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The Dead Father, As I Lay Dying,
and the Intertextual Dialogue between Modernism
and Postmodernism

Any work of art depends upon a complex series of interdependencies. If I wrench the rubber tire from the belly of Rauschenberg's famous goat to determine, in the interest of finer understanding of same, whether the tire is B. F. Goodrich or a Uniroyal, the work collapses, more or less behind my back.

Donald Barthelme, "Not-Knowing"

Despite his hostility towards literary criticism, Donald Barthelme often proved himself to be one of literature's most insightful commentators. A case in point is his 1985 essay "Not-Knowing," in which, by alluding to Robert Rauschenberg's "Monogram," Barthelme offers a remarkably comprehensive illustration of the mechanism of intertextual collage. In contrast to his earlier appraisal of collage as the governing principle of literature conveyed by the metaphor of Michelangelo's knife,¹ the 1985 definition does not focus on the diachronic aspect of intertextual relationship but strongly emphasizes the latter's interactive dimension and recognizes the ironic potential of every intertextual reading. By invoking the image of the "attired" goat, Barthelme stresses that the meaning of an intertextual exchange depends not on "the signification of parts but [on] how the parts come together" (517) and insists that the process of tracing interdependencies between parts inevitably presupposes a degree of interpretative violence. Translated into critical discourse, the idea of brutally ripping the tire from the goat's belly refers to the synchronic aspect of intertextual reading, where possible textual links are defined by means of the available discourse and the dominant reading conventions within the ideologically determined, transitory space between texts, which Kristeva calls the dialogic space of the "double" (69).

In this context, it is hardly surprising that *The Dead Father (DF)*, the second novel of the leading collage writer of American postmodernism, provoked multiple intertextual

¹ In an 1978 interview with Ziegler, Barthelme said, "instead of trying to do Blake, I might steal a little from Blake. As Michelangelo said so beautifully: 'Where I steal, I leave a knife.' He knew how to steal. My father, who was an architect, said: 'Get out there and steal, but improve what you steal.... Take the details and reduce them – Corbu or Mies or Neutra – and improve on these guys.' Or else your stealing has no meaning" (Ziegler and Bigsby 52-53). For Barthelme's comments on collage see Barthelme, Gass, Paley, and Percy 24.

readings which set it against modernist works, such as Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Kafka's *Letters to His Father*, Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, and Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*.² Associations with Faulkner are among the most frequent, presumably because of the two novels' apparent compositional and thematic parallelism.³ Despite those obvious symmetries, however, the relationship between *As I Lay Dying* (*ALD*) and *The Dead Father* is rendered controversial by Barthelme's reticence about his indebtedness to Faulkner (*Essays and Interviews* 228, 294). The case invites further analysis, especially since it raises crucial questions about the nature of intertextuality in the context of the all-subsuming modernist/postmodernist debate. Therefore, the aim of this essay is to re-examine the possible existence of an intertextual relationship between *The Dead Father* and *As I Lay Dying* and to explore the ways in which the intertextual reading of the two novels is contingent upon the cultural and critical renditions of differences between modernist and postmodernist literature. Rather than embarking on a hopeless mission to legitimize the intertextual bond between *The Dead Father* and *As I Lay Dying*, I seek to present a reading which, by testing the two novels' preoccupation with the figures of the dead father and the dead mother, elucidates the central features of intertextual dialogicity between modernist and postmodernist texts.

There are multiple correspondences between *As I Lay Dying* and *The Dead Father*. As Janusz Semrau notes, they can be traced already on the level of composition and are further emphasized by the two novels' preoccupation with the theme of death (51). Each text consists of a series of episodes constituting the motif of a journey which begins with a funeral party and ends at a burial site. While in *As I Lay Dying* the destitute Bundrens transport the corpse of their dead mother, Addie, to its resting place in Jefferson, the characters in Barthelme's novel face a similar task of dragging their father's giant carcass to the excavation site where he is to be buried. Moreover, the parallels are amplified by the grotesque exploitation of mythical patterns in both narratives. *The Dead Father* parodies the motif of quest and the motif of regenerative journey by presenting the burial as a passage through an obstacle-filled way to find the Golden Fleece, whereas the ultimate goal of the questers is actually to bury the father and free themselves from his influence. *As I Lay Dying*, on the other hand, caricatures the apocalyptic motif of ordeal as the travelling Bundrens ride through flood and fire in order to transport Addie's coffin to her family grave (Semrau 52-53). Meanwhile, however, the Bundrens use the journey as a pretext to carry out their private plans: Jefferson is the place where Dewey Dell can have an abortion and Anse can buy himself new teeth and get a new wife. The journey

² For discussions of *The Dead Father* in those contexts, see Kopcewicz; Wilde 45-47; Schwenger; Semrau 50-61.

³ For more discussion on this point, see Semrau 50-61. See also Barthelme's 1975 interview with Charles Ruas and his 1981 interview with Joe Brans's (*Essays and Interviews* 207-58, 293-308).

motif, despite its apparently symmetrical application in the two texts, provides a lens for observing significant differences between the patterns of each novel's teleological structuring. Not only does the narrative of *As I Lay Dying* consent entirely to the Aristotelian principle of the *telos* as its events stem from the initial fact of the Bundrens' promise to transport their deceased mother to Jefferson, but also the novel's *dianoia* remains unchallenged by such disrupting episodes as the collapse of the bridge or the barn fire. In contrast, *The Dead Father* does not imply any *telos* in the sense of either plot coherence or thought development (Leitch 136); most scenes, like the episode of the "halt," are assemblages of photographic images:

Thomas decides that the Dead Father is not allowed to view the film, because of his age. Outrage of the Dead Father. Death of the guitar, whanged against the tree, in outrage. Guitar carcass added to the fire. Thomas adamant. The Dead Father raging. Emma regnant. Julie staring. (DF 21)

As Andrzej Kopcewicz suggests, *The Dead Father's* narration can be grasped only in spatial terms; it is all about verbal collages "arrested in spatial surface" (174). Thomas Leitch makes a similar point by claiming that Barthelme's landscapes are "without shadows of narrative past... [the] story begins with a premise which like the rules of the game is simply given" (136). The "overbearing timelessness" of D.F.'s presence (Walsh 175) which informs the novel's static structure is forcefully stated at the onset of the journey: he is "dead, but still with us, still with us, but dead" (DF 3). His presence is always there to prevail in his children, so that "murdering," the desired solution to the problem of fatherhood, becomes unattainable. As the Dead Father proclaims "all lines [are his] lines" (DF 19); his giant carcass is the body of the book. It is thus precisely the spatial elaboration of this unattainability rather than any teleological organization that binds together the narrative of *The Dead Father* and accentuates its contrast to *As I Lay Dying*.

The discussion of differences in the spatio-temporal rendition of the journey motif in the two novels leads directly to the comparison of their narrative techniques. This in turn exposes the dependence of that discussion on theoretical renditions of temporality and spatiality, especially those inherent in the modernist and postmodernist models of literary subjectivity. The typically modernist preoccupation of Faulkner's soliloquies with individual subjectivity and its temporal predicament stands in sharp contrast with the spatialized subjectivities in Barthelme's text. *As I Lay Dying* oscillates around Addie's agony and prolonged burial, reflecting the Heideggerian concept of death which is not a momentary event but a process imprinting on life the mark of its mute presence. Accordingly, just as Addie's deathly presence regulates the lives of her family, the theme of

dying serves to maintain the progression of the novel's monologues. On the other hand, *The Dead Father's* fragmented narrative does not even begin to introduce characters in the usual sense of the word, thus signaling the deterioration, or rather detemporalization of the modernist subject. A case in point is the ambivalent status of the Dead Father, who, by being dead "only in a sense," exemplifies the postmodernist "waning of the modernist thematics of time and temporality [and] the elegiac mysteries of *durée*" (Jameson 72), which feature prominently in the interior monologues of *As I Lay Dying*. In fact, *The Dead Father's* treatment of death, a notion crucially involved in the construction of subjectivity, announces its radical departure from Faulkner's progressive "dying" as early as in the title's past participle form of the verb. "Dead" means one to whom death has already happened, a state rather than a process, and a state in which any access to authentic knowledge is forever deferred. Thus, through his indeterminate status of being dead and not dead at the same time, the Dead Father seems to be a literal enactment of the paradoxical logic of death as the attainable possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all. Unlike *As I Lay Dying*, which struggles with the implications of this logic, *The Dead Father* points to the irresolvability of death's paradox, thus producing a commentary on the modernist text's nostalgia for the subject's ontological authenticity.

Yet, is it altogether justified to assume close thematic correspondences between Faulkner's and Barthelme's texts by tracing direct parallels between the novels' central figures, Addie Bundren and The Dead Father? Indeed, the characters do resemble one another in that they embody what Semrau calls parental authority (52). In addition, they are similar in being authoritarian as well as a burden to those around them, since both, to repeat after "A Manual for Sons," block their children's path (*DF* 129). This oppressiveness, explicitly commented upon in *The Dead Father*, is never openly voiced in *As I Lay Dying*. However, it can be inferred from the meaning of the word "trout" in Chapter Three of *The Dead Father*, which serves as Riffaterre's intertextual "connective" between the two novels. The name of the fish derives from the Greek *trogein*, meaning to gnaw, to cause wearying distress and anxiety, and thus, if we recall Vardaman's declaration "My mother is a fish" (*ALD* 76), it seems to retrospectively inform Vardaman's perception of his mother, depriving it of its original innocence. Still, whereas both Addie and the Dead Father cause distress and anxiety among their families, we cannot turn a blind eye on the crucial gender difference between them, a difference which problematizes their apparent similarities and hence challenges the idea of Addie serving as the prototype for the main character of Barthelme's novel. In order to address this issue, however, it seems vital to return to the ontologically ambiguous status of the Dead Father, whose intertextual context may prove helpful in explaining why Faulkner centers his novel on the character of a dead woman.

The Dead Father's ontological and linguistic instability is repeatedly evoked in the course of Barthelme's narrative: not only does the Dead Father say in the beginning that it's "[g]reat to be alive.... To breathe in and out. To feel one's muscles bite and snap" (*DF* 13), but he also remains at once the spectacle and the spectator of his own burial: "'You'll bury me alive?' You're not alive... remember?'" (*DF* 175). The Dead Father's double role seems to be a literal embodiment of Baudelaire's *dédoublement*, an instance of the subject realizing the elusiveness of the possibility of an authentic sense of being. This situation gives rise to "the absolute comic" ("On Laughter" 157), or, as de Man calls it after Schlegel, "irony," which "from the small and apparently innocuous exposure of small self-deception... soon reaches the dimension of the absolute" ("Rhetoric" 215). The Dead Father is an epitome of the asymptotic unmasking that occurs in language as an accelerating *parabasis*, which brings an end to a hierarchized subject/object relationship, destabilizes cognitive endeavors, and thus signals the breakdown of the syntactic and logical congruity of discourse. The culminating moment of this process is exemplified by the entropic, Beckett Chapter Twenty-Two of *The Dead Father*:

AndI. EndI. Great endifarce teeterteeterteetertottering. Willit urt. I reiterate. Don't be cenacle. Conscienta mille testes. And having made them, where now? what now? Mens agitat molem and I wanted to doitwell, doitwell.... AndI most rightly and graciously and sweetly reiteratingandreiteratingandreiterating.... Don't understand! Don't want it! Fallo fallere fefelli falsum! (*DF* 171-73)

Here, as the Dead Father's utterances collapse onto one another, there follows a shattering of the illusion of narrative coherence, whereby, at the cost of any understanding ("Don't understand!"), the novel addresses the irrefutability of epistemological and ontological doubt, which, as I demonstrate later, *The Dead Father's* modernist intertext aims to transgress by controlling the ironic threat.

The recognition of irony as the governing mode of the Dead Father's existence and, due to its capacity to challenge narrative continuity, the underlying strategy of the novel directs the search for D.F.'s prototypes in Faulkner's novel not to the dead Addie, but rather to the character of her most despised son, Darl Bundren. Darl is the madman who, repressed and eventually expelled from the narrative altogether, shares the Dead Father's ironic predicament, particularly if we recall de Man's definition of irony as madness, "the end or dissolution of all consciousness" ("Rhetoric" 216). Darl's abnormal behavior, such as his fits of mad laughter and the attempt to burn Addie's coffin, unsettles the course of events, while the alienating and visionary quality of his monologues disrupts the narrative's linear progression to the point of threatening its complete dissolution. No

fragment illustrates Darl's disposition towards irony better than his final monologue where *dédoublement* gains true momentum as Darl speaks of himself in the third person:

Darl has gone to Jackson. They put him on the train, laughing, down the long car laughing, the heads turning like the heads of owls when he passed. "What are you laughing at?" I said.

"Yes yes yes yes yes...."

"Why do you laugh?" I said. "Is it because you hate the sound of laughing?..."

"Yes yes yes yes yes yes" (*ALD* 241-42)

Darl's maniacal repetitive affirmation of "an endless process [of psychic splitting] that leads to no synthesis" (de Man 220) exemplifies the moment of duplication the subject experiences in the act of irony, where the removal of the mask of identity does not reveal any truth about the self. Instead, it endlessly disrupts the process of inquiry into the subject's status, thus bringing about the laughter of madness. By being the locus of irony in *As I Lay Dying*, Darl's presence threatens the narrative and perhaps for this reason his position is constantly undermined and deprecated by others. The threat posed by his ironic consciousness is immediately counteracted – most notably when, in response to Darl's attempt to burn Addie's coffin and terminate the absurd pilgrimage, Jewel rescues the box from flames and secures the continuity of the journey – and in the end it is decisively removed as Darl is taken to a lunatic asylum. Without that episode, the narrative would not run a full circle because the Bundrens would not be able to complete the burial and fulfill their plans. Moreover, it is Darl's ironic sensibility that seems to be the reason for Addie's hatred:

Then I found 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 in a word like within a paper screen and struck me in the back through it. (*ALD* 161)

This passage communicates not only Addie's recognition of the dangerous potential of irony "hidden" in every instance of language but also her violent urge to nip its power in the bud. Given that Darl's eventual removal from the narrative secures its completion, it seems that the attitude expressed by Addie informs the novel's tendency to repress the ironic threat it nevertheless hosts within itself in the character of Darl. In other words, the same ironic element that reigns in *The Dead Father* seems to be already present, in its nascent state, in *As I Lay Dying*, in the character of Darl Bundren.⁴ Consequently, the fore-

⁴ The idea of "nascent state" derives from Lyotard's seminal essay "Answering the Question: What is Post-modernism?" (79). Lyotard's notion of postmodern elements as present in "nucleus" form (79) but repressed in modern(ist) works offers a way of accounting for correspondences between Darl and the Dead Father. It

grounding of the Dead Father may be understood as a celebratory de-marginalization of the silenced ironic doubt in *As I Lay Dying*.

Crucially, the assertion of irony's threat comes from Addie, the character not only central to the novel but also presumably endowed with the greatest insight into the truth of existence, as her knowledge, like that of a Socratean philosopher who seeks true wisdom in Hades, has been authenticated by death.⁵ Here, however, we stumble upon a paradox: on the one hand, the authenticity of Addie's testimony, "I knew what he [father] meant and that he could not have known what he meant himself" (*ALD* 164), is confirmed by the emphatic positioning of her monologue in the narrative after the actual moment of her death, but on the other hand, it is undermined by her own distrust towards words that are "no good [and] never fit at what they are trying to say at" (*ALD* 159). Rather than fulfilling the promise of death to bring definite answers to one's ontological inquiry, Addie's monologue announces the recognition, however bitter, of linguistic constraints that frustrate every possibility of reaching a state of authentic self-knowledge. That the discovery of the allegorical quality of words comes from the deceased Addie is highly relevant, since death, as a marker of temporality, is very much a feature of allegory. This is reflected in the fact that the heroine's death serves to sustain narrative duration by providing the Bundrens with a reason for completing their journey. As Paul de Man notes, "allegory always corresponds to the unveiling of an authentically temporal destiny [which] takes place in a subject that has sought refuge against the impact of time" ("Rhetoric" 206). Therefore allegory is invariably marked by a certain nostalgia for words to coincide with their referents, an attitude which Addie demonstrates when she observes that the word fear "was invented by someone that had never had the fear" (*ALD* 160), or when she declares, "people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too" (*ALD* 165). Her disillusioned acknowledgement of the allegorical quality of language may be said to reflect the novel's paradoxical attempt to render language transparent in order to show its non-transparency. Correspondingly, in refusing to accept the unbreachability of allegory, Addie expresses the typically modernist search for *le mot juste*, which is emphasized by the circularity of her life story: the end of

also, of course, exposes the reliance of intertextual readings on the existing models of approaching the relationship between modernist and postmodernist works.

⁵ Faulkner's title phrase is borrowed from Book IX of the *Odyssey*, "The Descent of the Dead," where Agamemnon's ghost says, "As I lay dying the woman with dog's eyes would not close my eyes as I descended into Hades" (Blotner 634-35). Given this context, the opening lines of Addie's monologue, "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" (*ALD* 157), seem to paraphrase the Socratic idea that the only aim of those who practice philosophy in a proper manner is to prepare for death (Plato sec. 64c). Just as death leaves Agamemnon open-eyed so that he can acquire knowledge of the underworld, it also seems to put Addie in possession of authentic existential knowledge inaccessible to the living.

Addie's "journey" is also its beginning since Jefferson, the site of her burial, is also the place of her birth.

This brings us back to the question why Faulkner centers his novel on the character of a dead woman. For one thing, it seems that the maneuver of authenticating Addie's words by making her talk from beyond the grave represents his essentialist trust in the expressive capacity of language. However, given the fact that Addie's presence is the constitutive element of the narrative's duration, the gesture seems to bespeak much more, namely, that her centrality is meant to mask the male author's usurpation of a woman's discursive position in order to disguise his dismissal of her point of view, presumably because a woman's point of view is one of the things that remain outside his control. In other words, Addie may very well be one of Faulkner's artist personae, one of his "male feminizations" (Hönnighausen 129) by means of which he indirectly proclaims his authorial (and male) control over language. The process of exerting that domination is symbolized in Addie's monologue by the image of the vessel, which serves as a sort of *mise en abime* for Faulkner's universalizing gesture:

I would think about his [Anse's] name until after a while I could see the word as a shape, a vessel, and I would watch him liquefy and flow into it like cold molasses flowing out of darkness into the vessel, until the jar stood full and motionless: a significant shape *profoundly without life* like an empty door frame; and then I would find that I had forgotten the name of the jar. (*ALD* 161, emphasis added)

By picturing Addie as a "murderous transformer" (Hönnighausen 132), Faulkner exposes his own procedures of shaping the language of his novel, which consist in approaching words and characters as lifeless "shapes" capable of conveying definite and controllable meanings. From this perspective, Addie's mistrust of words that "trick" (*ALD* 161) provides additional safeguard against any potential failure of Faulkner's approach, thereby revealing his authorial urge to dominate the discourse of the novel, including that part of it which is uttered by a female character. This idea is closely linked with the previously discussed tendency of Faulkner's text to suppress the ironic element represented by Darl. The ironist position of the latter tests the limits of Addie's essentialist approach to language and in this way thwarts her centrality to the novel, putting at risk both the duration of the narrative and the author's assertion of control over the novel's discourse. In order to mitigate this risk, Faulkner not only removes Darl but also silences and portrays as grotesque other major male characters in the novel: Jewel is hostile to language, Vardaman can barely use it, while Cash and Anse are verbally retarded.

In this context, Barthelme's recasting of Darl's ironic sensibility in the character of the Dead Father, and his use of the latter to deconstruct the notion of patriarchy by parodying psychoanalytic discourse, may be viewed as a recognition of Faulkner's manipulation. By rejecting the idea of gender binary in essentialist terms and introducing the absurd figure of D.F., the postmodern writer undermines male authority "both explicitly through his subject matter and implicitly through the strategies of his writing" (Schwenger 70) and thus comments on Faulkner's authorial dominance. His critique is additionally strengthened by the radical marginalization of the mother, who appears only once, as a lone horse-rider barely visible on the horizon. It also transpires from Julie's and Emma's fragmented and uncommunicative dialogic exchanges which, composed out of stock phrases, convey the sense of the imprisonment of female voice in the male-dominated discourse (McVicker 364-68):

Thought I heard a dog barking.
 In wild places far from the heart.
 Tiny silvered hairs that I had thought mine alone.
 A lady always does.
 Told them how Lenin Had appeared to her in a dream.
 That's your opinion...
 Hoping this will reach you at a favorable moment.
 (DF 86)

As though to confirm *The Dead Father's* ironic character, the novel's deconstructive maneuvers, however radical, are always prevented from merging into unequivocal statements by the presence of a self-reflexive textual element placed within the body of the text and called "A Manual for Sons." By creating a book-within-book structure, the "Manual" opens an interpretative abyss that not only disperses the conclusive commentaries of *As I Lay Dying* and prevents *The Dead Father's* own narrative from impeding its ironic potential, but also secures the text against totalizing interpretations. In contrast to Addie's monologue, which to an extent also serves as a mirror to the surrounding text of Faulkner's novel, the "Manual" does not proclaim any authenticity that would hinder its self-reflexive potential but instead allows for free perpetuation of ironic doubt. This difference between *The Dead Father* and *As I Lay Dying* further elucidates the two novels' distinct approaches to the problem of authorial control. What it shows is that while Barthelme renounces authority over his text by introducing the "Manual," Faulkner seems to emphasize his control by usurping Addie's voice and authenticating it by creating the illusion that it comes from beyond the grave, that is, from beyond the limits of human understanding.

Since the problem of authorial control involves the idea of diachronic intertextual influence, its discussion in terms of the relationship between *The Dead Father* and *As I Lay Dying* leads directly to the differences in the novels' thematization of the idea of ancestry. Even though, by revolving around the idea of parenthood, both *As I Lay Dying* and *The Dead Father* engage the issue of anxiety and indeterminacy that stems from the impossibility of creating new modes of cognition, they pursue it in radically different ways. Barthelme's novel delivers its commentary on intertextual influence in a provocatively straightforward manner through the figure of an ever-present authoritarian father (Wilde 45), suggesting that the dependence on ancestral texts is ingrained in literary creation. In contrast, *As I Lay Dying* bears no signs of such directness. With regard to the argument that Faulkner manipulates Addie Bundren's central position to assert his authorial domination over the novel's discourse, a comment on diachronic intertextual influence may be found in Addie's horror of pregnancy, which can be interpreted as the modernist novel's refusal to acknowledge the past and future intertexts it involuntarily carries within itself. From the psychoanalytic viewpoint, however, the association of textual influence with the figure of the mother implies not so much the anxiety of being influenced by existing discourse – unlike the father, the mother is not the giver of language and hence does not have to be conquered – as the reminder of pre-discursive freedom which characterizes pre-Symbolic stages of subject development. Thus, the modernist novel's implicit featuring of the intertextual relation in terms of the umbilical cord reveals its refusal to accept the inevitable indebtedness to its literary predecessors.

The context of *The Dead Father*, with its explicit identification of fatherhood with diachronic intertextual influence, urges us to re-examine Faulkner's rendition of father figures, especially the case of the marginalized Anse Bundren, who in many ways resembles the father in Barthelme's novel. Although Anse is portrayed as a remorseless, inert parasite, he is also "predatory" in the sense that he indulges in the immunity granted by his authority as a father. These qualities are shared by the Dead Father, who is like a "block placed squarely in [his children's] path" (*DF* 129), a burdensome but powerless corpse which on occasion turns into a ruthless slayer or authoritarian creator of everything that fills the universe of the novel. Accordingly, while in *As I Lay Dying* the general perception of Anse's relationship with his family, expressed most clearly by Dr. Peabody, is that they "could all have stuck his head in the saw and cured the whole family" (*ALD* 228), in *The Dead Father* the subjugation of patriarchal authority requires everyone's "combined efforts" (*DF* 145). In its more explicit version, the desire to dispose of the father is introduced in the word "murdering," which is an answer to a riddle posed to Thomas by Father Serpent in *The Dead Father*. The portmanteau quality

of the word suggests that even though “murder” (in a Lacanian sense) is a constantly ringing idea, it is also, as the lingering “-ing” suggests, impossible to accomplish. *The Dead Father*’s “murdering” perhaps links up with Dewey Dell’s secretly sought abortion, in which case the girl’s urge to dispose of the pregnancy and her eventual failure to do so may reflect the modernist novel’s tendency to repress the idea of literary imitation, accompanied by the fear that the desired disposal of the carried-inside remainder of the past may never take place.

The intertextual perspective offered by *The Dead Father* sheds light not only on Anse’s marginal position but also on the ambiguous duality of the father figure in Faulkner’s text. On the one hand, he is the clumsy and ridiculous Anse, yet on the other hand he is the omnipresent patriarch that haunts Addie throughout her life, and whom she hates for having “planted” her (*ALD* 157). This duality marks the effort to diminish the impact of literary fatherhood represented by the turning of Addie’s overwhelming father into the hopeless Anse Bundren, the effort which exemplifies the modernist struggle for literary uniqueness and reproduces the fear that the latter may not in the end be attainable. Such interpretation explains why Anse is “so loaded with faults and vices” as no other character in *As I Lay Dying* (Bleikasten 84). However, the final events of Anse’s remarriage and acquisition of a new set of teeth imply the frustration of the novel’s strategy to eliminate the father – he is bound to prevail due to his “ratlike talent for survival” (Bleikasten 85). In an intertextual reading of *As I Lay Dying* against *The Dead Father*, Faulkner’s portrayal of the father figure appears to be the starting point for Barthelme’s treatment of the anxiety of influence in his novel, where the father is de-marginalized and any distress deriving from his perseverance tolerated, or even embraced.

In conclusion of the analysis of the dialogic exchange between the two novels, let us return to Barthelme’s “attired” goat metaphor, which implies that a relationship between texts cannot be anatomized and proven, since all we can do is observe how it unfolds in the transitory space opened by their interaction. The intertextual reading of *The Dead Father* and *As I Lay Dying* seems to confirm this principle, as the dialogue between the two novels reveals meanings that are not located exclusively in either of them, but in the “double” position which gives no primacy to either part of the intertextual exchange, and which is always pre-determined by the cultural and ideological context of the interpretation. With regard to such notions as linguistic limits of ontological inquiry, authorial control, and textual influence, all of which inevitably constitute the frame of reference applied to the study of differences between modernist and postmodernist literature, *The Dead Father* provides a revitalizing context for approaching *As I Lay Dying*, while Faulkner’s text poses a challenge to the interpretative possibilities of its postmodernist

intertext. Once again, Donald Barthelme proves that by playing with existing texts and contexts he enters, in the words of Peter Schwenger, “delicately surreal battles between them.” The effect is “to undermine the authority of all texts, including his own” (70).

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