death of Addie Bundren and her poor, rural family's quest and motivations—noble or selfish—to honour her wish to be buried in her hometown of Jefferson, Mississippi.

As the book opens, Addie is alive, though in ill health. Addie and others expect her to die soon, and she sits at a window watching as her firstborn, Cash, builds her coffin. Anse, Addie's husband, waits on the porch, while their daughter, Dewey Dell, fans her mother in the July heat. The night after Addie dies a heavy rainstorm sets in; rivers rise and wash out bridges the family will need to cross to get to Jefferson.

The family's trek by wagon begins, with Addie's non-embalmed body in the coffin. Along the way, Anse and the five children encounter various difficulties. Anse frequently rejects any offers of assistance, including meals or lodging, so at times the family goes hungry and sleeps in barns. At other times he refuses to accept loans from people, claiming he wishes to 'be beholden to no man', thus manipulating the would-be-lender into giving him charity as a gift not to be repaid.

Jewel, Addie's middle child, tries to leave his dysfunctional family, yet cannot turn his back on them through the trials. Cash breaks a leg and winds up riding atop the coffin. He refuses to admit to any discomfort, but the family eventually puts a makeshift cast of concrete on his leg. Twice, the family almost loses Addie's coffin — first, while crossing a river on a washed-out bridge (two mules are lost), and second, when a fire of suspicious origin starts in the barn where the coffin is being stored for a night.

After nine days, the family finally arrives in Jefferson, where the stench from the coffin is quickly smelled by the townspeople. In town, family members have different items of business to take care of. Cash's broken leg needs attention. Dewey Dell, for the second time in the novel, goes to a pharmacy, trying to obtain an abortion that she does not know how to ask for. First, though, Anse wants to borrow some shovels to bury Addie, because that was the purpose of the trip and the family should be together for that. Before that happens, however, Darl, the second eldest, is seized for the arson of the barn, and sent to the Mississippi State Insane Asylum in Jackson. With Addie only just buried, Anse forces Dewey Dell to give up her money, which he spends on getting “new teeth”, and marries the woman from whom he borrowed the spades. As is many of Faulkner's works, the story is set in Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, which Faulkner referred to as 'my apocryphal county', a fictional rendition of the writer's homeof Lafayette County in the same state.”

My character from the book is Dewey Dell Bundren. We see her in the chapters 7, 14, 30, and 58 as a narrator. Dewey Dell is Addie’s fourth child. In the book some of the characters have metaphorical names. I think my character has it also. According to the Oxford dictionary Dewey comes from the phrase ‘Dewey-eyed', and it means innocent, pure, and childish. Dell means a

‘small valley’. And I infer that my character naïve.

The woman characters in the book always face with the hardships. They are trying to find place themselves in the male-dominated world. Their ways to experience this survival challenge are quite different. And Dewey Dell is the only daughter of the family. She lives with her four brothers. Because of her mother’s sickness, she takes care of the boys and the father in the family. She cleans the house, washes the clothes, cooks for her family. She does all the housework that a mother should do at that time. Besides the housework, she takes care of Vardaman who is the most innocent, and the youngest member of the Bundren family. She acts like a mother. She has really big responsibility. Without stopping she regularly repeat this vicious cycle.

Dewey Dell is the most striking woman after her mother, Addie. She is a good figure who resists against the society of that time. She is not eager to be a mother, or getting big responsibilities because she is seventeen years old. And because of her youthfulness, she has secrets, and big problems. She was tricked to intercourse. “The scene in which she becomes pregnant exemplifies the idea that women are controlled by men. Dewy Dell attempts to resist the agreement she made with Lafe simply by not picking any cotton, thus resulting in her basket being empty by the time they finished picking. Lafe, however, is determined to fulfil this agreement and picks cotton into Dewey Dells basket. This results in her basket being full and the pair having to fulfil the agreement in which they have sex. Ultimately this results in Dewey Dell's pregnancy. Though Dewy Dell tries to resist this consequence she is controlled by the more powerful force of the male gender and must abide to the agreement.” Lafe, the father was taking advantage of the young, and unexperienced Dewey Dell. Then when he learns the pregnancy, he gives her ‘10’ Dollars in order to get abortion. She starts to fell alone, and worried because at that time being a mother, or having sex is not acceptable. His attitude makes her traumatized. She was used, and objectified as a toy for passion. “After this event occurs Dewey Dell begins to feel lonely and worried. When discovering the news that her mother is dying, she throws herself on to her mother’s bed and cries out. This reaction could have cultivated from the initial shock of her mother's death, but also because she now knows she is completely alone in the pregnancy and has lost all guidance she could have had.” This event, Addie’s death is not so striking issue for Anse, the father. He gives an order which is preparing the dinner to Dewey Dell. 'Git up, now, and put supper on'(Faulkner 50). For Anse it is no big deal because Addie is not the only one woman in the world.

Apart from her mother’s death, she is obsessed with her pregnancy. In one of her narrations she says 'I couldn't see and I couldn't feel. I couldn't feel the bed under me, and I couldn't think what I was I couldn't think of my name and I couldn't think what I am a girl.' (Faulkner 121) “This dream could be read in many different ways. The most prominent meaning could possibly be that Dewey Dell is becoming desensitized. With her mother's death and the pregnancy, Dewey Dell is going through events that are out of her control and she is going through this absolutely alone. In a more specific way of reading this dream, Dewey Dell cannot feel because she lost all control of her body when she got pregnant and she can't see because when her mother died all of Dewey Dell's sense of guidance is lost.” She has to survive against this world alone. After having the dream, she wakes up, and looks out of the window, and she sees the neighbour, Tull. Suddenly she makes a connection between Tull and her experience with Lafe in the field. Then Tull notices her appearance, and he says 'When I came up, she looked around at me, her eyes kind of blaring up and going hard like I had made to touch her'(Chap 29/33). Furthermore; With the advice of Lafe, she starts seeking a way to abortion. She goes to a pharmacy to get

medicine. There the man introducing himself as the pharmacist is actually a worker there, not pharmacist. He says he has medicine for her situation, but all he thinks about raping her. Dewey Dell’s all thought, or actions are consumed by the sexuality in this world.

Psychologically Dewey Dell is not healthy. She is very young, and faces with serious problems. One day she talks to cow. She says 'You dont know what worry is. I dont know what it is. I dont know whether I am worrying or not. Whether I can or not. I dont know whether I can cry or not. I dont know whether I have tried or not. I feel like a wet seed wild in the hot blind earth.'(Faulkner 64). Here cow is a symbol. It refers to motherhood, pregnancy, fruitfulness. She is really anxious about keeping her pregnancy hidden. She behaves all members of the family suspiciously, paranoiac, but Darl achieves to learn her secret. He is so sensitive, and good at guessing. He is suspected from Dewey Dell’s behaviour. When she recognizes Darl knows her secret, she says When Darl learn her pregnancy, she says “You cannot believe it is true because you cannot believe that Dewey Dell, Dewey Dell Bundren, could have such bad luck: is that it?'(Faulkner 40). Moreover, she makes plans on killing Darl. She wants to snob a knife on his body. How much she imagines doing it, she just makes him to go to the mental health hospital. I think the reason why she is so sensitive her secret is that giving value to individual identities. She thinks every person has their individual boundaries. No one can violate them. She does not even mention to the doctor of the family because she knows she is alone. She uses these words: ' If could just feel it, it would be different, because would not be alone. But if were not alone eveybody would know it. And Peabody could do much for and then would not be alone. Then I could be all right alone'(Faulkner 58-59).