

## **ClassicNote on As I Lay Dying**

### **William Faulkner**

#### **American Writer**

**1897–1962**

#### **Biography of William Faulkner**

William Faulkner was a prolific writer who became very famous during his lifetime but who shied away from the spotlight as much as possible. He is remembered as both a gentlemanly southern eccentric and an arrogant, snobbish alcoholic. But perhaps the best way to describe Faulkner is to describe his heritage, for, like so many of his literary characters, Faulkner was profoundly affected by his family.

Faulkner's great grandfather, Colonel William Falkner (Faulkner added the "u" to his name), was born in 1825 and moved to Mississippi at the age of 14. He was a lawyer, writer, politician, soldier, and pioneer who was involved in several murder trials including two in which he was accused and was a best-selling novelist. During the Civil War he recruited a (Confederate) regiment and was elected its colonel, but his arrogance caused his troop to demote him and he left to recruit another regiment. After the war he became involved in the railroad business and made a lot of money; he bought a plantation and began to write books, one of which became a best-seller. He ran for Mississippi state legislature in 1889, but his opponent shot and killed him before the election.

Faulkner's grandfather was the colonel's oldest son, John Wesley Thompson Falkner. He inherited his father's railroad fortune and became an Assistant U.S. Attorney. He later became the president of the First National Bank of Oxford, Mississippi.

Faulkner's father was Murray Falkner, who moved from job to job before becoming the business manager of the University of Mississippi, where he and his family lived for the rest of his life. William Faulkner was born on September 25, 1897 and began to write poetry as a teenager. During World War I, he joined the Canadian Royal Flying Corps he was too short to join the U.S. Air Force but never fought; the day he graduated from the Flying Corps the Armistice was signed. The only "war injury" he received was the result of getting drunk and partying too hard on Armistice Day, wherein he injured his leg.

After the war, Faulkner came back to Oxford, enrolled as a special student at the University of Mississippi and began to write for the school papers and magazines, quickly earning a reputation as an eccentric. His strange routines, swanky dressing habits, and inability to hold down a job earned him the nickname "Count Nocount." He became postmaster of the University in 1921 and resigned three years later. In 1924 his first book of poetry, *The Marble Faun*, was published, but it was critically panned and had few buyers.

In early 1925 Faulkner and a friend traveled to New Orleans with the intention of getting Faulkner a berth on a ship to Europe, where he planned to refine his writing skills. But instead Faulkner ended up staying in New Orleans for a few months and writing. There he met the novelist Sherwood Anderson, whose book *Winesburg, Ohio* was a pillar of American Modernism. His friendship with Anderson inspired him to start writing novels, and in a short time he finished his first novel, *Soldier's Pay*, which was published in 1926 and was critically accepted although it sold few copies. Faulkner eventually did travel to Europe, but quickly returned to Oxford to write.

Faulkner wrote four more novels between 1926 and 1931: *Mosquitoes* (1927), *Sartoris* (1929), *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), and *As I Lay Dying* (1930), but none of them sold well, and he earned little money in this period. Finally, in 1931, *Sanctuary* was published and became financially successful. Suddenly Faulkner's

work began selling, and even magazines that had rejected his stories in the past clamored to publish them. Even Hollywood sought after him to write.

Faulkner's first big purchase was a large mansion in Oxford, where he lived and wrote, gaining a reputation as a reclusive curmudgeon. Between this time and the 1940s, Faulkner wrote seven more novels, including his famous *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Light in August*. In 1950, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, and, in typical Faulkner fashion, he sent his friends into a frenzy by refusing to attend the ceremony (although he eventually did go). In the latter part of the 1950s, he spent some time away from Oxford, including spending a year as a writer-in-residence at the University of Virginia. He returned to Oxford in June of 1962 and died of a heart attack on the morning of July 6 of that year.

### **About *As I Lay Dying*:**

*As I Lay Dying* was published in 1930, immediately following the work that many consider to be Faulkner's masterpiece, *The Sound and the Fury*. *The Sound and the Fury* is widely considered to be among the greatest of the modernist novels, and is hailed as a masterpiece of 20th century literature.

In both of these novels, Faulkner built on a tradition begun by modernist authors like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Faulkner used stream-of-consciousness narrative to explore perception and thought as the basis of experience. Objective reality does not exist in *As I Lay Dying*; we have only the highly subjective interior monologues of fifteen different narrators. Darl, who emerges early as the novel's most important narrator, is eloquent but considered strange by his family and neighbors. He ends up being put into an asylum, with his older brother Cash musing on the definition of "insane." Evaluating "truth" becomes an equally tricky enterprise, with Faulkner depicting a truth as mutable and violent as the river the Bundrens cross midway through the novel.

The structure of *As I Lay Dying* is powerful and innovative. Fifteen narrators alternate, delivering interior monologues with varying degrees of coherence and emotional intensity. The language is intense and highly subjective, with a recognizable change in language depending on the narrator. Each section falls somewhere in the range from confessional to stream-of-consciousness. The novel is a series of interior monologues, and through these fragmented passages we piece together the story of Addie Bundren's death and the transport of her body to Jefferson.

The narrative appears fragmentary, but the story demonstrates admirable unity: it is limited to the span of a few days, and the different sub-plots are logically and skillfully interwoven. Faulkner's innovation is in how we see this unified set of events: we are forced to look at the story from a number of different perspectives, each of which is highly subjective. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner made use of some elements of this technique. However, *As I Lay Dying* presents us with a far greater range of voices. Additionally, *The Sound and the Fury* provides a clearer distinction between unreliable and reliable narrators. Part Three of *The Sound and the Fury* is narrated by a man who is unmistakably evil, and Part Four helps clarify the novel through its use of a more objective third-person narrator. The voices in *As I Lay Dying* are more numerous and more ambiguous.

Among Faulkner's achievements, in this novel and elsewhere, was the rendering of the vernacular of the South into poetic literary language. The Bundrens live in Faulkner's fictional community of Yoknapatawpha County, a setting used in many of his novels, and they are among the poorest characters in all of Faulkner's work. And yet Darl is one of Faulkner's most articulate and poetic creations. His destruction has a tragic depth and dignity. Faulkner depicts the besieged and impoverished Bundrens with empathy and grace, although he never romanticizes them, nor does he shy away from depicting their ignorance and failings. His depiction here of poverty and rural people is among the most rich and layered portraits in all of literature.

### **Character List:**

**Darl Bundren:** One of the fifteen narrators. The second oldest son of the Bundren family. Darl is the first and most important narrator of the novel. He is sensitive, intuitive, and intelligent, and his monologues are some of the most eloquent; they are also a more intricate representation of the process of thought. Some of the interior monologues are fairly straightforward, but Darl's passages are stream-of-consciousness narrative. For much of the novel, he acts as a kind of narrative anchor. One of the challenges of the novel is the complete absence of an objective third-person narrator. Everything we know about these characters is told to us through the lens of a subjective speaker; because of Darl's sensitivity and isolation from the other characters, most readers come to rely heavily on his version of events. He is eloquent, intelligent, and isolated. He ends up being put in an asylum.

**Vardaman Bundren:** One of the fifteen narrators. The youngest son of the family, and the second most frequently used narrator of the novel. Vardaman seems to teeter on the brink of mental collapse early on. His mother's death is extremely traumatizing, and his sensitive and imaginative nature is thrown out of balance by the event. He is at an age where he is becoming conscious of his status as a country boy (as opposed to a town boy), and he wonders why it should be so. He has a special bond with Darl.

**Addie Bundren:** One of the fifteen narrators. Mother of the family. Gravely ill at the start of the novel, she dies early on. She has always wanted to be buried among her birth family in Jefferson. Once a schoolteacher, she married Anse and gave birth to four children by him: Cash, Darl, Dewey Dell, and Vardaman. She also had a secret affair with Whitfield, resulting in the birth of Jewel. The transport of her body is the main event of the novel.

**Anse Bundren:** One of the fifteen narrators. Patriarch. Anse is maddeningly stupid and lazy. He unimaginatively applies himself to his wife's wish, but the physical and mental cost to his family is tremendous. He is a begrudging father, without real love or concern for his children. There is nothing overtly hostile about him; mostly he comes off as a weak and irritating man, but his decisions cause real harm throughout the book.

**Cash Bundren:** One of the fifteen narrators. Oldest son of the Bundren family. Cash is a carpenter, and his identity is wrapped up in his work. Although his monologues are few in number and unrevealing for most of the novel, his voice comes to dominate the closing events. He lacks Darl's sublime imagination and sensitivity, but he is nonetheless a relatively compassionate and trustworthy narrator.

**Jewel:** One of the fifteen narrators. Middle child of the Bundrens. Secretly, he is the illegitimate child of the minister Whitfield. Jewel is a fiery and physical being. He is hot-tempered and impatient. He loves horses and is physically powerful.

**Dewey Dell:** One of the fifteen narrators. Only daughter of the Bundren family, and the second youngest child. Dewey Dell's monologues are characterized by unarticulated wishes, powerful but poorly misunderstood emotions, and fatigue. She is pregnant and is secretly seeking an abortion.

**Vernon Tull:** One of the fifteen narrators. A neighboring, wealthier farmer. Tull is often frustrated by Anse's laziness. He has helped Anse a great deal over the years, and his family helps the Bundrens during and after Addie's death.

**Cora Tull:** One of the fifteen narrators. Vernon's extremely religious wife. Cora has a special love for Darl, whom she recognizes as special. Often, her religious beliefs make her an extremely judgmental person.

**Eula Tull:** Daughter of Vernon and Cora.

**Kate Tull:** Daughter of Vernon and Cora. She predicts that Anse will have a new wife soon if Addie dies.

**Peabody:** One of the fifteen narrators. The doctor of the county. He is elderly and overweight, but he continues to work. Anse's stupidity maddens him. He tends to Addie and later to Cash.

**Samson:** One of the fifteen narrators. Local farmer. He puts up the Bundrens on the first night of their journey.

**Whitfield:** One of the fifteen narrators. Local minister. Father of Jewel. Years ago, he had a secret affair with Addie.

**Armstid:** One of the fifteen narrators. Farmer who puts up the Bundrens for several nights.

**Gillespie:** Farmer who puts up the Bundrens for a night. Darl burns his barn down.

**MacGowan:** One of the fifteen narrators. Assistant in a town store. He tricks Dewey Dell into believing he is a doctor, and peddles a bogus abortion treatment to her in exchange for sex.

### **Main Themes:**

**Isolation:** Faulkner's structure is particularly suitable for the theme of isolation. The characters exist within their own series of interior monologues; we encounter each character, alone with their secret longings and fears. With many characters, we are struck by their loneliness. Darl's isolation is the most poetic and the most tragic. He is a powerfully intuitive observer, but his sensitivity and brilliance often isolate from others. He views his siblings with a paradoxically mixed attitude swerving from empathy and loyalty to supreme and insensitive detachment. Many characters resent Darl because of how he encroaches on their isolation: Dewey Dell hates Darl for making her feel vulnerable, and Jewel lashes out at Darl for seeing the truth about him.

**The Physical:** The novel dwells on the realities of land, nature, and physical processes. One does not feel detached from nature, with all of its power and nastiness. The land and the difficulty of earning a living from it, as well as the power of the flooded river, reveal men as being part of an often hostile environment. Nature's belligerence is seen in our very bodies. The sanitized version of death favored by Whitfield is used only as a foil for the much nastier reality faced by the Bundrens. The stinking corpse and the ever present buzzards present a vision of death at its most repulsive and physical.

**Work:** Work is a recurring theme of the novel, most often connected to Cash. Cash is a man whose work gives him an identity; we hear the sound of his saw before we see him, and in all of the characters monologues Cash is inseparable from his work as a carpenter. Work plays itself out in another way with Anse, whose laziness and stupidity, along with his whining and self-pity, earn the reader's unqualified contempt.

**Poverty:** The Bundrens are among the poorest characters in all of Faulkner's work. This poverty imposes harsh limits on them. It makes them dependent on their neighbors, and resentful of that dependence; often, the Bundrens display a pathetic mixture of dependency and pride. Their poverty also makes life so harsh that little time can be allotted for grief, or healing. Pain is concealed, and the work of everyday life goes on.

**Religion:** Many character muse about God and man throughout the novel. Faulkner tends to be rather critical of simplistic Christianity. The minister Whitfield is revealed as a self-satisfied hypocrite, hiding his transgression with Addie yet maintaining that he has wrestled with the devil and won. Cora's piety also grows increasingly annoying, especially when it becomes clear that she ignores any fact or event that contradicts her pre-established beliefs.

**Duty:** Obligation is an important theme of the novel. The family is bringing Addie's body to Jefferson, to bury her as she wished to be buried. There is much talk about duty. Addie herself speaks of duty regarding her relationship to Anse; to hear her speak of it, duty is a joyless but necessary part of life. Anse, too, constantly

speaks of his duty to Addie, and the need to bury the body where she wished it to be buried. But duty seems somewhat fragile. Anse takes up with a new woman less than two weeks after Addie's death. And in terms of duty, the ties within the Bundren family fray rather quickly when it comes time to turn in Darl.

**Being:** Both Vardaman and Darl are taken by questions of being, consciousness, and identity. His mother's death has only added confusion to these questions; Vardaman cannot understand how something that "is" can become "was." Darl's musings veer between striking eloquence and a kind of elegant crudeness. Darl engages in intense sessions of questioning, in which he examines the foundations of being and consciousness. These questions take on a tragic significance when Darl loses his mind, and his concept of himself is completely undermined.

**Mortality:** With the central action being the delivery of Addie Bundren's body to Jefferson, mortality is an inescapable theme. Mortality here is nasty and extremely physical, with a stinking corpse and fat buzzards always following close behind. Death is also rendered more painful in light of the harshness of life. Addie is not allowed real rest. Her dead hands are described as still unresting, as if they could not believe that their work was done. And even after death, her body is made to suffer a number of new indignities.

### **Short Summary:**

The Bundren family live on their farm in Yoknapatawpha County, a fictional rural county in Mississippi. They are incredibly poor, and the clan matriarch, Addie Bundren, is nearing death. Cash, the oldest son of the family, is a carpenter. As a last gift to his mother, he makes a coffin for her outside the window of the room where she lies dying. Anse, the family's stupid and weak patriarch, sends two sons, Darl and Jewel, on a lumber shipping job that will net the family a few extra dollars. Darl and Jewel set off, Darl knowing that it means he will not be present for his mother's death. Midtrip, they have an accident, and are forced to turn back; but Addie Bundren has already died.

Cash completes the coffin and they hold a funeral service. Darl and Jewel set off again. Dewey Dell, the only girl of the family, nurses her own secrets: she is pregnant, and will seek an abortion in town. Vardaman, the youngest child, is traumatized horribly by his mother's death, and continues to confuse her with the fish he caught and killed earlier that same day. Darl and Jewel return, and the family sets off to transport the body to Jefferson. It was Addie's longstanding wish to be buried among her birth family there.

Storms have made the journey difficult. The bridges are washed away, and after a night at Samson's farm the Bundrens end up having to backtrack to find a fordable part of the river. The stench is becoming more noticeable, and buzzards follow the wagon. The attempted crossing is disastrous: Cash's leg is broken, and he nearly drowns. The mules are killed. But Jewel manages to save the coffin from floating away downstream.

The Bundrens take shelter at Armstid's farm. To buy new mules, Anse sells Jewel's horse behind Jewel's back. The stench of the body is becoming stronger, and the family sets off in a hurry.

In Mottson, Dewey Dell tries unsuccessfully to find a druggist who will give her an abortion treatment. Meanwhile, the family has trouble with the sheriff, due to the horrifying stench of the body, and the Bundrens buy cement to make a cast for Cash's leg.

The Bundrens seek shelter at the Gillespie farm. No longer able to stand what is happening to the body, Darl sets fire to the barn in which the coffin is housed. Jewel manages to save the coffin, but the barn burns to the ground. Meanwhile, Cash's leg is clearly seriously injured, and the cement cast has only made matters worse.

The next day, they arrive in Jefferson and bury Addie. Because of arrangements made by his own family, Darl is captured and taken off to a mental institution in Jackson. Cash sees Peabody, the county doctor, who does the best he can for the damaged leg. Dewey Dell is fooled by a shop assistant, and ends up trading sex for a

bogus abortion treatment. Anse, his wife just recently buried, finds a new wife in town. As the Bundrens are setting off to return home, he brings the woman out and introduces her as his new bride.

**First Section (Darl, Cora, Jewel, Darl, Cora, Dewey Dell; pages 1–23):**

Darl Bundren narrates. He and his younger brother Jewel come in from the field, passing a dilapidated cotton house. Darl walks around the shack, but Jewel steps through a window and walks straight on through. They go up a path, coming up the bluff; Vernon Tull's wagon is by the spring, and in the wagon bed are two chairs. At the spring, Jewel drinks from a gourd. Darl can hear his brother Cash sawing away, building the coffin for their mother, Addie Bundren. Cash is building the coffin right outside the house. Darl goes inside.

Cora Tull narrates. She baked some cakes on engagement, but the town lady client changed her mind afterward. She now has to find another place to sell them. Her daughter Kate voices her anger about the cancellation: "But those rich town ladies can change their minds. Poor folks can't." Cora views the situation differently, taking comfort in her God. He sees into people's hearts. Cora Tull and her family live nearby. They have come to help as Addie Bundren in dying. Cora and her two daughters, Kate and Eula, help with the chores. Darl passes on through the house, and Cora notes that Eula watches Darl with signs of infatuation.

Darl narrates. He goes onto the back porch, where his father Anse and Vernon Tull sit around waiting for Addie to die. Anse Bundren asks after Jewel. Darl takes a deep drink of water, and thinks about the pleasure of water and other times he has felt it, especially in the cool of night. He thinks about masturbating quietly in the dark, and wonders if his older brother Cash, sleeping not far away, was doing the same thing. Darl replies to his father's question, telling him that Jewel is in the barn harnessing the team. But Darl knows that in truth Jewel has passed through the barn and out into the pasture, to work with his horse. The horse, fiery and independent, gives him hell, and Jewel repeatedly addresses the animal as "you son of a bitch"; it is clear that the horse is Jewel's passion.

Jewel narrates. He despises Cash for sawing the coffin right where Addie can see him; Cash, Jewel thinks, wants to be complimented for his carpentry, wants to show off what a good son he is. He views the others as waiting around for Addie's death "like buzzards." He wishes violently that he could be alone with her, so that her last days could be quiet, private.

Darl narrates. He, Jewel, Anse, and Vernon Tull discuss whether Darl and Jewel are going to do a job transporting lumber for Tull. Anse waffles, clearly wanting the money but afraid of seeming cold. The family needs the three dollars. Darl and Anse discuss the possibility that if they go, Darl and Jewel may not make it back in time to say goodbye to the dying Addie. Jewel refuses to admit that Addie is that sick. Jewel is angry that Tull is even there, and accuses the family of trying hurry Addie into the grave. Anse says that she wants to see the coffin being made, and that Jewel is selfish and doesn't try to respect her wishes. Darl leaves the decision in Anse's hands, but the man continues to waffle, clearly wanting the money but lacking the courage to admit it. The brothers go to do the job. Darl goes into the house to look at his mother. He hears voices.

Cora narrates. She sees Darl, looking in on Addie, and believes more fervently than ever that he is the best of the Bundren lot. Cora has been coming to help for a while, trying to comfort Addie in her last dies. She finds the Bundrens a deplorable lot. She does not approve of Addie being buried among her family in Jefferson; a wife she be buried near her husband and children. She thinks that Jewel hates Addie most of all, despite Addie's partiality toward him. And she notices that Dewey Dell, the only daughter of the family, takes to her job fanning Addie with a kind of unhealthy possessiveness. Dewey Dell seems to want Addie all to herself. Cora believes that Darl begged Anse not to send him off on that lumber job, and that Jewel would rather have three dollars than say goodbye to his mother.

Dewey Dell narrates. She remembers when she went with the young boy Lafe to the secret shade, wondering if she would give in to him and have sex. They were harvesting, and she told him that if her sack were full by

the time they reached the secret shade it meant that God meant for her to do it. Lefe helped her fill her sack. She later saw Darl, and he knew without being told what had happened. The communication between the two is powerful, often unspoken, but part of Dewey Dell hates Darl for this closeness: "And that's why I can talk to him with knowing with hating because he knows" (23). Darl stands in the door now, looking at Addie. He tells Dewey Dell that Addie is going to die before he and Jewel return.

### **Analysis:**

*As I Lay Dying* is an important experiment in narrative. The language is intense and highly subjective, with a recognizable change in language depending on the narrator. Each section falls somewhere in the range from confessional to stream-of-consciousness. The novel is a series of interior monologues, and through these fragmented passages we piece together the story of Addie Bundren's death and the transport of her body to Jefferson.

The narrative appears fragmentary, but the story demonstrates admirable unity: it is limited to the span of a few days, and the different sub-plots are logically and skilfully interwoven. Faulkner's innovation is in how we see this unified set of events: we are forced to look at the story from a number of different perspectives, each of which is highly subjective. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner made use of some elements of this technique. However, *As I Lay Dying* presents us with a far greater range of voices. Additionally, *The Sound and the Fury* provides a clearer distinction between unreliable and reliable narrators. Part Three of *The Sound and the Fury* is narrated by a man who is unmistakably evil, and Part Four helps clarify the novel through its use of a more objective third-person narrator. The voices in *As I Lay Dying* are more numerous and more ambiguous.

Darl is the first and most important narrator of the novel. He is sensitive, intuitive, and intelligent, and his monologues are some of the most eloquent; they are also a more intricate representation of the process of thought. Some of the interior monologues are fairly straightforward, but Darl's passages are stream-of-consciousness narrative. For much of the novel, he acts as a kind of narrative anchor. One of the challenges of the novel is the complete absence of an objective third-person narrator. Everything we know about these characters is told to us through the lens of a subjective speaker; because of Darl's sensitivity and isolation from the other characters, most readers come to rely heavily on his version of events. He is eloquent, intelligent, and isolated. Isolation is one of the recurring themes of the novel. Because of the novel's unique structure, the isolation of the characters is highlighted. Darl tells us what he and alone can observe, and his isolation is the most poetic; ultimately, it is also the most tragic.

From the very first section, the sensory and sensual images of the novel are a strong element. Although the novel takes the form of interior monologues, each character is powerfully influenced, in his own way, by the sheer physicality of their world. *As I Lay Dying* presents one of the most rugged and rural settings of any Faulkner novel; this South is the South of heartbreaking poverty and life lived close to an often unforgiving land. Nature and physical needs dominate as a theme: Darl narrates a long passage on the pleasure of drinking water, and relates a memory of seeing the stars reflected in a bucket full of water. He is described as always having his eyes "full of the land" by other characters; he sees something in the world that the others don't, and his descriptions of nature are often striking for their sensuality and the unusual metaphors he employs.

Work is part of the relationship to the land, and it is an important theme of the novel. Cash is a man whose work gives him an identity; we hear the sound of his saw before we see him, and in all of the characters' monologues Cash is inseparable from his work as a carpenter. The sound of his saw is the constant background noise that accompanies us all the way to Addie Bundren's death. Jewel is furious at Cash for building the coffin right near Addie: "It's because he stays out there, right under the window, hammering, and sawing on that goddamn box. Where she's got to see him. Where every breath she draws is full of his knocking and sawing where she can see him saying See. See what a good one I am making for you" (11). But Jewel love's is possessive and perhaps ignores Addie's wishes: she wants to see the coffin being made. Cash is

doing for her the only thing he can do. He takes his identity from his work as a carpenter, and the coffin is the only gift he can give his mother.

We do not only hear about the negative aspects of characters from other characters; characters often inadvertently present their own faults in their own sections. In Cora Tull's first section, Cora's self-righteousness and irritating piety come through loud and clear. Her daughter Kate seems far healthier in comparison: Kate complains about the insensitivities of the rich. Cora's attitude of acceptance seems at first to be kinder, but in the end turns out to be self-righteous and equally angry. She continues to talk to us about the cakes, thinking about them again and again without reason, and continuing to take comfort in the power of God, who "can see into the heart" (4). Implicit in Cora's interior monologue is that she feels she does not need to judge the rich because her God will. Religion is a theme of the novel, and often Faulkner is deeply critical of the religious characters of the book. Characters often are blinded by their own piety.

Poverty is an important theme of the novel. The Bundrens are one of the poorest families in any of Faulkner's books. Jewel and Darl are going to miss their mother's death for three dollars. The family lives in a perpetual state of need, always slightly short of cash.

Isolation also is apparent in Dewey Dell's narrative. She is the only daughter of the family, and Addie's death will leave her as the sole female. This fact might explain the extreme possessiveness with which she watches over Addie. Dewey Dell is clearly lonely, and has found comfort in the arms of a boy who lives nearby. But although she is lonely and isolated and suffers for it, some part of her treasures this isolation. Part of her resents and fears Darl because he intuitively understands her and can see her secrets. Most of the time, Dewey Dell seems very partial to Darl. The two enjoy a closeness and love that is evident to the other members of the family. But in Dewey Dell's first section, she voices a resentment that will explain her actions later: "And that's why I can talk to him with knowing with hating because he knows" (23).

### **Second Section (Tull, Anse, Darl, Peabody, Darl, Vardaman, Dewey Dell; pages 24–58):**

Vernon Tull narrates. He and Anse talk about sending the boys off with the lumber; Anse continues to say he doesn't like doing it, but he has to. Addie wants to be buried in Jefferson, with her own people, and they'll want to set off right away after she dies. Vardaman, the youngest Bundren, comes along, carrying an enormous fish. He wants to show it to his mother. Anse tells Vardaman to clean it, and the boy goes around the house. Vernon notes that rain is coming. He looks at Cash, working meticulously on the coffin, and he hopes that Cash does as good a job on the barn he's supposed to build for Vernon. Cora and Eula and Kate come out of the house; it's time for the Tulls to go home. They discuss the Bundrens. Vernon has promised to help Anse if he gets into a tight spot; like all of the people in the area, he's already helped Anse a great deal over the years. Kate observes acridly that if Addie dies, Anse will get a new wife before cotton-picking time. Now that Addie is dying, the three older Bundren sons will probably get married.

Anse narrates. Anse speaks of the misfortune of living near the road. He blames the bustle of the road for many misfortunes, including Cash's carpenter hopes, which lead to Cash falling off a roof and being unable to work for six months. He thinks the road has contributed to Addie's sickness. Vardaman returns, covered with blood from having cleaned the fish. Anse tells him to go wash up. Anse is weary.

Darl narrates. He asks Jewel, repeatedly, if he realizes that Addie is going to die. He has bothered Dewey Dell, not out of malice but out of a strange detachment from how his words hurt her: he knew that Dewey Dell is pregnant, and that she is waiting for Addie to die so she can rush to town and find a pharmacist to help her have an abortion.

Peabody narrates. He is the doctor, and despite the coming storm he has been sent for by Anse. He knows that if stingy Anse has sent for him, it's already too late; moreover, he doesn't want to prolong Addie's suffering. Peabody is obese and old, and he has to be hauled up the bluff by a rope. He enters Addie's room and sees that

the end is very close. He goes out on the porch to talk to Anse, but Dewey Dell calls them back in the room. Addie's eyes are fierce. Dewey Dell tells Peabody that Addie wants him to leave. Suddenly, Addie calls out to Cash, still sawing away on the coffin. Her voice is harsh and strong.

Darl narrates. This interior monologue is one of the strangest in the novel: though Darl is not present, he narrates the death of Addie Bundren. Dewey Dell says that Addie wants to see Jewel. Anse informs her that Jewel and Darl have gone off to ship the lumber. Addie calls out to Cash again; he fits together two boards for her to see. She looks at Vardaman, and it seems as if the light leaps back into her eyes; then, suddenly, she is dead. Dewey Dell throws herself on her mother's body, weeping hysterically. Vardaman, terrified, slips out of the room.

Meanwhile, Jewel and Darl have run the wagon into a ditch. One of the wheels is shattered. The description is italicized.

Cash comes in to look at his mother. Anse tells him to hurry up with the coffin. Anse also tells Dewey Dell to fix supper. She smooths the wrinkles of the bed and goes.

The voice becomes more subjectively Darl's, the verb tenses indicating imagining rather than witnessing the situation: he imagines Dewey Dell looking at Peabody, thinking to herself that the doctor could help her so much if he only knew.

The narrator switches to a tense suggesting witness. Anse touches Addie's corpse and quilt, trying to be tender. He then leaves, thinking about he'll finally be able to get those false teeth he's always wanted.

Back at the wrecked wagon, Darl tells Jewel that Addie is dead.

Vardaman narrates. He runs out back and cries. Not far from the porch is the spot where the fish lay earlier that day. He is preoccupied by the memory of the blood, and of the change from fish to not-fish. He blames Peabody for triggering his mother's death, and runs into the barn to beat Peabody's horses. The horses run off, leaving a trail of dust. He runs into the pasture, where he ignores the cow he needs milking. He watches Cash come out from the house, noting Cash's limp. Cash notes the dust trail and goes up the path to investigate. Vardaman is full of angry, confused feelings; he keeps thinking of the moment before the fish was cut and before his mother was dead. He hears no living thing, and even the sensory information connected to Jewel's magnificent horse dissolves into its different components.

Dewey Dell narrates. She addresses Peabody in her own mind: he could help her so much, and he doesn't even know it. Cash comes in and informs her that Peabody's team has run off. She hasn't had time to cook the fish, and as the men start to eat dinner they complain about the lack of meat. She goes out to milk the cow. She reflects on her loneliness. Life is gone. And the baby grows; she can feel it. Vardaman, hiding in the barn scares her. Even before an accusation, he denies doing anything. She is angry at him, but when he starts to cry she comforts him. She sends him in to eat his dinner. Alone again with her worries, Dewey Dell finds herself so seized by anxiety that she cannot name her own feelings.

### **Analysis:**

Poverty is one of the novel's recurring themes. The harshness of the Bundren's life is emphasized again and again. For the rural, life is hard work with no chance for rest. The Bundrens are particularly poor, and their situation has always been difficult. Because of this poverty, Jewel and Darl end up having to ship lumber, missing their mother's death for three dollars.

Anse's laziness is most decidedly a factor in their state. Anse generally comes off as a despicable character; he clearly means to have the boys go off and ship the lumber, missing their mother's death for three dollars, but

he is not man enough to say it directly. Instead he waffles and whines until his decision becomes clear. He is a weak man, always excusing his own behavior and acting with little real feeling for his family. When Addie dies, he thinks that finally he'll be able to get false teeth. He makes some attempt at tenderness, but it is as if he does so because he knows he should, or he has seen others doing it. He attempts to smooth out the quilt, "as he saw Dewey Dell do" (47), but he only succeeds in wrinkling it. Faulkner's language is heavy here, emphasizing Anse's hands as bringing disorder and ugliness to whatever they touch. His gesture lacks real feeling; it is sentiment contrived because sentiment is appropriate, and to drive the point home to us Faulkner has Anse looking forward to his false teeth with his wife's body not yet cold.

Anse's neighbors have had to help him constantly throughout the years, so much so that they have become resigned to it. The voices coming from outside of the family are often characterized by a harsh judgment of the Bundrens and of Anse in particular. Faulkner also emphasizes that for those outside of the family, Addie's death cannot be the sole focus of attention. Life is too demanding. Mortality as a theme is often juxtaposed to the need to keep on living. Peabody, being pulled up the mountain to see Addie, reflects on his old age and the demands of his work. Cora thinks of her cakes. Vernon Tull sends Jewel and Darl to ship lumber for him. The intent is not always to show that a character is petty, but to depict a life that is demanding and unrelenting in its harshness.

Darl's voice continues to be the most eloquent and relied-upon. Anse's interior monologue reveals his weak will and dimness. Dewey Dell's interior monologues are delivered from the throes of powerful fear and emotion. Vardaman's monologues are similar to Darl's in many ways. They are, not surprisingly, less mature, but the young boy shares Darl's taste for bizarre imagery and relentless questioning of the very terms of his own existence.

The Tulls and Peabody provide valuable outsiders' perspective. They universally condemn Anse, more or less, for his laziness and weakness. Tull notes that one can always tell Anse's shirts apart: there are no sweat stains, the implication being that Anse never works (27). On the other Bundrens, their opinions vary. Cora is extremely fond of Darl; she sees in him a sensibility finer and gentler than among any other Bundren. So much so that she seems to cling to illusions about him: she believes that he begged to stay with Addie instead of delivering the lumber, and claims in her interior monologue that Vernon told her so. Yet in Vernon Tull's own interior monologue, we hear the exchange with Darl. As Vernon Tull's interior monologue depicts it, Darl is hesitant and seems sad about leaving while Addie dies, but he does not beg.

This example highlights the complexity of the portraits that emerge in *As I Lay Dying*. We listen to the very strong opinions characters have of one another. Usually interior thought is emphasized far more than dialogue. While dialogue as a way to reveal characters would provide more objective evidence, we would lose the psychological complexity of the portraits.

The Tulls talking among themselves as they leave is one of the rare moments when we learn from dialogue. The family, heading home, begins naturally to discuss the Bundrens. Kate and Eula seem preoccupied with Cash, Darl, and Jewel, and the possibility that they'll get married soon; Kate speaks with some scorn about Jewel's fiery nature. Kate also speaks with scorn about Anse, predicting that if Addie dies Anse will find a new wife before cotton-picking time (28). Though people help Anse, no one seems to respect him.

The death scene itself is revealed in Darl's section, although he is not there to witness it. The passage merits close examination, so that readers can reach their own conclusions. Although Darl is not there, the passage seems to be narrated from a more detached version of Darl's own voice. Anse is referred to as "Pa," for example, suggesting that we are seeing things from Darl's perspective. But the italicized passages are more strongly in a personal voice: in these italicized passages, we hear about the wagon accident. Also, Darl continues to narrate the death in the italicized passages, although the tense (future: ie "She will go out where Peabody is") suggests that Darl is imagining what is happening. But there is continuity between the italicized passages and the non-italicized. Darl's voice is the only voice Faulkner seems willing to use for this scene. He

and Jewel are among the most affected by Addie's death. Darl's sensitivity and eloquence are matched throughout the novel with his strange detachment and isolation. In this light, it makes some sense that Darl's voice should narrate Addie's death. The situation mirrors Darl's own paradoxical relationship to the event. He is more close to it, more moved by the event and its implications, but his mind leads him to be isolated from his own family. He is literally removed from his mother by the errand, just as he is psychologically and spiritually isolated from all around him.

As Faulkner depicts it, and as the structure of the novel suggests, real intimacy and tenderness are close to impossible in the Bundren family. Work and the realities of poverty darken all aspects of life, and hope and longing are always expressed alone. The family lives in squalid, cramped conditions, and yet isolation is one of their trademarks. Remember Darl reflecting on his boyhood, and the first times he masturbated: Cash was sleeping not a few feet away, but Darl does not know if Cash was doing the same thing. Solitary masturbation in complete darkness is the only glimpse we get of Darl's and Cash's sexuality. Dialogue between the Bundrens is almost always spare and minimal, and juxtaposed to a torrent of powerful, often violent internal reflections. Darl is the only character who occasionally gives voice to his thoughts, and probes into the interior lives of his siblings: with both Jewel and Dewey Dell, this habit of Darl's earns resentment, even hatred.

In Addie's death we are reminded again of the harshness of rural poverty. The themes of poverty and work run through the passages. Motherhood, as depicted here, is a life-destroying venture, without joy or tenderness. Peabody says of Addie, and her fierce unspoken insistence that he leave the room: "Seem them [women like Addie] drive from the room them coming with sympathy and pity, with actual help, and clinging to some trifling animal to whom they never were more than pack-horses" (41). Even more striking is the description of Addie's hands: "the hands alone still with any semblance of life: a curled, gnarled inertness; a spent yet alert quality from which weariness, exhaustion, travail has not departed, as though they doubted even yet the actuality of rest, guarding with horned and penurious alertness the cessation which they know cannot last" (46). Addie's hands bear the marks of her hard life.

For Dewey Dell, there is not time enough to articulate her own emotions to herself: "I try to but I can't think long enough to worry" (53). Her thoughts are some of the most muddled in the book: she speaks not with the complicated and eccentric eloquence of Darl but in a voice near-hysterical with worry. Her mother's death is deeply painful: she throws herself on Addie's corpse with an unexpected intensity. She has lost her lover, who has abandoned her and left her pregnant. Her isolation is clear. But she is so used to being alone that she resents intrusions. Darl, for example, earns her resentment because of how intimately he understands her. Even more intrusive is the growing presence in her womb: "I feel my body, my bones and flesh beginning to part and open upon the alone, and the process of coming unalone is terrible" (55). Dewey Dell must begin to worry about finding a way to end the pregnancy.

### **Third Section (Vardaman, Tull, Darl, Cash, Vardaman, Tull, Darl, Cash, Darl, Vardaman, Darl, Anse; pp. 59–95):**

Vardaman narrates. He is disturbed by the idea of shutting Addie up in the coffin. He speaks confusedly about the wonders of town and the mysteries of his mother's death. He doesn't understand why he's a country boy and why such differences exist between town and country. He can't seem to understand the idea of death, and in his thoughts he confuses Addie's corpse with the dead fish. He feels the need to get Vernon, because Vernon also saw the fish.

Tull narrates. A storm has begun. He is woken by the passing of Peabody's (riderless) team. Cora hears the noise and thinks Addie has passed. She wants to hitch up and go to help, but Tull prefers to wait till he's called. Vardaman arrives at their door, dripping with rain, and speaking incoherently about fish. His babbling is strange and eerie, and Tull shares the reader's reaction: "I'll be darn if it didn't give me the creeps" (63). Vernon hitches up the team, and when he comes back into the house he finds Vardaman and Cora in the kitchen, the boy still speaking of fish. Cora thinks it's a judgment against Anse. They bring Vardaman back,

and help where they can. Toward dawn, the coffin is complete and they put Addie inside of it, nailing the lid shut. Vardaman is found later, asleep on the floor, after having used the drill to put holes into the top of the coffin; two of the holes were bored right into Addie's face. It is dawn before the Tulls return home. Tull thinks about God and faith and his wife, and the sadness of the world, the powerlessness of man.

Darl narrates. He has come home to get a spare wheel for the wagon. He watches as Cash completes the coffin. Anse gets in the way, so Cash sends him inside. Tull helps complete the coffin. Cash makes the coffin on a bevel, even though it takes longer. They finish and carry it in. Darl and Jewel have set out again to complete their job. Beneath a strange roof, Darl thinks of being, and the contradictions of being, and home.

Cash narrates. It is a list of thirteen reasons to build the coffin on a bevel.

Vardaman narrates. "My mother is a fish" (76).

Vernon Tull narrates. He returns to the Bundren home with the wagon at 10 AM the next day. With Quick and Anstid, he has discussed the high level of the river due to the storm; Anse had best hurry. The bridge is old and won't hold up much longer. Vardaman has been upset. He attacked Dewey Dell when she cooked up the fish he caught. The woman are inside and the men are on the porch. Cash repairs the damage Vardaman did to the coffin. They lay Addie in backwards, to protect her dress. Whitfield, the minister, arrives. He announces that the bridge has been swept away. The women sing, and Whitfield performs the rites for Addie. The women sing again. On the way home, Cora is still singing. They see a dirty Vardaman fishing in the slough, and they try to get him to come home with them so he can rest for a bit, but the boy refuses.

Darl narrates. He is telling Jewel that it is not his horse that's dead. Jewel is angry. Three days have passed, and they have returned home. Anse has been waiting for them; Addie's body rots in the coffin. Buzzards circle in the sky.

Cash narrates. He tries to explain to Jewel why the coffin won't balance, but Jewel ignores his advice and insists that Cash help to lift the coffin and move it to the wagon.

Darl narrates. He is witnessing the exchange between Jewel and Cash. The men carry the coffin down the hill to the wagon, having a great deal of difficulty: Cash is right. It doesn't balance. In the end, Jewel is carrying most of the weight, and with sheer muscle and weight he hoists the coffin into the wagon.

Vardaman narrates. The family is going to town. Dewey Dell has assured him that the toy train set he saw long ago in town will still be there. Anse and Jewel argue: Jewel wants to ride his horse, but Anse wants him to ride in the wagon like Addie would have wanted. Darl and Vardaman have a strange conversation about their mother (see below, Analysis). Cash is bringing his tools along; on the way back from dropping off Addie, he's going to have to get to work on Tull's barn roof. Dewey Dell is taking Mrs. Tull's cakes to town for her.

Darl narrates. Everyone is getting into the wagon. Jewel appears not to be coming, angry about not being able to ride his horse. Anse is angry; Cash tries to brush it off, saying that Jewell will go and stay with the Tulls. But Darl predicts aloud that Jewel will meet them later. The buzzards circle in the distance.

Anse narrates. They are in the wagon, riding on. He is fuming about his sons. He is mad at Jewel for wanting to ride the horse and then refusing to come. He becomes angry when Darl starts laughing suddenly; behavior like that is what makes people think Darl is crazy. Anse berates his sons' lack of respect for their dead mother. We soon see the source of Darl's laughter: Jewel, as Darl predicted, is catching up with them. He is riding his horse.

**Analysis:**

Both Vardaman and Darl are taken by questions of being, consciousness, and identity. His mother's death has only added confusion to these questions; Vardaman cannot understand how something that "is" can become "was." In other words, the destructive power of time, the terror of mortality, and the mystery of ceasing to exist have been too much for Vardaman. In his mind, his mother has become something else. Vardaman turns death into transformation. His mother is a fish. He then imagines her as a rabbit, because she has gone far away, just as the rabbits did. He is disturbed by the fact that they are going to eat the fish.

Vardaman struggles to find teleology for the events around him. He tries to connect what happens to reasons, when in fact often things happen for no reason at all. He blames his mother's death on Peabody, because Peabody's arrival preceded his mother's death. He also has linked the fish and his mother. His reasoning is clearly incorrect, but in many ways it is no less reasonable than explanations given by other characters of the novel. Consider Cora Tull, he repetitively maintains that all happens by God's will, for God's reasons. Yet she is so wrapped up in forcing events into a Christian framework that her pronouncements become tiresome. She sees Vardaman's instability as God's punishment for Anse. Her reasoning is no more sophisticated than Vardaman's; the sole difference is that she has the backing of her near-fanatical religious beliefs.

Questions of identity and being are linked to poverty and rural life for Vardaman. In, Vardaman's first interior monologue of this section, he asks others and himself why he is who he is: "Why ain't I a town boy, pa?" (59). With a stopover "in town" imminent, the themes of poverty and rural vs. town life creep up. For Vardaman, the event gives rise to questions about why he has been born poor, without the things town boys have.

Poverty and rural hardship continue to be themes. Even for the Bundren children, the trip to bring Addie's body to burial must be mixed with business; life is too harsh to grant mourning periods. Cash brings his tools, so that he can stop and work at Tull's on the way back. Anse says that this act is disrespectful, but Darl defends Cash. And Dewey Dell must bring Cora's cakes to sell in town.

The Tulls are studies for the theme of religion. Cora's piety, as Faulkner depicts it, is something easy to admire and equally easy to ridicule. Cora's faith makes her a great help at times, but she is also judgmental, self-deceiving, and often misinterprets situations out of a zealotry to force all events into a Christian framework of understanding.

Tull's fatalism is a counterpoint to his wife's faith. He too believes in God, a God who directs all things, but he seems to derive little comfort. He wonders about the burden of being human: what God decides, man must do. He respects his wife, and says that if God were to put things into mortal hands, they would be Cora's. But he seems resigned to suffering as a constant of life: "And I reckon she would make a few changes, no matter how He was running it. And I reckon they would be for man's good. Leastaways, we would have to like them. Leastaways, we might as well go on and make like we did" (67). This passage touches on Tull's religious attitudes, while doubling as a concise statement of how he feels about his overbearing wife.

Cash is seen in glimpses; so far, his only interior monologues are closely tied to his work as a carpenter. Cash is doing the only thing he knows how to do. He draws meaning from his work. Tull remarks that Cash takes care over carpentry jobs that require little craftsmanship (79). He is so bound up in his work and the details of craftsmanship that he seems unreasonable to his siblings. Jewel dismisses Cash's protests, while Cash continues to fuss. But carpentry is Cash's life; without it, he is nothing.

The siblings have strongly defined personalities, and each one is very different from the others. Jewel is evidently the hothead of the family. He is also tall and incredibly strong, hoisting Addie's coffin into the wagon almost single-handedly. His interior life is far less complicated than Darl's or Vardaman's. He expresses his grief not through thought, but through explosions of physical power. His feelings are intense and sincere, expressed mostly as bursts of defiance and anger and disgust. After he gets the coffin up into the wagon, he says "Goddamn you" repeatedly, and the target of his cursing here seems to be just about everyone. His defiance becomes clear again in his dispute with Anse, and his decision to come along, separate from the

others, on horseback. His pride is clear, and he rides the horse despite the fact that it could be considered disrespectful to his family and dead mother.

Darl continues to be the most intuitive of the characters. He speaks with Vardaman as if he can read the boy's mind, and he accurately predicts Jewel's behavior.

Darl's musings veer between striking eloquence and a kind of elegant crudeness. When struggling with questions of what it means to be, his syntax becomes simple, almost childlike; at these times, he and Vardaman have the most in common of any of the siblings. He also recognizes that his questioning, rather than buttress his understanding of himself, makes him far less certain as an entity than someone like Jewel: "I don't know what 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" (73). Jewel's thickheadedness protects him from the kind of philosophical self-torture that Darl cannot help but engage in. Tull believes firmly that Darl thinks too much, and the thinking has made Darl go funny in the head (64). Darl forces himself to question the very foundations of his being. As he falls asleep, he feels his identity disappearing. He reasons back and forth, confirming his existence, but also seeming to realize that his being is unstable: "And then I must be, or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room. And so if I am not emptied yet, I am *is*" (74). Falling asleep, for now Darl is able to affirm his being, and yet this whole monologue foreshadows the unraveling of Darl's being later in the novel.

The conversation between Darl and Vardaman is one of the novel's more unsettling moments (90–1). Darl seems to be playing with Vardaman as older brothers do, but given their interior monologues the dialogue becomes disturbing. This section merits close inspection. Vardaman speaks of how his mother is a fish, and Darl does not seem to contradict him. They ask aloud who their mothers are. Darl tells Vardaman that he doesn't have a mother: "Because if I had one, it is *was*. And if it is was, it can't be *is*" (91). He also repeats to Vardaman a thought Darl had in an earlier monologue: "Jewel's mother is a horse" (90). He seems for now to be alluding to Jewel's incredible love for his horse, which seems more meaningful to him than Addie. But Darl also explains to Vardaman that just because Jewel's mother is a horse, it doesn't necessarily follow that Vardaman's is. Darl's meaning will become clear later.

Something important to note: the interior monologues of the Bundrens are almost always in the present tense, while the interior monologues of those outside the family are usually, but not always, in the past tense. This move separates characters like the Tulls from the main action, making their narratives come from a position of some distance. The struggle to bring Addie's body to Jefferson is the Bundrens'; they suffer the most, and the woman they bury is theirs and no one else's. The emotions of those outside the family are appropriately less intense, and this distance is reflected in the verb tense.

#### **Fourth Section (Darl, Anse, Samson, Dewey Dell, Tull, Darl, Tull, Darl, Vardaman; pages 96–139):**

Darl narrates. Jewel approaches in the distance. The Bundrens pass Tull's place slowly, waving. Cash observes that the body will stink soon, and that the coffin isn't balanced for a long ride. A bit later, Jewel passes them quickly, giving no acknowledgment, the horse kicking up mud. A gout of mud lands on the coffin; Cash removes it carefully with a tool, and a bit later he grabs some leaves as they pass under a tree and begins cleaning the stain.

Anse narrates. He talks about hard working men never profit; it's the rich in towns. Life is harsh, but God's will be done; the just will be rewarded in heaven. They reach Samson's, but the bridge near there has also washed up. Anse comforts himself with the thought that he will soon get those false teeth.

Samson narrates. He is on his porch with some friends, MacCullum and Quick. Quick goes down to the Bundrens to inform them that the bridge has been washed out. Samson invites them to stay the night; the Bundrens accept but refuse dinner. They sleep out in the barn. That night, Samson's wife Rachel is disgusted

by the transport of the body; she lashes out at Samson, for the horrible things men do to their wives, ignoring the fact that it was Addie's wish to be buried far away. Samson thinks he can smell the body, but believes it might be his imagination. The next morning, the Bundrens set out to backtrack, to look for a place to cross the river. They do not say goodbye. Samson goes out to his barn, still thinking he can smell it, and then he realized it's more than his imagination: a fat buzzard squats nearby.

Dewey Dell narrates. She thinks of Addie's death, wishing there had been time to think, time to let Addie die, time to wish she had time to let Addie die. Dewey Dell feels naked under Darl's gaze. She remembers a dream where she killed him. She remembers a nightmare where she did not know where or who or what she was, nor what was happening. The buzzard is in the sky. They pass by Tull's again, Anse waving as before. She keeps insisting that she believes in God.

Vernon Tull narrates. He takes his mule and follows the Bundrens down to the shattered bridge. Anse stares out across the water, unable to come up with any kind of plan or make a decision. Jewel lashes out at Tull, and Dewey Dell looks at Tull with hatred. Cash tries to work out a plan for crossing. Jewel asks Tull if they can use his mule; he refuses, which infuriates Jewel.

Darl narrates. He remembers years ago, when Jewel was always falling asleep at odd times, and losing weight. His mother thought it was sickness, and against Anse's wishes covered for Jewel, doing his chores and getting the other children to do them. Dewey Dell discovered that Jewel was sneaking out at night. Cash and Darl thought it was a woman, but eventually Cash followed Jewel and learned the truth, though he didn't tell Darl. One morning Jewel came home with a beautiful horse. He'd been working nights clearing a field to earn the money. Addie, who'd been worrying sick about Jewel, began to cry. That night, as Jewel slept and Addie watched over him crying, Darl realized that Jewel had a different father than the rest of the children.

Vernon Tull narrates. He accompanies Anse, Dewey Dell, and Vardaman across the bridge, the middle of which is shattered and sinks down into the water. The crossing is terrifying; the waters are fast and thick with debris. Now the others must attempt to cross.

Darl narrates. The brothers argue about the best way to cross the river. They decide on a plan: Cash will drive, and Darl, riding on horseback, will hold a rope tied to the wagon, to stabilize it. The river is treacherous. Darl gets off the wagon, which tilts, threatening to dump the coffin and tools into the water. The mules drown.

Vardaman narrates. Cash loses his grip on the coffin. Vardaman runs back and forth, yelling at Darl to catch the coffin. He thinks the coffin will slip away fast because his mother is a fish. Darl grabs a hold of the coffin underwater, but finally when he emerges from the water his hands are empty.

### **Analysis:**

Logistical concerns dominate this part of the novel. The most difficult part of the journey comes right at the start; the river has to be crossed, but heavy rains have led to the highest water levels in memory, and the bridges have been destroyed. To make these logistical matters worse, the body has begun to stink. The smell of carrion is beginning to attract fat buzzards, heavy with water. The buzzards are a dark and heavy symbol of mortality, and the nasty physicality of death. They will follow the Bundrens all the way to Addie's burial, growing in number all along the way.

Anse never quite manages to be a likable, or even forgivable character, even when he is speaking. His interior monologue is about the inability of the poor honest man to make a go of it, but it's clear that he's lazy and weak. On the banks of the river, his sons have to make all of the decisions. He is not capable of deciding anything; he is too weak and too afraid to take responsibility for even the simplest of choices.

The family displays a strange, often pathetic mix of dependency and pride; this paradoxical combination

comes from their extreme poverty. When staying in Samson's bar, they refuse to accept much of the hospitality Samson offers, out of pride. But it is clear from the earlier monologues that the Bundrens have been dependent on neighbors' help many times in the past. The spectacle of the Bundrens bringing the body to Jefferson takes on a whole new dimension when seen from the eyes of outsiders. We see them through the eyes of people who often look down on them, but our sympathy for the characters, and the fact that we have seen things from the Bundrens' perspective, makes this perspective painful. When others condescend to the Bundrens, the reader pities the family even more. Anse is the character who remains farthest from most readers' sympathies. But the others all command our sympathy, even respect; to see them looked on with contempt is painful.

Darl's relationship to his family and his neighbors is paradoxical. He is at once the most connected to and the most isolated from all of the people around him. His incredible powers of intuition take on a mystic dimension; years ago he learned, in a flash of insight, that Jewel's father is not Anse. The leap suggests that Darl knew his mother better than any of the other Bundren children could have. Her favoritism of Jewel had much to do with the fact that he was something that was hers and not Anse's.

But Darl's insights also make him hated. The novel is full of isolated voices, but isolation is often cherished. Dewey Dell says that she feels naked in front of Darl's intuitive gaze: in her dreams, she plays out fantasies of killing him (107–8). Darl is fiercely loyal to her in his own way: she observes that "He'll do what I say. He always does" (108), but his loyalty is not recompense enough for how vulnerable she makes him feel.

Darl's eyes are the most common source of discomfort. Dewey Dell recoils under his gaze. Tull sums up Darl succinctly, "He is looking at me. He don't say nothing; just looks at me with them queer eyes of hisn that makes folks talk. I always say it ain't never been what he done so much or said or anything so much as how he looks at you. It's like he had got into the inside of you, someway. Like somehow you was looking at yourself and your doings outen his eyes" (112). The look into Darl's eyes is the key, for other characters, to knowing that their isolation has been violated. Darl penetrates deeply into the consciousness of others. Despite the powerful loneliness of so many of the characters, with Dewey Dell being among the loneliest of them all, this psychological intimacy is not at all welcome.

Jewel is full of fierce pride, as well as a selfishness and aggression that isolate him from his family in a different way. Earlier in the novel, Dewey Dell insisted that Jewel "don't care about anything he is not kin to us in caring, not care-kin" (22). His fierce temper and pride are sometimes self-defeating. He refuses Samson's offer of feed for his horse (103); he lashes out at Tull and then seems angry a minute later when he asks Tull for help and Tull refuses (113). He is, at times, supremely selfish. He works himself tirelessly for the money to buy his horse, forcing his siblings to pick up the slack around the Bundren farm. But Jewel's isolation might come from a sense that he is not a full sibling to the others; we never hear directly from Jewel if he knows the truth of his parentage, although certainly it is hinted. And living with Anse, Jewel has learned to resent and despise the begrudging generosity with which Anse treats his children. When Jewel returns with the newly bought horse, Anse is angry that he'll have to feed it. Jewel's response is withering and fierce: "He won't never eat a mouthful of yours. . . Not a mouthful. I'll kill him first. Don't you never think it. Don't you never" (123). Pride, often carried to ridiculous extremes, and a determination to do everything for himself and by himself, have been Jewel's reactions to Anse's half-hearted fathering.

Cash and his work continue to be inextricable. When Jewel rides by at a gallop, splattering the coffin with mud, Cash meticulously removes the mud and scrubs out the stain. He works silently, without voicing any complaint to Jewel (97). While a cynical reader might argue that Cash is more concerned about his piece of carpentry work than what is inside of the coffin, a strong case can be made that the coffin is the embodiment of Cash's grief. He is not an emotive person, but there is something tender and gentle about him. At least on an unconscious level, his grief at Addie's passing is wrapped up in the piece of work he created for her.

**Fifth Section (Tull, Darl, Cash, Cora, Addie, Whitfield, Darl, Armstid; pages 140–82):**

Tull narrates. He sees Darl leap from the wagon. Vardaman, excited, runs ahead of him, Dewey Dell trying to restrain him. Cash loses hold of the coffin, but Jewel still has the rope. Wagon, horse, and the men get mixed together in complete chaos; in the end, the horse comes ashore, Cash in tow, and deposits Cash on land.

Darl narrates. Cash is unconscious, a pool of vomit by his head. The others are continuing the complex underwater salvage: the wagon bed and coffin are onshore, but they are now diving in search of Cash's tools. Cash comes to briefly, only to vomit again, but Dewey Dell tends to him. Anse babbles platitudes, insisting that he is doing his duty by Addie. The other men continue to look for the saw.

Cash narrates. He is saying to himself that he warned everyone what might happen if the coffin wasn't on a balance. . .

Cora narrates. She remembers arguments she had with Addie about religion. She considered Addie too proud; Addie insisted she knew her sins and did not begrudge the punishment she merited, but Cora said that judgment and deciding what constitutes sin were God's domain. Cora considers Addie's sin to be partiality to Jewel, especially since Cora thinks that Darl was touched by God himself. Addie spoke of trusting in "him" to be her cross and her love and her salvation, and Cora realized with horror that Addie was talking about Jewel. She fell to her knees, praying for Addie, who loved her selfish son more than the Lord.

Addie narrates. She remembers her days as a schoolteacher. She hated her pupils, and looked forward to beating them when they misbehaved. She was courted by Anse, and went to live with him. She gave birth to Cash. She was beginning to feel more and more like words were made up by those who did not understand them. She reacted to words like "motherhood" and "love"; words were meaningless to her. She felt like her aloneness had been violated. She gave birth to Darl, and hated Anse for it. But she did her duty to Anse, by never asking him to be more than he was, that is to say, by never asking him to be what she needed. She had an affair, with a holy man, and she remembers how beautiful he seemed, coming to her in the woods, "dressed in sin" (163). By this man, she gave birth to Jewel. Something about the child calmed her, made her feel love. She gave birth to Dewey Dell and Vardaman afterward to atone for Jewel. Listening to Cora talk about sin, she could not take her neighbor seriously: "because people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too" (165).

Whitfield narrates. He is the minister who fathered Jewel. When he heard Addie was dying, he struggled "with Satan, and . . . emerged victorious" (166). He resolved to tell the Bundrens what he had done before Addie herself did. He braved the flooded river to reach them on time, but when passing the Tulls he learned that Addie had already died. He took the early death as a sign that he need not tell the truth: the will was as good as the deed.

Darl narrates. They lay sickly Cash on top of the coffin as Jewel fetches Armstid's team. At the Armstid home, they carry Cash inside and the women care for him. Armstid offers them food and shelter, and Anse accepts the meal. Jewel does not go inside with the rest of the family. He cares for the horses in the barn.

Armstid narrates. He and Anse discuss buying a new team for the wagon; Armstid offers to lend his team, but Anse declines. Jewel rides off to get Peabody for Cash, but Peabody is gone and Jewel brings the horse doctor instead. Cash's leg has been broken; it's the same leg he broke last year. Cash, barely conscious demands his tools. Darl brings them in and shows them to him. The next morning, Anse rides off on Jewel's horse, to go to Snopes' place and try to buy a new time. It is probably the first time someone other than Jewel has ridden the horse, and Jewel is clearly unhappy about it. As the day heats up, the stench of Addie's body is noticeable from far off. Armstid sees Vardaman chasing off buzzards, but the effort is in vain; the birds lift off just enough to escape him, but then return near the coffin. Anse returns. He has bought a team. But he has sold Jewel's horse to get it. Jewel, infuriated, rides off on his horse. But the next morning, the team from Snopes' place arrives; someone left the horse there. Armstid thinks Jewel has taken off for good; he sympathizes with him, because Anse is so despicable.

## Analysis:

The voyage to Jefferson has been incredibly difficult. The logistical challenges are amplified by the increasing stench of the body.

But in the middle of this most difficult stretch of the voyage, we pause for three interior monologues that take place outside of the central action. We have Cora, urging penance and humility; Addie, defiant and full of venom; and Whitfield, full of hypocritical self-righteousness. These three voices flesh out our view of Addie, who has been a completely enigmatic figure until now. Cora's monologue comes first, and the following two monologues make many of Cora's statements ironic, as well as revealing Cora as limited and naïve. Cora tells Addie, "Just because you have been a faithful wife is no sign that there is no sin in your heart" (154). She also says that Brother Whitfield is "a godly man if ever one breathed God's breath" (155). We soon learn that Addie, in fact, has not been faithful to Anse, and that the other man was Brother Whitfield himself. Cora's talking about faith and sin and salvation sounds ridiculous to Addie.

Cora's worldview is incredibly simplistic, controlled completely by giving herself over to God. But we have seen also that she ignores inconvenient facts. Tull points out that her criticisms of Anse are riddled with contradictions; when Tull calls her on it, she ignores him and sings (140–1). After her conversation with Addie, she seems more off-track than ever; in effect, she loses credibility as a narrator. Tellingly, it is the last time she narrates in the novel.

Addie, in the few pages that we see her, seems to have a dark and honest interior life. She is not afraid of her emotions; to herself, at least, she admits that she hated her pupils. And she speaks honestly of her relationship with her children, which was not characterized by an abundance of love. With Jewel, all was different. Jewel was her own, not Anse's; Addie's distance from her other young seems to be connected to a contempt for Anse. But despite her infidelity, she remains faithful to Anse in many other ways. The theme of duty is important in the novel. She never demands that he be a better man than he is; she accepts his failings. And she gives him children.

She is supremely disillusioned by her marriage to Anse. She speaks of words and their limits, but she is also speaking of the emptiness of certain ideas. To her, motherhood and love are often just words, employed by those who are afraid that they don't have them. She sees a separation between words and the ideas that they represent. It is part of why she does not seem to respect Cora. From Addie's perspective, her sin makes her more capable of understanding salvation, while both concepts remain abstract for Cora. In a memorable line, Addie says "people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too" (165). From these few pages, Addie emerges as a woman who has little faith in platitudes or empty ideas.

She stands in sharp contrast to both Cora and Whitfield. Whitfield clings hypocritically to his status as holy man. While Addie fully admits her sin, and seems to even revel in the part of sin that gives her back her independence, Whitfield still talks like a simple-minded minister. He claims to have wrestled with Satan and won (166), because he has decided to confess his union with Addie. He sees his trip to the Bundren home as some kind of mighty spiritual journey, the difficulties proving that God is testing him. He welcomes the tests with ridiculous bravado. This event is outside of the chronology of the main action; remember that Whitfield arrived shortly after Addie died. We hear about Whitfield's crossing of the river right in the middle of the Bundrens' difficult crossing, and the juxtaposition makes Whitfield look ridiculous. If a rickety bridge is a test of God in his eyes, it cannot be seen in the same way by the reader, who has just watched the Bundrens cross, with a wagon and coffin, with no bridge at all. And of course, the minister conveniently interprets Addie's death as God letting Whitfield off the hook. Especially after Addie's blasting of empty words, the minister's religious talk seems foul and empty. The theme of religion, touched on often in this novel, takes a critical turn. Faulkner often shows the comfort and beauty of simple religion, but here he blasts the hypocrisy and simplistic worldviews with which some religious people arm themselves.

The two crossings also juxtapose two very different perspectives on mortality. Through these two perspective, Faulkner explores the theme in a way that does not flatter Whitfield or his beliefs. Whitfield deals in a kind of tidy spiritualism. His journey across the river, with all of its supposed hardships, resembles a children's story for Christians. He wants to make peace before Addie's death. But her death, as a problem, seems to take care of itself. In reality, the Bundrens have to deal with the nasty physical side of death. The now soaked body has begun to stink, and the buzzards suggest a side of death quite different from the hymn-filled heaven evoked by Cora and Whitfield.

Cash is hurt badly once again, but he clings to what he is. He demands to see his tools, with the sad irony being that with a newly broken leg it will be some time before he works again. And as he lies, barely conscious, he keeps repeating to himself the expert advice he gave the others before the crossing; he is repeating the advice that the others, particularly Jewel, ignored. Arguably, listening to Cash might have prevented the accident. But although Cash has taken the worst of the disastrous crossing, characteristically he says nothing.

The selling of Jewel's horse is another atrocious action by Anse. It is the first time in the novel that he makes a dramatic decision on his own, but Anse seems to be doing it for the sake of being cruel to Jewel. Anse could borrow Armstid's team, but he chooses not to. The horse, it must be remembered, is not even his to sell. Jewel bought it himself, with money earned from months of backbreaking labor. Anse justifies himself by saying that he's gone without teeth for fifteen years, scraping by as a sacrifice for the family. But the horse is not his, and the one decision Anse has made so far is not one that was his to make; there is an element of suppressed glee when Anse announces what he has done: "Like he had done something he thought was cute but wasn't so sho now how other folks would take it" (177).

**Sixth Section (Vardaman, Mosely, Darl, Vardaman, Darl, Vardaman, Darl, Vardaman, Darl; pages 183–218):**

Vardaman narrates. He and Darl discuss the buzzards. Cash is in pain, but denies it, claiming that his leg only hurts when they go over bumps.

Mosely narrates. The Bundrens have reached town. He is a town pharmacist, and Dewey Dell wanders around his store. He approaches her, asking if she needs assistance. After lots of questioning and indirect answers, she manages to get across that she wants a medicine that will make her lose her baby. Mosely refuses. She tries to convince him to give her the treatment, telling him she's got ten dollars from the father, Lafe, but Mosely refuses. Finally, she leaves. Mosely talks with his assistant Albert, who has heard about the Bundrens' doings about town. The town marshal approached them, because of the incredible stench of the corpse. In addition, Darl went to buy cement for Cash's leg, purchasing the cement over the protests of the storekeeper, who said that cement as a cast would cause more damage than no cast at all.

Darl narrates. Cash continues to insist that the pain is fine. The mix the cement and make the cast. Jewel returns.

Vardaman narrates. He thinks of the toy train in Jefferson. He wonders where the buzzards go at night. He aims to find out.

Darl narrates. The Bundrens are staying at the Gillespie farm. Darl asks Jewel who his father was. Jewel is infuriated by the question. Cash is having trouble with his leg.

Vardaman narrates. He and Darl listen to the coffin, attempting to hear Addie. They both seem to think they're communicating with her. Late that night, Vardaman sees some of the men moving the coffin to the barn. He goes to the barn stealthily, hoping to see where the buzzards go at night, and then he sees something, connected to Darl, that Dewey Dell warns him never to talk about.

Darl narrates. The barn has been set ablaze. Gillespie and some of the other men work hard to save the animals. Jewel, in an incredible show of strength and will, saves the coffin.

Vardaman narrates. They've moved the coffin back under the apple tree. The barn has burned to the ground. Cash is in great pain; beneath the cast, the leg has gone black. Anse tries to use a hammer to bust off the cast, but it cracks without coming off, and causes terrible pain to Cash. They did not grease the leg before putting the cast on. Jewel's back is burned red. Dewey Dell applies medicine made from butter and soot; the soot is black, and so Jewel's back is now the same color as Cash's foot. Darl is outside, lying on top of the coffin, weeping.

Darl narrates. They are fast approaching Jefferson. Dewey Dell says she needs to answer a call of nature, and disappears into the woods; when she comes back, she is dressed in her best clothes. On the way in, they come across some people who comment on the stench coming from the wagon. Jewel nearly gets in a fight with one of the men, but Darl intervenes and everyone calms down.

### **Analysis:**

The Bundrens' treatment of Cash's leg and the reactions of townfolks to their family and the wagon's cargo drive home the differences between the Bundrens and "townfolk." Even among farmers, the Bundrens are particularly impoverished. Although members of the family such as Darl and Vardaman show great intelligence, they cement cast for Cash's leg is an act of total ignorance, one that is embarrassing for the family as they encounter the reactions of others: Mosley says damningly, "Didn't none of you have more sense than that?" (210). Anse's leadership seems to be mostly to blame. He's the father, and his habits have left their mark on the children. Always cheap, he does not take Cash to a doctor, despite the clearly horrific state of Cash's leg.

Vardaman thinks of town as a magic place; his obsession with the toy train grows as they approach Jefferson. His family is far too poor to buy the train, but he longs just to see it: "It made my heart hurt" (202). Vardaman's longing touches on the themes of poverty, and of the division between rural and town people.

Town is a place where the Bundrens become vulnerable. At key points, Faulkner allows us to see the Bundrens through the interior monologues of town folk, and the perceptions are not flattering. Dewey Dell wanders into Moseley's store, seeking an abortion treatment but terrified and unsure of how to ask. And the Bundrens have an embarrassing run in with the sheriff of Mottson, who confronts them about the stench emanating from their wagon.

During the events at the Gillespie farm and immediately afterward, we hear only the monologues of two characters: Darl and Vardaman. The choice is not surprising; Vardaman, and to an even greater extent, Darl, have been the dominant narrators of the novel. Both share a strong bond, great sensitivity, and have a strong mystic side. Vardaman, as the younger boy, defers to Darl's interpretations of many events. At Addie's coffin, Vardaman can hear Addie but cannot understand what she is saying. Darl tells him that Addie is talking to God, crying out to him to hide her away from the sight of man (200). Implicitly, Darl is humiliated and disturbed by the travails that his mother's body has had to undergo.

The event Vardaman sees, which Dewey Dell forbids him to speak of, is Darl setting fire to the barn. Various interpretations are offered for Darl's act, but the "he's just gone crazy" interpretation seems unsatisfactory. Darl does seem to think that he hears Addie talking to him, or at least he says so to Vardaman: arguably, Darl might be speaking metaphorically about the body's need to be destroyed or buried, so that it will no longer be a source of disgust and loathing in others. Whether Darl believes Addie is speaking to him in a literal sense or not is really beside the point; his action is not dramatically out of synch with his behavior throughout the rest of the novel. In so many of his monologues Darl seems to transcend the division between literal and metaphoric; there is a powerful mysticism in much of what Darl says.

Undoubtedly, he is rattled by Addie's death in a way that the others are not. The humiliation of bringing the rotting body to Jefferson has clearly traumatized him. He is sensitive, and he believes that this act is an affront to his mother. For all of these reasons, Darl sets fire to the barn. Admittedly, it is not the most reasonable action. But burning the barn seems more the action of a desperate and traumatized man than a man who is simply insane.

Darl's attempt to end the indignities against his mother's body are thwarted by Jewel, who once again expresses grief and loyalty through the physical. His effort to save the coffin is almost super-human.

Note that as Darl becomes more traumatized, his sense of boundaries are diminished. Though he has clearly known about Jewel's fathering for some time, he chooses now to pick at Jewel about it. In part, he may be reacting to Jewel's indifference to the family. His comments allude not just to Jewel's bastard parentage but his lack of love for their mother: "Your mother was a horse, but who was your father, Jewel?" (198). Darl seems particularly obtuse here; we are hearing about the event in his own interior monologue, but even so we cannot guess at his motivations for confronting Jewel now. Certainly, the words seem to hurt. Jewel is furious, cussing at Darl, but Darl's reaction seems so innocent, it seems hard to believe that he is saying this to hurt Jewel.

Especially since Darl arguably saves Jewel's life. When Jewel nearly gets himself into a fight with a man wielding a knife, Darl steps in and calms everyone down. He is the only one in the family capable of doing so: Vardaman is too young, Anse too weak, Cash too sick, and Dewey Dell is a girl. Darl's approach to the stranger is diplomatic, soothing, clever. Hardly the performance of an insane man.

The tone of Darl's interior monologues does at times seem more fragmented, less coherent, but the monologues are marked still by the eloquence and beauty that we have come to associate with Darl's language. While Darl's monologues show increasing signs of trauma and grief, they are not the ramblings of a crazy man. Darl's last monologue in the book is different; more on that in the next section.

An important structural feature is the chiasmus of Darl in relation to the other Bundrens. While Darl establishes himself early as the most reliable narrator, with Dewey Dell and Vardaman nearly mad with grief and Cash totally absorbed in his work, there is an interesting inversion by the end of the novel. Note that with each monologue, Vardaman becomes more sane, more balanced. Dewey Dell and Cash will soon speak, in voices that seem to have made peace with Addie's death; Cash barely mentions it, and Dewey Dell not at all. It is Darl who seems to sliding in the opposite direction. The journey to Jefferson is not a time to make peace for Darl. His betrayal by his family will deal a killing blow to his sanity.

### **Seventh Section (Cash, Peabody, MacGowan, Vardaman, Darl, Dewey Dell, Cash; Pages 219–48):**

Cash justifies the family's decision to send Darl to the asylum. Gillespie was threatening to sue them for the destruction of the barn (he found out, somehow, that Darl had set the fire); it was either face a lawsuit or send Darl off. Jewel seems almost eager to send Darl off. Cash is not. Cash thinks that the distinction between crazy and sane is not so easy to make: "It's like it ain't so much what a fellow does, but it's the way a majority of folks is looking at him when he does it" (220). Darl wants to get a doctor for Cash before they bury Addie; Cash takes note, feeling that between the two of them there has always been a kind of closeness. Cash says he can manage. Anse goes off to search for spades. He goes into a place from which gramophone music is playing. Cash refers to this place as "Mrs. Bundren's house" (222). With two borrowed spades, they go off to bury Addie. The woman of the house looks at the window as they go, and Anse waves at her. After Addie is buried, the men from the institution come and subdue Darl, with help from everyone in the family except Cash and Vardaman. Darl is stunned. He cannot believe that Cash didn't warn him.

Peabody narrates. He is treating Cash's leg, while Anse returns the borrowed spades. Peabody cannot believe that Anse is such a fool; Cash will be lame for the rest of his life. If he walks at all, he'll be hobbling on a

shortened leg. Peabody continues to condemn Anse, expressing disgust at how Anse had Jewel committed.

MacGowan narrates. He is an assistant at a Jefferson store. Dewey Dell comes looking for a treatment, and he pretends to be a doctor. She can pay ten dollars, she assures him. He ushers her down into the cellar, give her a random sampling of medicine, and tells her to return that night for the rest of the "treatment." That night, she comes promptly at ten, with Vardaman in tow. While she goes inside, Vardaman waits outside on the curb for her. MacGowan gives her more fake medicine, and brings her down into the cellar.

Vardaman narrates. While Dewey Dell goes in with MacGowan, he sits outside and thinks about Darl, who has gone to Jackson. He knows that people say Darl has gone crazy. He keeps thinking about Darl, his brother, but he does not understand what has happened. Dewey Dell emerges, and they walk home. She keeps saying that she knows "it" won't work.

Darl narrates. He is on the train to Jackson, on his way to the asylum. He has completely lost his mind.

Dewey Dell narrates. At the hotel, Anse confronts her about the ten dollars she has. She pleads with him, telling him that the money isn't hers. He takes it from her.

Cash narrates. He remembers that when they returned the shovels Anse stayed in the woman's house for an unusually long time. This event occurred before Cash was brought to Peabody. Cash listened to the graphophone music, wondering if he could some day buy one. That night, Anse went off, after a visit to the barber. The next morning, Anse left again, saying he would meet up with them at the corner. The children wait there, the team hitched up, while Dewey Dell and Vardaman eat bananas. Anse comes to meet them, false teeth in his mouth. The woman from whom they borrowed the shovels is with him. She carries the graphophone and her face is fixed in a fierce, defiant expression. Anse introduces her as Mrs. Bundren.

### **Analysis:**

Cash comes to dominate as the narrator near the end of the novel. His two lengthy monologues reveal the climactic events that finish the story. His monologues are delivered in past tense, giving him a more detached perspective.

Cash is not a vocally articulate character. For much of the novel, he is more or less silent. Yet he seems to provide just the right balance of tenderness and detachment for the novel's closing. He is a sensitive character, less intuitive and intelligent than Darl, but also more stable. His work grounds him.

Although in the end he goes along with Darl's institutionalization, it is clear that he has feelings of guilt about it. These feelings of guilt stand in sharp contrast to Anse's indifference and Dewey Dell's and Jewel's outright hostility. Discussing the plan to commit Darl, Anse seems to welcome it: "I reckon he ought to be there,' pa says. God knows, it's a trial on me" (219). Anse, as usual, is thinking only of himself. He evaluates Darl's institutionalization only in terms of convenience. Dewey Dell and Jewel are downright hostile. When Darl tries to escape, Dewey Dell leaps on him "like a wildcat" (224); when they have Darl pinned, Jewel snarls "Kill him . . . Kill the son of a bitch" (225). Most readers have tremendous sympathy for Darl. And while Jewel seems initially to be an impressive character, his behavior here leaves a distinctly unfavorable impression of him. Remember that only a few hours ago Darl intervened and possibly saved him from serious harm. Jewel is full of venom against Darl because Darl dared to ask Jewel about his fatherhood. Dewey Dell is angry at Darl because his powers of observation make her feel violated; in fact, it was probably Dewey Dell who told Gillespie about Darl setting the fire (224). The two siblings turn savagely on Darl at the end. The theme of isolation is developed in a surprising way: Dewey Dell and Jewel feel their aloneness violated by Darl, and they betray him in the most horrible way imaginable.

But Darl's last few hours with his family show him at his best. He intervenes and helps Jewel; he insists on

bringing Cash to the doctor before burying Addie. He is capable of deep compassion and feeling. He is shocked by his betrayal. Cash himself observes that he and Darl have always shared a special bond, partly because they are so much older than the others. And indeed, it is Cash's betrayal that Darl finds the most shocking. When he is held down by the others, who looks up at Cash helplessly: "I thought you would have told me" (225). Although Cash remains a sympathetic character, he also has betrayed Darl. In the end, he says that listening to the graphophone in years afterward always made him feel sorry that Darl wasn't there to enjoy the music with them, but he too has decided that it is for Darl's own good.

Anse's act is despicable, and Peabody's monologue emphasizes that fact. Peabody's criticism of Anse is the most direct and damning speech about Anse in the whole novel. Nothing can be respected about a man who takes so little care of his son's shattered leg, or who can be so unbothered by having a son committed.

Vardaman is the sibling who seems to miss Darl the most. He keeps dwelling on Darl's absence, although it is clear he does not understand what has happened. He thinks of Darl with envy, because Darl is going to Jackson and will ride a train. He continues to repeat to himself that Darl is his brother. The truth about what has happened will hit Vardaman later, when he is older.

The two brothers continue to have a special bond. Darl's final, raving monologue echoes elements of Vardaman's monologue. But the trauma of being betrayed by his family and committed has pushed Darl into a complete breakdown. He has lost all sense of self: he speaks of "Darl" as if he is not Darl. Darl's philosophical ponderings of being and the basis of being have taken a tragic turn. Trauma has led him to lose all sense of his identity. His family views him as an outside, and this view is tragically paralleled by Darl himself, as his consciousness splits from himself. He views himself from the outside: "Darl is our brother, our brother Darl" (242). He seems to be dwelling on how he has been betrayed. And he cannot stop laughing. His final interior monologue is one of the most terrifying representations of insanity in all of literature. But it also seems to be a dramatic change, a collapse brought on suddenly by his family's betrayal, rather than the inevitable end of a gradual process. The final image is chilling: Darl in a cage, foaming at the mouth, repeating "yes" to himself again and again. His musings on the instability of identity have degenerated into a loss of identity.

To return to Cash's thoughts about sanity and insanity, the relativism of Cash's analysis is an important element of Faulkner's modernist experiments. Faulkner used stream-of-consciousness to explore truth as emerging from multiple perspectives. More than James Joyce or Virginia Woolf, Faulkner's experiments more self-consciously emphasize the lack of an objective vantage point. Truth emerges from a fragmented narrative. Cash's observations about insanity drive home the point. Insanity is as much a matter of social convention as anything else.

The others continue with life. We hear no more from Jewel, though from Cash's narrative it seems that Jewel took some satisfaction in Darl's institutionalization. Dewey Dell is absorbed in her own problems. Vardaman remembers his brother, but he also thinks about the toy train and the buzzards; he has become more lucid as the novel has progressed. Still, his connection with Darl may be cause to doubt the boy's future.

And Anse takes a new wife. Cash lets us know that this is the case from an earlier monologue, when he refers to the women whose spades they borrow as Mrs. Bundren (222); even so, most readers slip over the name without realizing what is being indicated. Cash's narrative being in the past tense also contributes to the sense of life going on; his love of the graphophone music and his regret for Darl hint at many evenings spent quietly together at the Bundren home, enjoying the music. But this is hardly an idyllic ending. Anse is one of the most repugnant of Faulkner's characters, primped and ridiculous with his new teeth and wife; he remains the family patriarch, with Peabody snarling that the whole family would be better off with Anse dead. The new Mrs. Bundren comes not with a smile, but with a fierce look of hostility. There is the specter of the pregnancy that Dewey Dell has not succeeded in terminating. And the family's betrayal of Darl hints at how fragile the Bundrens' loyalty to each other really is. The novel has ended, with sensitive, beautiful Darl destroyed and Anse pleased as punch, able to lose a son and wife without so much as batting an eye. Jewel can call on

officials to kill his own brother without having his sanity questioned, but Darl, for trying to spare his mother further indignity, is destroyed. The final tone of the novel is of loss and pain; the voyage has not been about healing so much as about scarring. For the sensitive ones among them, life does not give enough rest for healing.

**First Section (Darl, Cora, Jewel, Darl, Cora, Dewey Dell; pages 1–23):**

Darl Bundren narrates. He and his younger brother Jewel come in from the field, passing a dilapidated cotton house. Darl walks around the shack, but Jewel steps through a window and walks straight on through. They go up a path, coming up the bluff; Vernon Tull's wagon is by the spring, and in the wagon bed are two chairs. At the spring, Jewel drinks from a gourd. Darl can hear his brother Cash sawing away, building the coffin for their mother, Addie Bundren. Cash is building the coffin right outside the house. Darl goes inside.

Cora Tull narrates. She baked some cakes on engagement, but the town lady client changed her mind afterward. She now has to find another place to sell them. Her daughter Kate voices her anger about the cancellation: "But those rich town ladies can change their minds. Poor folks can't." Cora views the situation differently, taking comfort in her God. He sees into people's hearts. Cora Tull and her family live nearby. They have come to help as Addie Bundren is dying. Cora and her two daughters, Kate and Eula, help with the chores. Darl passes on through the house, and Cora notes that Eula watches Darl with signs of infatuation.

Darl narrates. He goes onto the back porch, where his father Anse and Vernon Tull sit around waiting for Addie to die. Anse Bundren asks after Jewel. Darl takes a deep drink of water, and thinks about the pleasure of water and other times he has felt it, especially in the cool of night. He thinks about masturbating quietly in the dark, and wonders if his older brother Cash, sleeping not far away, was doing the same thing. Darl replies to his father's question, telling him that Jewel is in the barn harnessing the team. But Darl knows that in truth Jewel has passed through the barn and out into the pasture, to work with his horse. The horse, fiery and independent, gives him hell, and Jewel repeatedly addresses the animal as "you son of a bitch"; it is clear that the horse is Jewel's passion.

Jewel narrates. He despises Cash for sawing the coffin right where Addie can see him; Cash, Jewel thinks, wants to be complimented for his carpentry, wants to show off what a good son he is. He views the others as waiting around for Addie's death "like buzzards." He wishes violently that he could be alone with her, so that her last days could be quiet, private.

Darl narrates. He, Jewel, Anse, and Vernon Tull discuss whether Darl and Jewel are going to do a job transporting lumber for Tull. Anse waffles, clearly wanting the money but afraid of seeming cold. The family needs the three dollars. Darl and Anse discuss the possibility that if they go, Darl and Jewel may not make it back in time to say goodbye to the dying Addie. Jewel refuses to admit that Addie is that sick. Jewel is angry that Tull is even there, and accuses the family of trying hurry Addie into the grave. Anse says that she wants to see the coffin being made, and that Jewel is selfish and doesn't try to respect her wishes. Darl leaves the decision in Anse's hands, but the man continues to waffle, clearly wanting the money but lacking the courage to admit it. The brothers go to do the job. Darl goes into the house to look at his mother. He hears voices.

Cora narrates. She sees Darl, looking in on Addie, and believes more fervently than ever that he is the best of the Bundren lot. Cora has been coming to help for a while, trying to comfort Addie in her last dies. She finds the Bundrens a deplorable lot. She does not approve of Addie being buried among her family in Jefferson; a wife she be buried near her husband and children. She thinks that Jewel hates Addie most of all, despite Addie's partiality toward him. And she notices that Dewey Dell, the only daughter of the family, takes to her job fanning Addie with a kind of unhealthy possessiveness. Dewey Dell seems to want Addie all to herself. Cora believes that Darl begged Anse not to send him off on that lumber job, and that Jewel would rather have three dollars than say goodbye to his mother.

Dewey Dell narrates. She remembers when she went with the young boy Lefe to the secret shade, wondering if she would give in to him and have sex. They were harvesting, and she told him that if her sack were full by the time they reached the secret shade it meant that God meant for her to do it. Lefe helped her fill her sack. She later saw Darl, and he knew without being told what had happened. The communication between the two is powerful, often unspoken, but part of Dewey Dell hates Darl for this closeness: "And that's why I can talk to him with knowing with hating because he knows" (23). Darl stands in the door now, looking at Addie. He tells Dewey Dell that Addie is going to die before he and Jewel return.

### **Analysis:**

*As I Lay Dying* is an important experiment in narrative. The language is intense and highly subjective, with a recognizable change in language depending on the narrator. Each section falls somewhere in the range from confessional to stream-of-consciousness. The novel is a series of interior monologues, and through these fragmented passages we piece together the story of Addie Bundren's death and the transport of her body to Jefferson.

The narrative appears fragmentary, but the story demonstrates admirable unity: it is limited to the span of a few days, and the different sub-plots are logically and skilfully interwoven. Faulkner's innovation is in how we see this unified set of events: we are forced to look at the story from a number of different perspectives, each of which is highly subjective. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner made use of some elements of this technique. However, *As I Lay Dying* presents us with a far greater range of voices. Additionally, *The Sound and the Fury* provides a clearer distinction between unreliable and reliable narrators. Part Three of *The Sound and the Fury* is narrated by a man who is unmistakably evil, and Part Four helps clarify the novel through its use of a more objective third-person narrator. The voices in *As I Lay Dying* are more numerous and more ambiguous.

Darl is the first and most important narrator of the novel. He is sensitive, intuitive, and intelligent, and his monologues are some of the most eloquent; they are also a more intricate representation of the process of thought. Some of the interior monologues are fairly straightforward, but Darl's passages are stream-of-consciousness narrative. For much of the novel, he acts as a kind of narrative anchor. One of the challenges of the novel is the complete absence of an objective third-person narrator. Everything we know about these characters is told to us through the lens of a subjective speaker; because of Darl's sensitivity and isolation from the other characters, most readers come to rely heavily on his version of events. He is eloquent, intelligent, and isolated. Isolation is one of the recurring themes of the novel. Because of the novel's unique structure, the isolation of the characters is highlighted. Darl tells us what he and alone can observe, and his isolation is the most poetic; ultimately, it is also the most tragic.

From the very first section, the sensory and sensual images of the novel are a strong element. Although the novel takes the form of interior monologues, each character is powerfully influenced, in his own way, by the sheer physicality of their world. *As I Lay Dying* presents one of the most rugged and rural settings of any Faulkner novel; this South is the South of heartbreaking poverty and life lived close to an often unforgiving land. Nature and physical needs dominate as a theme: Darl narrates a long passage on the pleasure of drinking water, and relates a memory of seeing the stars reflected in a bucket full of water. He is described as always having his eyes "full of the land" by other characters; he sees something in the world that the others don't, and his descriptions of nature are often striking for their sensuality and the unusual metaphors he employs.

Work is part of the relationship to the land, and it is an important theme of the novel. Cash is a man whose work gives him an identity; we hear the sound of his saw before we see him, and in all of the characters monologues Cash is inseparable from his work as a carpenter. The sound of his saw is the constant background noise that accompanies us all the way to Addie Bundren's death. Jewel is furious at Cash for building the coffin right near Addie: "It's because he stays out there, right under the window, hammering, and sawing on that goddamn box. Where she's got to see him. Where every breath she draws is full of his

knocking and sawing where she can see him saying "See. See what a good one I am making for you" (11). But Jewel love's is possessive and perhaps ignores Addie's wishes: she wants to see the coffin being made. Cash is doing for her the only thing he can do. He takes his identity from his work as a carpenter, and the coffin is the only gift he can give his mother.

We do not only hear about the negative aspects of characters from other characters; characters often inadvertently present their own faults in their own sections. In Cora Tull's first section, Cora's self-righteousness and irritating piety come through loud and clear. Her daughter Kate seems far healthier in comparison: Kate complains about the insensitivities of the rich. Cora's attitude of acceptance seems at first to be kinder, but in the end turns out to be self-righteous and equally angry. She continues to talk to us about the cakes, thinking about them again and again without reason, and continuing to take comfort in the power of God, who "can see into the heart" (4). Implicit in Cora's interior monologue is that she feels she does not need to judge the rich because her God will. Religion is a theme of the novel, and often Faulkner is deeply critical of the religious characters of the book. Characters often are blinded by their own piety.

Poverty is an important theme of the novel. The Bundrens are one of the poorest families in any of Faulkner's books. Jewel and Darl are going to miss their mother's death for three dollars. The family lives in a perpetual state of need, always slightly short of cash.

Isolation also is apparent in Dewey Dell's narrative. She is the only daughter of the family, and Addie's death will leave her as the sole female. This fact might explain the extreme possessiveness with which she watches over Addie. Dewey Dell is clearly lonely, and has found comfort in the arms of a boy who lives nearby. But although she is lonely and isolated and suffers for it, some part of her treasures this isolation. Part of her resents and fears Darl because he intuitively understands her and can see her secrets. Most of the time, Dewey Dell seems very partial to Darl. The two enjoy a closeness and love that is evident to the other members of the family. But in Dewey Dell's first section, she voices a resentment that will explain her actions later: "And that's why I can talk to him with knowing with hating because he knows" (23).

### **Second Section (Tull, Anse, Darl, Peabody, Darl, Vardaman, Dewey Dell; pages 24–58):**

Vernon Tull narrates. He and Anse talk about sending the boys off with the lumber; Anse continues to say he doesn't like doing it, but he has to. Addie wants to be buried in Jefferson, with her own people, and they'll want to set off right away after she dies. Vardaman, the youngest Bundren, comes along, carrying an enormous fish. He wants to show it to his mother. Anse tells Vardaman to clean it, and the boy goes around the house. Vernon notes that rain is coming. He looks at Cash, working meticulously on the coffin, and he hopes that Cash does as good a job on the barn he's supposed to build for Vernon. Cora and Eula and Kate come out of the house; it's time for the Tulls to go home. They discuss the Bundrens. Vernon has promised to help Anse if he gets into a tight spot; like all of the people in the area, he's already helped Anse a great deal over the years. Kate observes acridly that if Addie dies, Anse will get a new wife before cotton-picking time. Now that Addie is dying, the three older Bundren sons will probably get married.

Anse narrates. Anse speaks of the misfortune of living near the road. He blames the bustle of the road for many misfortunes, including Cash's carpenter hopes, which lead to Cash falling off a roof and being unable to work for six months. He thinks the road has contributed to Addie's sickness. Vardaman returns, covered with blood from having cleaned the fish. Anse tells him to go wash up. Anse is weary.

Darl narrates. He asks Jewel, repeatedly, if he realizes that Addie is going to die. He has bothered Dewey Dell, not out of malice but out of a strange detachment from how his words hurt her: he knew that Dewey Dell is pregnant, and that she is waiting for Addie to die so she can rush to town and find a pharmacist to help her have an abortion.

Peabody narrates. He is the doctor, and despite the coming storm he has been sent for by Anse. He knows that

if stingy Anse has sent for him, it's already too late; moreover, he doesn't want to prolong Addie's suffering. Peabody is obese and old, and he has to be hauled up the bluff by a rope. He enters Addie's room and sees that the end is very close. He goes out on the porch to talk to Anse, but Dewey Dell calls them back in the room. Addie's eyes are fierce. Dewey Dell tells Peabody that Addie wants him to leave. Suddenly, Addie calls out to Cash, still sawing away on the coffin. Her voice is harsh and strong.

Darl narrates. This interior monologue is one of the strangest in the novel: though Darl is not present, he narrates the death of Addie Bundren. Dewey Dell says that Addie wants to see Jewel. Anse informs her that Jewel and Darl have gone off to ship the lumber. Addie calls out to Cash again; he fits together two boards for her to see. She looks at Vardaman, and it seems as if the light leaps back into her eyes; then, suddenly, she is dead. Dewey Dell throws herself on her mother's body, weeping hysterically. Vardaman, terrified, slips out of the room.

Meanwhile, Jewel and Darl have run the wagon into a ditch. One of the wheels is shattered. The description is italicized.

Cash comes in to look at his mother. Anse tells him to hurry up with the coffin. Anse also tells Dewey Dell to fix supper. She smooths the wrinkles of the bed and goes.

The voice becomes more subjectively Darl's, the verb tenses indicating imagining rather than witnessing the situation: he imagines Dewey Dell looking at Peabody, thinking to herself that the doctor could help her so much if he only knew.

The narrator switches to a tense suggesting witness. Anse touches Addie's corpse and quilt, trying to be tender. He then leaves, thinking about he'll finally be able to get those false teeth he's always wanted.

Back at the wrecked wagon, Darl tells Jewel that Addie is dead.

Vardaman narrates. He runs out back and cries. Not far from the porch is the spot where the fish lay earlier that day. He is preoccupied by the memory of the blood, and of the change from fish to not-fish. He blames Peabody for triggering his mother's death, and runs into the barn to beat Peabody's horses. The horses run off, leaving a trail of dust. He runs into the pasture, where he ignores the cow he needs milking. He watches Cash come out from the house, noting Cash's limp. Cash notes the dust trail and goes up the path to investigate. Vardaman is full of angry, confused feelings; he keeps thinking of the moment before the fish was cut and before his mother was dead. He hears no living thing, and even the sensory information connected to Jewel's magnificent horse dissolves into its different components.

Dewey Dell narrates. She addresses Peabody in her own mind: he could help her so much, and he doesn't even know it. Cash comes in and informs her that Peabody's team has run off. She hasn't had time to cook the fish, and as the men start to eat dinner they complain about the lack of meat. She goes out to milk the cow. She reflects on her loneliness. Life is gone. And the baby grows; she can feel it. Vardaman, hiding in the barn scares her. Even before an accusation, he denies doing anything. She is angry at him, but when he starts to cry she comforts him. She sends him in to eat his dinner. Alone again with her worries, Dewey Dell finds herself so seized by anxiety that she cannot name her own feelings.

### **Analysis:**

Poverty is one of the novel's recurring themes. The harshness of the Bundren's life is emphasized again and again. For the rural, life is hard work with no chance for rest. The Bundrens are particularly poor, and their situation has always been difficult. Because of this poverty, Jewel and Darl end up having to ship lumber, missing their mother's death for three dollars.

Anse's laziness is most decidedly a factor in their state. Anse generally comes off as a despicable character; he clearly means to have the boys go off and ship the lumber, missing their mother's death for three dollars, but he is not man enough to say it directly. Instead he waffles and whines until his decision becomes clear. He is a weak man, always excusing his own behavior and acting with little real feeling for his family. When Addie dies, he thinks that finally he'll be able to get false teeth. He makes some attempt at tenderness, but it is as if he does so because he knows he should, or he has seen others doing it. He attempts to smooth out the quilt, "as he saw Dewey Dell do" (47), but he only succeeds in wrinkling it. Faulkner's language is heavy here, emphasizing Anse's hands as bringing disorder and ugliness to whatever they touch. His gesture lacks real feeling; it is sentiment contrived because sentiment is appropriate, and to drive the point home to us Faulkner has Anse looking forward to his false teeth with his wife's body not yet cold.

Anse's neighbors have had to help him constantly throughout the years, so much so that they have become resigned to it. The voices coming from outside of the family are often characterized by a harsh judgment of the Bundrens and of Anse in particular. Faulkner also emphasizes that for those outside of the family, Addie's death cannot be the sole focus of attention. Life is too demanding. Mortality as a theme is often juxtaposed to the need to keep on living. Peabody, being pulled up the mountain to see Addie, reflects on his old age and the demands of his work. Cora thinks of her cakes. Vernon Tull sends Jewel and Darl to ship lumber for him. The intent is not always to show that a character is petty, but to depict a life that is demanding and unrelenting in its harshness.

Darl's voice continues to be the most eloquent and relied-upon. Anse's interior monologue reveals his weak will and dimness. Dewey Dell's interior monologues are delivered from the throes of powerful fear and emotion. Vardaman's monologues are similar to Darl's in many ways. They are, not surprisingly, less mature, but the young boy shares Darl's taste for bizarre imagery and relentless questioning of the very terms of his own existence.

The Tulls and Peabody provide valuable outsiders' perspective. They universally condemn Anse, more or less, for his laziness and weakness. Tull notes that one can always tell Anse's shirts apart: there are no sweat stains, the implication being that Anse never works (27). On the other Bundrens, their opinions vary. Cora is extremely fond of Darl; she sees in him a sensibility finer and gentler than among any other Bundren. So much so that she seems to cling to illusions about him: she believes that he begged to stay with Addie instead of delivering the lumber, and claims in her interior monologue that Vernon told her so. Yet in Vernon Tull's own interior monologue, we hear the exchange with Darl. As Vernon Tull's interior monologue depicts it, Darl is hesitant and seems sad about leaving while Addie dies, but he does not beg.

This example highlights the complexity of the portraits that emerge in *As I Lay Dying*. We listen to the very strong opinions characters have of one another. Usually interior thought is emphasized far more than dialogue. While dialogue as a way to reveal characters would provide more objective evidence, we would lose the psychological complexity of the portraits.

The Tulls talking among themselves as they leave is one of the rare moments when we learn from dialogue. The family, heading home, begins naturally to discuss the Bundrens. Kate and Eula seem preoccupied with Cash, Darl, and Jewel, and the possibility that they'll get married soon; Kate speaks with some scorn about Jewel's fiery nature. Kate also speaks with scorn about Anse, predicting that if Addie dies Anse will find a new wife before cotton-picking time (28). Though people help Anse, no one seems to respect him.

The death scene itself is revealed in Darl's section, although he is not there to witness it. The passage merits close examination, so that readers can reach their own conclusions. Although Darl is not there, the passage seems to be narrated from a more detached version of Darl's own voice. Anse is referred to as "Pa," for example, suggesting that we are seeing things from Darl's perspective. But the italicized passages are more strongly in a personal voice: in these italicized passages, we hear about the wagon accident. Also, Darl continues to narrate the death in the italicized passages, although the tense (future: ie "She will go out where

Peabody is") suggests that Darl is imagining what is happening. But there is continuity between the italicized passages and the non-italicized. Darl's voice is the only voice Faulkner seems willing to use for this scene. He and Jewel are among the most affected by Addie's death. Darl's sensitivity and eloquence are matched throughout the novel with his strange detachment and isolation. In this light, it makes some sense that Darl's voice should narrate Addie's death. The situation mirrors Darl's own paradoxical relationship to the event. He is more close to it, more moved by the event and its implications, but his mind leads him to be isolated from his own family. He is literally removed from his mother by the errand, just as he is psychologically and spiritually isolated from all around him.

As Faulkner depicts it, and as the structure of the novel suggests, real intimacy and tenderness are close to impossible in the Bundren family. Work and the realities of poverty darken all aspects of life, and hope and longing are always expressed alone. The family lives in squalid, cramped conditions, and yet isolation is one of their trademarks. Remember Darl reflecting on his boyhood, and the first times he masturbated: Cash was sleeping not a few feet away, but Darl does not know if Cash was doing the same thing. Solitary masturbation in complete darkness is the only glimpse we get of Darl's and Cash's sexuality. Dialogue between the Bundrens is almost always spare and minimal, and juxtaposed to a torrent of powerful, often violent internal reflections. Darl is the only character who occasionally gives voice to his thoughts, and probes into the interior lives of his siblings: with both Jewel and Dewey Dell, this habit of Darl's earns resentment, even hatred.

In Addie's death we are reminded again of the harshness of rural poverty. The themes of poverty and work run through the passages. Motherhood, as depicted here, is a life-destroying venture, without joy or tenderness. Peabody says of Addie, and her fierce unspoken insistence that he leave the room: "Seem them [women like Addie] drive from the room them coming with sympathy and pity, with actual help, and clinging to some trifling animal to whom they never were more than pack-horses" (41). Even more striking is the description of Addie's hands: "the hands alone still with any semblance of life: a curled, gnarled inertness; a spent yet alert quality from which weariness, exhaustion, travail has not departed, as though they doubted even yet the actuality of rest, guarding with horned and penurious alertness the cessation which they know cannot last" (46). Addie's hands bear the marks of her hard life.

For Dewey Dell, there is not time enough to articulate her own emotions to herself: "I try to but I can't think long enough to worry" (53). Her thoughts are some of the most muddled in the book: she speaks not with the complicated and eccentric eloquence of Darl but in a voice near-hysterical with worry. Her mother's death is deeply painful: she throws herself on Addie's corpse with an unexpected intensity. She has lost her lover, who has abandoned her and left her pregnant. Her isolation is clear. But she is so used to being alone that she resents intrusions. Darl, for example, earns her resentment because of how intimately he understands her. Even more intrusive is the growing presence in her womb: "I feel my body, my bones and flesh beginning to part and open upon the alone, and the process of coming unalone is terrible" (55). Dewey Dell must begin to worry about finding a way to end the pregnancy.

### **Third Section (Vardaman, Tull, Darl, Cash, Vardaman, Tull, Darl, Cash, Darl, Vardaman, Darl, Anse; pp. 59–95):**

Vardaman narrates. He is disturbed by the idea of shutting Addie up in the coffin. He speaks confusedly about the wonders of town and the mysteries of his mother's death. He doesn't understand why he's a country boy and why such differences exist between town and country. He can't seem to understand the idea of death, and in his thoughts he confuses Addie's corpse with the dead fish. He feels the need to get Vernon, because Vernon also saw the fish.

Tull narrates. A storm has begun. He is woken by the passing of Peabody's (riderless) team. Cora hears the noise and thinks Addie has passed. She wants to hitch up and go to help, but Tull prefers to wait till he's called. Vardaman arrives at their door, dripping wet, and speaking incoherently about fish. His babbling is strange and eerie, and Tull shares the reader's reaction: "I'll be darn if it didn't give me the creeps" (63).

Vernon hitches up the team, and when he comes back into the house he finds Vardaman and Cora in the kitchen, the boy still speaking of fish. Cora thinks it's a judgment against Anse. They bring Vardaman back, and help where they can. Toward dawn, the coffin is complete and they put Addie inside of it, nailing the lid shut. Vardaman is found later, asleep on the floor, after having used the drill to put holes into the top of the coffin; two of the holes were bored right into Addie's face. It is dawn before the Tulls return home. Tull thinks about God and faith and his wife, and the sadness of the world, the powerlessness of man.

Darl narrates. He has come home to get a spare wheel for the wagon. He watches as Cash completes the coffin. Anse gets in the way, so Cash sends him inside. Tull helps complete the coffin. Cash makes the coffin on a bevel, even though it takes longer. They finish and carry it in. Darl and Jewel have set out again to complete their job. Beneath a strange roof, Darl thinks of being, and the contradictions of being, and home.

Cash narrates. It is a list of thirteen reasons to build the coffin on a bevel.

Vardaman narrates. "My mother is a fish" (76).

Vernon Tull narrates. He returns to the Bundren home with the wagon at 10 AM the next day. With Quick and Anstid, he has discussed the high level of the river due to the storm; Anse had best hurry. The bridge is old and won't hold up much longer. Vardaman has been upset. He attacked Dewey Dell when she cooked up the fish he caught. The women are inside and the men are on the porch. Cash repairs the damage Vardaman did to the coffin. They lay Addie in backwards, to protect her dress. Whitfield, the minister, arrives. He announces that the bridge has been swept away. The women sing, and Whitfield performs the rites for Addie. The women sing again. On the way home, Cora is still singing. They see a dirty Vardaman fishing in the slough, and they try to get him to come home with them so he can rest for a bit, but the boy refuses.

Darl narrates. He is telling Jewel that it is not his horse that's dead. Jewel is angry. Three days have passed, and they have returned home. Anse has been waiting for them; Addie's body rots in the coffin. Buzzards circle in the sky.

Cash narrates. He tries to explain to Jewel why the coffin won't balance, but Jewel ignores his advice and insists that Cash help to lift the coffin and move it to the wagon.

Darl narrates. He is witnessing the exchange between Jewel and Cash. The men carry the coffin down the hill to the wagon, having a great deal of difficulty: Cash is right. It doesn't balance. In the end, Jewel is carrying most of the weight, and with sheer muscle and weight he hoists the coffin into the wagon.

Vardaman narrates. The family is going to town. Dewey Dell has assured him that the toy train set he saw long ago in town will still be there. Anse and Jewel argue: Jewel wants to ride his horse, but Anse wants him to ride in the wagon like Addie would have wanted. Darl and Vardaman have a strange conversation about their mother (see below, Analysis). Cash is bringing his tools along; on the way back from dropping off Addie, he's going to have to get to work on Tull's barn roof. Dewey Dell is taking Mrs. Tull's cakes to town for her.

Darl narrates. Everyone is getting into the wagon. Jewel appears not to be coming, angry about not being able to ride his horse. Anse is angry; Cash tries to brush it off, saying that Jewell will go and stay with the Tulls. But Darl predicts aloud that Jewel will meet them later. The buzzards circle in the distance.

Anse narrates. They are in the wagon, riding on. He is fuming about his sons. He is mad at Jewel for wanting to ride the horse and then refusing to come. He becomes angry when Darl starts laughing suddenly; behavior like that is what makes people think Darl is crazy. Anse berates his sons' lack of respect for their dead mother. We soon see the source of Darl's laughter: Jewel, as Darl predicted, is catching up with them. He is riding his horse.

## Analysis:

Both Vardaman and Darl are taken by questions of being, consciousness, and identity. His mother's death has only added confusion to these questions; Vardaman cannot understand how something that "is" can become "was." In other words, the destructive power of time, the terror of mortality, and the mystery of ceasing to exist have been too much for Vardaman. In his mind, his mother has become something else. Vardaman turns death into transformation. His mother is a fish. He then imagines her as a rabbit, because she has gone far away, just as the rabbits did. He is disturbed by the fact that they are going to eat the fish.

Vardaman struggles to find teleology for the events around him. He tries to connect what happens to reasons, when in fact often things happen for no reason at all. He blames his mother's death on Peabody, because Peabody's arrival preceded his mother's death. He also has linked the fish and his mother. His reasoning is clearly incorrect, but in many ways it is no less reasonable than explanations given by other characters of the novel. Consider Cora Tull, he repetitively maintains that all happens by God's will, for God's reasons. Yet she is so wrapped up in forcing events into a Christian framework that her pronouncements become tiresome. She sees Vardaman's instability as God's punishment for Anse. Her reasoning is no more sophisticated than Vardaman's; the sole difference is that she has the backing of her near-fanatical religious beliefs.

Questions of identity and being are linked to poverty and rural life for Vardaman. In, Vardaman's first interior monologue of this section, he asks others and himself why he is who he is: "Why ain't I a town boy, pa?" (59). With a stopover "in town" imminent, the themes of poverty and rural vs. town life creep up. For Vardaman, the event gives rise to questions about why he has been born poor, without the things town boys have.

Poverty and rural hardship continue to be themes. Even for the Bundren children, the trip to bring Addie's body to burial must be mixed with business; life is too harsh to grant mourning periods. Cash brings his tools, so that he can stop and work at Tull's on the way back. Anse says that this act is disrespectful, but Darl defends Cash. And Dewey Dell must bring Cora's cakes to sell in town.

The Tulls are studies for the theme of religion. Cora's piety, as Faulkner depicts it, is something easy to admire and equally easy to ridicule. Cora's faith makes her a great help at times, but she is also judgmental, self-deceiving, and often misinterprets situations out of a zealotry to force all events into a Christian framework of understanding.

Tull's fatalism is a counterpoint to his wife's faith. He too believes in God, a God who directs all things, but he seems to derive little comfort. He wonders about the burden of being human: what God decides, man must do. He respects his wife, and says that if God were to put things into mortal hands, they would be Cora's. But he seems resigned to suffering as a constant of life: "And I reckon she would make a few changes, no matter how He was running it. And I reckon they would be for man's good. Leastaways, we would have to like them. Leastaways, we might as well go on and make like we did" (67). This passage touches on Tull's religious attitudes, while doubling as a concise statement of how he feels about his overbearing wife.

Cash is seen in glimpses; so far, his only interior monologues are closely tied to his work as a carpenter. Cash is doing the only thing he knows how to do. He draws meaning from his work. Tull remarks that Cash takes care over carpentry jobs that require little craftsmanship (79). He is so bound up in his work and the details of craftsmanship that he seems unreasonable to his siblings. Jewel dismisses Cash's protests, while Cash continues to fuss. But carpentry is Cash's life; without it, he is nothing.

The siblings have strongly defined personalities, and each one is very different from the others. Jewel is evidently the hothead of the family. He is also tall and incredibly strong, hoisting Addie's coffin into the wagon almost single-handedly. His interior life is far less complicated than Darl's or Vardaman's. He expresses his grief not through thought, but through explosions of physical power. His feelings are intense and sincere, expressed mostly as bursts of defiance and anger and disgust. After he gets the coffin up into the

wagon, he says "Goddamn you" repeatedly, and the target of his cursing here seems to be just about everyone. His defiance becomes clear again in his dispute with Anse, and his decision to come along, separate from the others, on horseback. His pride is clear, and he rides the horse despite the fact that it could be considered disrespectful to his family and dead mother.

Darl continues to be the most intuitive of the characters. He speaks with Vardaman as if he can read the boy's mind, and he accurately predicts Jewel's behavior.

Darl's musings veer between striking eloquence and a kind of elegant crudeness. When struggling with questions of what it means to be, his syntax becomes simple, almost childlike; at these times, he and Vardaman have the most in common of any of the siblings. He also recognizes that his questioning, rather than buttress his understanding of himself, makes him far less certain as an entity than someone like Jewel: "I don't know what 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" (73). Jewel's thickheadedness protects him from the kind of philosophical self-torture that Darl cannot help but engage in. Tull believes firmly that Darl thinks too much, and the thinking has made Darl go funny in the head (64). Darl forces himself to question the very foundations of his being. As he falls asleep, he feels his identity disappearing. He reasons back and forth, confirming his existence, but also seeming to realize that his being is unstable: "And then I must be, or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room. And so if I am not emptied yet, I am *is*" (74). Falling asleep, for now Darl is able to affirm his being, and yet this whole monologue foreshadows the unraveling of Darl's being later in the novel.

The conversation between Darl and Vardaman is one of the novel's more unsettling moments (90–1). Darl seems to be playing with Vardaman as older brothers do, but given their interior monologues the dialogue becomes disturbing. This section merits close inspection. Vardaman speaks of how his mother is a fish, and Darl does not seem to contradict him. They ask aloud who their mothers are. Darl tells Vardaman that he doesn't have a mother: "Because if I had one, it is *was*. And if it is was, it can't be *is*" (91). He also repeats to Vardaman a thought Darl had in an earlier monologue: "Jewel's mother is a horse" (90). He seems for now to be alluding to Jewel's incredible love for his horse, which seems more meaningful to him than Addie. But Darl also explains to Vardaman that just because Jewel's mother is a horse, it doesn't necessarily follow that Vardaman's is. Darl's meaning will become clear later.

Something important to note: the interior monologues of the Bundrens are almost always in the present tense, while the interior monologues of those outside the family are usually, but not always, in the past tense. This move separates characters like the Tulls from the main action, making their narratives come from a position of some distance. The struggle to bring Addie's body to Jefferson is the Bundrens'; they suffer the most, and the woman they bury is theirs and no one else's. The emotions of those outside the family are appropriately less intense, and this distance is reflected in the verb tense.

#### **Fourth Section (Darl, Anse, Samson, Dewey Dell, Tull, Darl, Tull, Darl, Vardaman; pages 96–139):**

Darl narrates. Jewel approaches in the distance. The Bundrens pass Tull's place slowly, waving. Cash observes that the body will stink soon, and that the coffin isn't balanced for a long ride. A bit later, Jewel passes them quickly, giving no acknowledgment, the horse kicking up mud. A gout of mud lands on the coffin; Cash removes it carefully with a tool, and a bit later he grabs some leaves as they pass under a tree and begins cleaning the stain.

Anse narrates. He talks about hard working men never profit; it's the rich in towns. Life is harsh, but God's will be done; the just will be rewarded in heaven. They reach Samson's, but the bridge near there has also washed up. Anse comforts himself with the thought that he will soon get those false teeth.

Samson narrates. He is on his porch with some friends, MacCullum and Quick. Quick goes down to the

Bundrens to inform them that the bridge has been washed out. Samson invites them to stay the night; the Bundrens accept but refuse dinner. They sleep out in the barn. That night, Samson's wife Rachel is disgusted by the transport of the body; she lashes out at Samson, for the horrible things men do to their wives, ignoring the fact that it was Addie's wish to be buried far away. Samson thinks he can smell the body, but believes it might be his imagination. The next morning, the Bundrens set out to backtrack, to look for a place to cross the river. They do not say goodbye. Samson goes out to his barn, still thinking he can smell it, and then he realized it's more than his imagination: a fat buzzard squats nearby.

Dewey Dell narrates. She thinks of Addie's death, wishing there had been time to think, time to let Addie die, time to wish she had time to let Addie die. Dewey Dell feels naked under Darl's gaze. She remembers a dream where she killed him. She remembers a nightmare where she did not know where or who or what she was, nor what was happening. The buzzard is in the sky. They pass by Tull's again, Anse waving as before. She keeps insisting that she believes in God.

Vernon Tull narrates. He takes his mule and follows the Bundrens down to the shattered bridge. Anse stares out across the water, unable to come up with any kind of plan or make a decision. Jewel lashes out at Tull, and Dewey Dell looks at Tull with hatred. Cash tries to work out a plan for crossing. Jewel asks Tull if they can use his mule; he refuses, which infuriates Jewel.

Darl narrates. He remembers years ago, when Jewel was always falling asleep at odd times, and losing weight. His mother thought it was sickness, and against Anse's wishes covered for Jewel, doing his chores and getting the other children to do them. Dewey Dell discovered that Jewel was sneaking out at night. Cash and Darl thought it was a woman, but eventually Cash followed Jewel and learned the truth, though he didn't tell Darl. One morning Jewel came home with a beautiful horse. He'd been working nights clearing a field to earn the money. Addie, who'd been worrying sick about Jewel, began to cry. That night, as Jewel slept and Addie watched over him crying, Darl realized that Jewel had a different father than the rest of the children.

Vernon Tull narrates. He accompanies Anse, Dewey Dell, and Vardaman across the bridge, the middle of which is shattered and sinks down into the water. The crossing is terrifying; the waters are fast and thick with debris. Now the others must attempt to cross.

Darl narrates. The brothers argue about the best way to cross the river. They decide on a plan: Cash will drive, and Darl, riding on horseback, will hold a rope tied to the wagon, to stabilize it. The river is treacherous. Darl gets off the wagon, which tilts, threatening to dump the coffin and tools into the water. The mules drown.

Vardaman narrates. Cash loses his grip on the coffin. Vardaman runs back and forth, yelling at Darl to catch the coffin. He thinks the coffin will slip away fast because his mother is a fish. Darl grabs a hold of the coffin underwater, but finally when he emerges from the water his hands are empty.

### **Analysis:**

Logistical concerns dominate this part of the novel. The most difficult part of the journey comes right at the start; the river has to be crossed, but heavy rains have led to the highest water levels in memory, and the bridges have been destroyed. To make these logistical matters worse, the body has begun to stink. The smell of carrion is beginning to attract fat buzzards, heavy with water. The buzzards are a dark and heavy symbol of mortality, and the nasty physicality of death. They will follow the Bundrens all the way to Addie's burial, growing in number all along the way.

Anse never quite manages to be a likable, or even forgivable character, even when he is speaking. His interior monologue is about the inability of the poor honest man to make a go of it, but it's clear that he's lazy and weak. On the banks of the river, his sons have to make all of the decisions. He is not capable of deciding anything; he is too weak and too afraid to take responsibility for even the simplest of choices.

The family displays a strange, often pathetic mix of dependency and pride; this paradoxical combination comes from their extreme poverty. When staying in Samson's bar, they refuse to accept much of the hospitality Samson offers, out of pride. But it is clear from the earlier monologues that the Bundrens have been dependent on neighbors' help many times in the past. The spectacle of the Bundrens bringing the body to Jefferson takes on a whole new dimension when seen from the eyes of outsiders. We see them through the eyes of people who often look down on them, but our sympathy for the characters, and the fact that we have seen things from the Bundrens' perspective, makes this perspective painful. When others condescend to the Bundrens, the reader pities the family even more. Anse is the character who remains farthest from most readers' sympathies. But the others all command our sympathy, even respect; to see them looked on with contempt is painful.

Darl's relationship to his family and his neighbors is paradoxical. He is at once the most connected to and the most isolated from all of the people around him. His incredible powers of intuition take on a mystic dimension; years ago he learned, in a flash of insight, that Jewel's father is not Anse. The leap suggests that Darl knew his mother better than any of the other Bundren children could have. Her favoritism of Jewel had much to do with the fact that he was something that was hers and not Anse's.

But Darl's insights also make him hated. The novel is full of isolated voices, but isolation is often cherished. Dewey Dell says that she feels naked in front of Darl's intuitive gaze: in her dreams, she plays out fantasies of killing him (107–8). Darl is fiercely loyal to her in his own way: she observes that "He'll do what I say. He always does" (108), but his loyalty is not recompense enough for how vulnerable she makes him feel.

Darl's eyes are the most common source of discomfort. Dewey Dell recoils under his gaze. Tull sums up Darl succinctly, "He is looking at me. He don't say nothing; just looks at me with them queer eyes of hisn that makes folks talk. I always say it ain't never been what he done so much or said or anything so much as how he looks at you. It's like he had got into the inside of you, someway. Like somehow you was looking at yourself and your doings outen his eyes" (112). The look into Darl's eyes is the key, for other characters, to knowing that their isolation has been violated. Darl penetrates deeply into the consciousness of others. Despite the powerful loneliness of so many of the characters, with Dewey Dell being among the loneliest of them all, this psychological intimacy is not at all welcome.

Jewel is full of fierce pride, as well as a selfishness and aggression that isolate him from his family in a different way. Earlier in the novel, Dewey Dell insisted that Jewel "don't care about anything he is not kin to us in caring, not care-kin" (22). His fierce temper and pride are sometimes self-defeating. He refuses Samson's offer of feed for his horse (103); he lashes out at Tull and then seems angry a minute later when he asks Tull for help and Tull refuses (113). He is, at times, supremely selfish. He works himself tirelessly for the money to buy his horse, forcing his siblings to pick up the slack around the Bundren farm. But Jewel's isolation might come from a sense that he is not a full sibling to the others; we never hear directly from Jewel if he knows the truth of his parentage, although certainly it is hinted. And living with Anse, Jewel has learned to resent and despise the begrudging generosity with which Anse treats his children. When Jewel returns with the newly bought horse, Anse is angry that he'll have to feed it. Jewel's response is withering and fierce: "He won't never eat a mouthful of yours. . . Not a mouthful. I'll kill him first. Don't you never think it. Don't you never" (123). Pride, often carried to ridiculous extremes, and a determination to do everything for himself and by himself, have been Jewel's reactions to Anse's half-hearted fathering.

Cash and his work continue to be inextricable. When Jewel rides by at a gallop, splattering the coffin with mud, Cash meticulously removes the mud and scrubs out the stain. He works silently, without voicing any complaint to Jewel (97). While a cynical reader might argue that Cash is more concerned about his piece of carpentry work than what is inside of the coffin, a strong case can be made that the coffin is the embodiment of Cash's grief. He is not an emotive person, but there is something tender and gentle about him. At least on an unconscious level, his grief at Addie's passing is wrapped up in the piece of work he created for her.

**Fifth Section (Tull, Darl, Cash, Cora, Addie, Whitfield, Darl, Armstid; pages 140–82):**

Tull narrates. He sees Darl leap from the wagon. Vardaman, excited, runs ahead of him, Dewey Dell trying to restrain him. Cash loses hold of the coffin, but Jewel still has the rope. Wagon, horse, and the men get mixed together in complete chaos; in the end, the horse comes ashore, Cash in tow, and deposits Cash on land.

Darl narrates. Cash is unconscious, a pool of vomit by his head. The others are continuing the complex underwater salvage: the wagon bed and coffin are onshore, but they are now diving in search of Cash's tools. Cash comes to briefly, only to vomit again, but Dewey Dell tends to him. Anse babbles platitudes, insisting that he is doing his duty by Addie. The other men continue to look for the saw.

Cash narrates. He is saying to himself that he warned everyone what might happen if the coffin wasn't on a balance. . .

Cora narrates. She remembers arguments she had with Addie about religion. She considered Addie too proud; Addie insisted she knew her sins and did not begrudge the punishment she merited, but Cora said that judgment and deciding what constitutes sin were God's domain. Cora considers Addie's sin to be partiality to Jewel, especially since Cora thinks that Darl was touched by God himself. Addie spoke of trusting in "him" to be her cross and her love and her salvation, and Cora realized with horror that Addie was talking about Jewel. She fell to her knees, praying for Addie, who loved her selfish son more than the Lord.

Addie narrates. She remembers her days as a schoolteacher. She hated her pupils, and looked forward to beating them when they misbehaved. She was courted by Anse, and went to live with him. She gave birth to Cash. She was beginning to feel more and more like words were made up by those who did not understand them. She reacted to words like "motherhood" and "love"; words were meaningless to her. She felt like her aloneness had been violated. She gave birth to Darl, and hated Anse for it. But she did her duty to Anse, by never asking him to be more than he was, that is to say, by never asking him to be what she needed. She had an affair, with a holy man, and she remembers how beautiful he seemed, coming to her in the woods, "dressed in sin" (163). By this man, she gave birth to Jewel. Something about the child calmed her, made her feel love. She gave birth to Dewey Dell and Vardaman afterward to atone for Jewel. Listening to Cora talk about sin, she could not take her neighbor seriously: "because people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too" (165).

Whitfield narrates. He is the minister who fathered Jewel. When he heard Addie was dying, he struggled "with Satan, and . . . emerged victorious" (166). He resolved to tell the Bundrens what he had done before Addie herself did. He braved the flooded river to reach them on time, but when passing the Tulls he learned that Addie had already died. He took the early death as a sign that he need not tell the truth: the will was as good as the deed.

Darl narrates. They lay sickly Cash on top of the coffin as Jewel fetches Armstid's team. At the Armstid home, they carry Cash inside and the women care for him. Armstid offers them food and shelter, and Anse accepts the meal. Jewel does not go inside with the rest of the family. He cares for the horses in the barn.

Armstid narrates. He and Anse discuss buying a new team for the wagon; Armstid offers to lend his team, but Anse declines. Jewel rides off to get Peabody for Cash, but Peabody is gone and Jewel brings the horse doctor instead. Cash's leg has been broken; it's the same leg he broke last year. Cash, barely conscious demands his tools. Darl brings them in and shows them to him. The next morning, Anse rides off on Jewel's horse, to go to Snopes' place and try to buy a new time. It is probably the first time someone other than Jewel has ridden the horse, and Jewel is clearly unhappy about it. As the day heats up, the stench of Addie's body is noticeable from far off. Armstid sees Vardaman chasing off buzzards, but the effort is in vain; the birds lift off just enough to escape him, but then return near the coffin. Anse returns. He has bought a team. But he has sold Jewel's horse to get it. Jewel, infuriated, rides off on his horse. But the next morning, the team from Snopes'

place arrives; someone left the horse there. Armstid thinks Jewel has taken off for good; he sympathizes with him, because Anse is so despicable.

### **Analysis:**

The voyage to Jefferson has been incredibly difficult. The logistical challenges are amplified by the increasing stench of the body.

But in the middle of this most difficult stretch of the voyage, we pause for three interior monologues that take place outside of the central action. We have Cora, urging penance and humility; Addie, defiant and full of venom; and Whitfield, full of hypocritical self-righteousness. These three voices flesh out our view of Addie, who has been a completely enigmatic figure until now. Cora's monologue comes first, and the following two monologues make many of Cora's statements ironic, as well as revealing Cora as limited and naïve. Cora tells Addie, "Just because you have been a faithful wife is no sign that there is no sin in your heart" (154). She also says that Brother Whitfield is "a godly man if ever one breathed God's breath" (155). We soon learn that Addie, in fact, has not been faithful to Anse, and that the other man was Brother Whitfield himself. Cora's talking about faith and sin and salvation sounds ridiculous to Addie.

Cora's worldview is incredibly simplistic, controlled completely by giving herself over to God. But we have seen also that she ignores inconvenient facts. Tull points out that her criticisms of Anse are riddled with contradictions; when Tull calls her on it, she ignores him and sings (140–1). After her conversation with Addie, she seems more off-track than ever; in effect, she loses credibility as a narrator. Tellingly, it is the last time she narrates in the novel.

Addie, in the few pages that we see her, seems to have a dark and honest interior life. She is not afraid of her emotions; to herself, at least, she admits that she hated her pupils. And she speaks honestly of her relationship with her children, which was not characterized by an abundance of love. With Jewel, all was different. Jewel was her own, not Anse's; Addie's distance from her other young seems to be connected to a contempt for Anse. But despite her infidelity, she remains faithful to Anse in many other ways. The theme of duty is important in the novel. She never demands that he be a better man than he is; she accepts his failings. And she gives him children.

She is supremely disillusioned by her marriage to Anse. She speaks of words and their limits, but she is also speaking of the emptiness of certain ideas. To her, motherhood and love are often just words, employed by those who are afraid that they don't have them. She sees a separation between words and the ideas that they represent. It is part of why she does not seem to respect Cora. From Addie's perspective, her sin makes her more capable of understanding salvation, while both concepts remain abstract for Cora. In a memorable line, Addie says "people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too" (165). From these few pages, Addie emerges as a woman who has little faith in platitudes or empty ideas.

She stands in sharp contrast to both Cora and Whitfield. Whitfield clings hypocritically to his status as holy man. While Addie full admits her sin, and seems to even revel in the part of sin that gives her back her independence, Whitfield still talks like a simple-minded minister. He claims to have wrestled with Satan and won (166), because he has decided to confess his union with Addie. He sees his trip to the Bundren home as some kind of mighty spiritual journey, the difficulties proving that God is testing him. He welcomes the tests with ridiculous bravado. This event is outside of the chronology of the main action; remember that Whitfield arrived shortly after Addie died. We hear about Whitfield's crossing of the river right in the middle of the Bundrens' difficult crossing, and the juxtaposition makes Whitfield look ridiculous. If a rickety bridge is a test of God in his eyes, it cannot be seen in the same way by the reader, who has just watched the Bundrens cross, with a wagon and coffin, with no bridge at all. And of course, the minister conveniently interprets Addie's death as God letting Whitfield off the hook. Especially after Addie's blasting of empty words, the minister's religious talk seems foul and empty. The theme of religion, touched on often in this novel, takes a critical turn.

Faulkner often shows the comfort and beauty of simple religion, but here he blasts the hypocrisy and simplistic worldviews with which some religious people arm themselves.

The two crossings also juxtapose two very different perspectives on mortality. Through these two perspectives, Faulkner explores the theme in a way that does not flatter Whitfield or his beliefs. Whitfield deals in a kind of tidy spiritualism. His journey across the river, with all of its supposed hardships, resembles a children's story for Christians. He wants to make peace before Addie's death. But her death, as a problem, seems to take care of itself. In reality, the Bundrens have to deal with the nasty physical side of death. The now soaked body has begun to stink, and the buzzards suggest a side of death quite different from the hymn-filled heaven evoked by Cora and Whitfield.

Cash is hurt badly once again, but he clings to what he is. He demands to see his tools, with the sad irony being that with a newly broken leg it will be some time before he works again. And as he lies, barely conscious, he keeps repeating to himself the expert advice he gave the others before the crossing; he is repeating the advice that the others, particularly Jewel, ignored. Arguably, listening to Cash might have prevented the accident. But although Cash has taken the worst of the disastrous crossing, characteristically he says nothing.

The selling of Jewel's horse is another atrocious action by Anse. It is the first time in the novel that he makes a dramatic decision on his own, but Anse seems to be doing it for the sake of being cruel to Jewel. Anse could borrow Armstid's team, but he chooses not to. The horse, it must be remembered, is not even his to sell. Jewel bought it himself, with money earned from months of backbreaking labor. Anse justifies himself by saying that he's gone without teeth for fifteen years, scraping by as a sacrifice for the family. But the horse is not his, and the one decision Anse has made so far is not one that was his to make; there is an element of suppressed glee when Anse announces what he has done: "Like he had done something he thought was cute but wasn't so sho now how other folks would take it" (177).

**Sixth Section (Vardaman, Mosely, Darl, Vardaman, Darl, Vardaman, Darl, Vardaman, Darl; pages 183–218):**

Vardaman narrates. He and Darl discuss the buzzards. Cash is in pain, but denies it, claiming that his leg only hurts when they go over bumps.

Mosely narrates. The Bundrens have reached town. He is a town pharmacist, and Dewey Dell wanders around his store. He approaches her, asking if she needs assistance. After lots of questioning and indirect answers, she manages to get across that she wants a medicine that will make her lose her baby. Mosely refuses. She tries to convince him to give her the treatment, telling him she's got ten dollars from the father, Lafe, but Mosely refuses. Finally, she leaves. Mosely talks with his assistant Albert, who has heard about the Bundrens' doings about town. The town marshal approached them, because of the incredible stench of the corpse. In addition, Darl went to buy cement for Cash's leg, purchasing the cement over the protests of the storekeeper, who said that cement as a cast would cause more damage than no cast at all.

Darl narrates. Cash continues to insist that the pain is fine. They mix the cement and make the cast. Jewel returns.

Vardaman narrates. He thinks of the toy train in Jefferson. He wonders where the buzzards go at night. He aims to find out.

Darl narrates. The Bundrens are staying at the Gillespie farm. Darl asks Jewel who his father was. Jewel is infuriated by the question. Cash is having trouble with his leg.

Vardaman narrates. He and Darl listen to the coffin, attempting to hear Addie. They both seem to think they're

communicating with her. Late that night, Vardaman sees some of the men moving the coffin to the barn. He goes to the barn stealthily, hoping to see where the buzzards go at night, and then he sees something, connected to Darl, that Dewey Dell warns him never to talk about.

Darl narrates. The barn has been set ablaze. Gillespie and some of the other men work hard to save the animals. Jewel, in an incredible show of strength and will, saves the coffin.

Vardaman narrates. They've moved the coffin back under the apple tree. The barn has burned to the ground. Cash is in great pain; beneath the cast, the leg has gone black. Anse tries to use a hammer to bust off the cast, but it cracks without coming off, and causes terrible pain to Cash. They did not grease the leg before putting the cast on. Jewel's back is burned red. Dewey Dell applies medicine made from butter and soot; the soot is black, and so Jewel's back is now the same color as Cash's foot. Darl is outside, lying on top of the coffin, weeping.

Darl narrates. They are fast approaching Jefferson. Dewey Dell says she needs to answer a call of nature, and disappears into the woods; when she comes back, she is dressed in her best clothes. On the way in, they come across some people who comment on the stench coming from the wagon. Jewel nearly gets in a fight with one of the men, but Darl intervenes and everyone calms down.

### **Analysis:**

The Bundrens' treatment of Cash's leg and the reactions of townfolks to their family and the wagon's cargo drive home the differences between the Bundrens and "townfolk." Even among farmers, the Bundrens are particularly impoverished. Although members of the family such as Darl and Vardaman show great intelligence, they cement cast for Cash's leg is an act of total ignorance, one that is embarrassing for the family as they encounter the reactions of others: Mosley says damningly, "Didn't none of you have more sense than that?" (210). Anse's leadership seems to be mostly to blame. He's the father, and his habits have left their mark on the children. Always cheap, he does not take Cash to a doctor, despite the clearly horrific state of Cash's leg.

Vardaman thinks of town as a magic place; his obsession with the toy train grows as they approach Jefferson. His family is far too poor to buy the train, but he longs just to see it: "It made my heart hurt" (202). Vardaman's longing touches on the themes of poverty, and of the division between rural and town people.

Town is a place where the Bundrens become vulnerable. At key points, Faulkner allows us to see the Bundrens through the interior monologues of town folk, and the perceptions are not flattering. Dewey Dell wanders into Moseley's store, seeking an abortion treatment but terrified and unsure of how to ask. And the Bundrens have an embarrassing run in with the sheriff of Mottson, who confronts them about the stench emanating from their wagon.

During the events at the Gillespie farm and immediately afterward, we hear only the monologues of two characters: Darl and Vardaman. The choice is not surprising; Vardaman, and to an even greater extent, Darl, have been the dominant narrators of the novel. Both share a strong bond, great sensitivity, and have a strong mystic side. Vardaman, as the younger boy, defers to Darl's interpretations of many events. At Addie's coffin, Vardaman can hear Addie but cannot understand what she is saying. Darl tells him that Addie is talking to God, crying out to him to hide her away from the sight of man (200). Implicitly, Darl is humiliated and disturbed by the travails that his mother's body has had to undergo.

The event Vardaman sees, which Dewey Dell forbids him to speak of, is Darl setting fire to the barn. Various interpretations are offered for Darl's act, but the "he's just gone crazy" interpretation seems unsatisfactory. Darl does seem to think that he hears Addie talking to him, or at least he says so to Vardaman: arguably, Darl might be speaking metaphorically about the body's need to be destroyed or buried, so that it will no longer be

a source of disgust and loathing in others. Whether Darl believes Addie is speaking to him in a literal sense or not is really beside the point; his action is not dramatically out of synch with his behavior throughout the rest of the novel. In so many of his monologues Darl seems to transcend the division between literal and metaphoric; there is a powerful mysticism in much of what Darl says.

Undoubtedly, he is rattled by Addie's death in a way that the others are not. The humiliation of bringing the rotting body to Jefferson has clearly traumatized him. He is sensitive, and he believes that this act is an affront to his mother. For all of these reasons, Darl sets fire to the barn. Admittedly, it is not the most reasonable action. But burning the barn seems more the action of a desperate and traumatized man than a man who is simply insane.

Darl's attempt to end the indignities against his mother's body are thwarted by Jewel, who once again expresses grief and loyalty through the physical. His effort to save the coffin is almost super-human.

Note that as Darl becomes more traumatized, his sense of boundaries are diminished. Though he has clearly known about Jewel's fathering for some time, he chooses now to pick at Jewel about it. In part, he may be reacting to Jewel's indifference to the family. His comments allude not just to Jewel's bastard parentage but his lack of love for their mother: "Your mother was a horse, but who was your father, Jewel?" (198). Darl seems particularly obtuse here; we are hearing about the event in his own interior monologue, but even so we cannot guess at his motivations for confronting Jewel now. Certainly, the words seem to hurt. Jewel is furious, cussing at Darl, but Darl's reaction seems so innocent, it seems hard to believe that he is saying this to hurt Jewel.

Especially since Darl arguably saves Jewel's life. When Jewel nearly gets himself into a fight with a man wielding a knife, Darl steps in and calms everyone down. He is the only one in the family capable of doing so: Vardaman is too young, Anse too weak, Cash too sick, and Dewey Dell is a girl. Darl's approach to the stranger is diplomatic, soothing, clever. Hardly the performance of an insane man.

The tone of Darl's interior monologues does at times seem more fragmented, less coherent, but the monologues are marked still by the eloquence and beauty that we have come to associate with Darl's language. While Darl's monologues show increasing signs of trauma and grief, they are not the ramblings of a crazy man. Darl's last monologue in the book is different; more on that in the next section.

An important structural feature is the chiasmus of Darl in relation to the other Bundrens. While Darl establishes himself early as the most reliable narrator, with Dewey Dell and Vardaman nearly mad with grief and Cash totally absorbed in his work, there is an interesting inversion by the end of the novel. Note that with each monologue, Vardaman becomes more sane, more balanced. Dewey Dell and Cash will soon speak, in voices that seem to have made peace with Addie's death; Cash barely mentions it, and Dewey Dell not at all. It is Darl who seems to sliding in the opposite direction. The journey to Jefferson is not a time to make peace for Darl. His betrayal by his family will deal a killing blow to his sanity.

### **Seventh Section (Cash, Peabody, MacGowan, Vardaman, Darl, Dewey Dell, Cash; Pages 219–48):**

Cash justifies the family's decision to send Darl to the asylum. Gillespie was threatening to sue them for the destruction of the barn (he found out, somehow, that Darl had set the fire); it was either face a lawsuit or send Darl off. Jewel seems almost eager to send Darl off. Cash is not. Cash thinks that the distinction between crazy and sane is not so easy to make: "It's like it ain't so much what a fellow does, but it's the way a majority of folks is looking at him when he does it" (220). Darl wants to get a doctor for Cash before they bury Addie; Cash takes note, feeling that between the two of them there has always been a kind of closeness. Cash says he can manage. Anse goes off to search for spades. He goes into a place from which gramophone music is playing. Cash refers to this place as "Mrs. Bundren's house" (222). With two borrowed spades, they go off to bury Addie. The woman of the house looks at the window as they go, and Anse waves at her. After Addie is

buried, the men from the institution come and subdue Darl, with help from everyone in the family except Cash and Vardaman. Darl is stunned. He cannot believe that Cash didn't warn him.

Peabody narrates. He is treating Cash's leg, while Anse returns the borrowed spades. Peabody cannot believe that Anse is such a fool; Cash will be lame for the rest of his life. If he walks at all, he'll be hobbling on a shortened leg. Peabody continues to condemn Anse, expressing disgust at how Anse had Jewel committed.

MacGowan narrates. He is an assistant at a Jefferson store. Dewey Dell comes looking for a treatment, and he pretends to be a doctor. She can pay ten dollars, she assures him. He ushers her down into the cellar, give her a random sampling of medicine, and tells her to return that night for the rest of the "treatment." That night, she comes promptly at ten, with Vardaman in tow. While she goes inside, Vardaman waits outside on the curb for her. MacGowan gives her more fake medicine, and brings her down into the cellar.

Vardaman narrates. While Dewey Dell goes in with MacGowan, he sits outside and thinks about Darl, who has gone to Jackson. He knows that people say Darl has gone crazy. He keeps thinking about Darl, his brother, but he does not understand what has happened. Dewey Dell emerges, and they walk home. She keeps saying that she knows "it" won't work.

Darl narrates. He is on the train to Jackson, on his way to the asylum. He has completely lost his mind.

Dewey Dell narrates. At the hotel, Anse confronts her about the ten dollars she has. She pleads with him, telling him that the money isn't hers. He takes it from her.

Cash narrates. He remembers that when they returned the shovels Anse stayed in the woman's house for an unusually long time. This event occurred before Cash was brought to Peabody. Cash listened to the graphophone music, wondering if he could some day buy one. That night, Anse went off, after a visit to the barber. The next morning, Anse left again, saying he would meet up with them at the corner. The children wait there, the team hitched up, while Dewey Dell and Vardaman eat bananas. Anse comes to meet them, false teeth in his mouth. The woman from whom they borrowed the shovels is with him. She carries the graphophone and her face is fixed in a fierce, defiant expression. Anse introduces her as Mrs. Bundren.

### **Analysis:**

Cash comes to dominate as the narrator near the end of the novel. His two lengthy monologues reveal the climactic events that finish the story. His monologues are delivered in past tense, giving him a more detached perspective.

Cash is not a vocally articulate character. For much of the novel, he is more or less silent. Yet he seems to provide just the right balance of tenderness and detachment for the novel's closing. He is a sensitive character, less intuitive and intelligent than Darl, but also more stable. His work grounds him.

Although in the end he goes along with Darl's institutionalization, it is clear that he has feelings of guilt about it. These feelings of guilt stand in sharp contrast to Anse's indifference and Dewey Dell's and Jewel's outright hostility. Discussing the plan to commit Darl, Anse seems to welcome it: "I reckon he ought to be there,' pa says. God knows, it's a trial on me" (219). Anse, as usual, is thinking only of himself. He evaluates Darl's institutionalization only in terms of convenience. Dewey Dell and Jewel are downright hostile. When Darl tries to escape, Dewey Dell leaps on him "like a wildcat" (224); when they have Darl pinned, Jewel snarls "Kill him . . . Kill the son of a bitch" (225). Most readers have tremendous sympathy for Darl. And while Jewel seems initially to be an impressive character, his behavior here leaves a distinctly unfavorable impression of him. Remember that only a few hours ago Darl intervened and possibly saved him from serious harm. Jewell is full of venom against Darl because Darl dared to ask Jewel about his fatherhood. Dewey Dell is angry at Darl because his powers of observation make her feel violated; in fact, it was probably Dewey Dell

who told Gillespie about Darl setting the fire (224). The two siblings turn savagely on Darl at the end. The theme of isolation is developed in a surprising way: Dewey Dell and Jewel feel their aloneness violated by Darl, and they betray him in the most horrible way imaginable.

But Darl's last few hours with his family show him at his best. He intervenes and helps Jewel; he insists on bringing Cash to the doctor before burying Addie. He is capable of deep compassion and feeling. He is shocked by his betrayal. Cash himself observes that he and Darl have always shared a special bond, partly because they are so much older than the others. And indeed, it is Cash's betrayal that Darl finds the most shocking. When he is held down by the others, who looks up at Cash helplessly: "I thought you would have told me" (225). Although Cash remains a sympathetic character, he also has betrayed Darl. In the end, he says that listening to the graphophone in years afterward always made him feel sorry that Darl wasn't there to enjoy the music with them, but he too has decided that it is for Darl's own good.

Anse's act is despicable, and Peabody's monologue emphasizes that fact. Peabody's criticism of Anse is the most direct and damning speech about Anse in the whole novel. Nothing can be respected about a man who takes so little care of his son's shattered leg, or who can be so unbothered by having a son committed.

Vardaman is the sibling who seems to miss Darl the most. He keeps dwelling on Darl's absence, although it is clear he does not understand what has happened. He thinks of Darl with envy, because Darl is going to Jackson and will ride a train. He continues to repeat to himself that Darl is his brother. The truth about what has happened will hit Vardaman later, when he is older.

The two brothers continue to have a special bond. Darl's final, raving monologue echoes elements of Vardaman's monologue. But the trauma of being betrayed by his family and committed has pushed Darl into a complete breakdown. He has lost all sense of self: he speaks of "Darl" as if he is not Darl. Darl's philosophical ponderings of being and the basis of being have taken a tragic turn. Trauma has led him to lose all sense of his identity. His family views him as an outside, and this view is tragically paralleled by Darl himself, as his consciousness splits from himself. He views himself from the outside: "Darl is our brother, our brother Darl" (242). He seems to be dwelling on how he has been betrayed. And he cannot stop laughing. His final interior monologue is one of the most terrifying representations of insanity in all of literature. But it also seems to be a dramatic change, a collapse brought on suddenly by his family's betrayal, rather than the inevitable end of a gradual process. The final image is chilling: Darl in a cage, foaming at the mouth, repeating "yes" to himself again and again. His musings on the instability of identity have degenerated into a loss of identity.

To return to Cash's thoughts about sanity and insanity, the relativism of Cash's analysis is an important element of Faulkner's modernist experiments. Faulkner used stream-of-consciousness to explore truth as emerging from multiple perspectives. More than James Joyce or Virginia Woolf, Faulkner's experiments more self-consciously emphasize the lack of an objective vantage point. Truth emerges from a fragmented narrative. Cash's observations about insanity drive home the point. Insanity is as much a matter of social convention as anything else.

The others continue with life. We hear no more from Jewel, though from Cash's narrative it seems that Jewel took some satisfaction in Darl's institutionalization. Dewey Dell is absorbed in her own problems. Vardaman remembers his brother, but he also thinks about the toy train and the buzzards; he has become more lucid as the novel has progressed. Still, his connection with Darl may be cause to doubt the boy's future.

And Anse takes a new wife. Cash lets us know that this is the case from an earlier monologue, when he refers to the women whose spades they borrow as Mrs. Bundren (222); even so, most readers slip over the name without realizing what is being indicated. Cash's narrative being in the past tense also contributes to the sense of life going on; his love of the graphophone music and his regret for Darl hint at many evenings spent quietly together at the Bundren home, enjoying the music. But this is hardly an idyllic ending. Anse is one of the most repugnant of Faulkner's characters, primped and ridiculous with his new teeth and wife; he remains the family

patriarch, with Peabody snarling that the whole family would be better off with Anse dead. The new Mrs. Bundren comes not with a smile, but with a fierce look of hostility. There is the specter of the pregnancy that Dewey Dell has not succeeded in terminating. And the family's betrayal of Darl hints at how fragile the Bundrens' loyalty to each other really is. The novel has ended, with sensitive, beautiful Darl destroyed and Anse pleased as punch, able to lose a son and wife without so much as batting an eye. Jewel can call on officials to kill his own brother without having his sanity questioned, but Darl, for trying to spare his mother further indignity, is destroyed. The final tone of the novel is of loss and pain; the voyage has not been about healing so much as about scarring. For the sensitive ones among them, life does not give enough rest for healing.

### As I Lay Dying Links

- In depth information on Faulkner, his work and his life. A fantastic resource, including summaries and links.

### **William Faulkner**

The man himself never stood taller than five feet, six inches tall, but in the realm of American literature, William Faulkner is a giant. More than simply a renowned Mississippi writer, the Nobel Prize–winning novelist and short story writer is acclaimed throughout the world as one of this century's greatest writers, one who transformed his "postage stamp" of native soil into an apocryphal setting in which he explored, articulated, and challenged "the old verities and truths of the heart." During his period of greatest artistic achievement, from *The Sound in the Fury* in 1929 to *Go Down, Moses* in 1942, Faulkner accomplished in a little over a decade more artistically than most writers accomplish over a lifetime of writing. It is one of the more remarkable feats of American literature, how a young man who never graduated from high school, never received a college degree, living in a small town in the poorest state in the nation, all the while balancing a growing family of dependents and impending financial ruin, could during the Great Depression write a series of novels all set in the same small Southern county *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, and above all, *Absalom, Absalom!* that would one day be recognized as among the greatest novels ever written by an American.

- Info on Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County. Detailed information on the rich mythology Faulkner constructed over the course of a lifetime of writing. Includes a glossary of all of Faulkner's characters.

### **Welcome to Yoknapatawpha County:**

**Yoknapatawpha County:** Pronounced "Yok ´ nuh puh TAW ´ fuh." A county in northern Mississippi, the setting for most of William Faulkner's novels and short stories, and patterned upon Faulkner's actual home in Lafayette County, Mississippi. Its county seat is Jefferson. It is bounded on the north by the Tallahatchie River (an actual river in Mississippi) and its southern boundary is the Yoknapatawpha River. It consists of 2,400 square miles, the eastern half of which is pine hill country. According to the map included in *Absalom, Absalom!* (published in 1936), the county's population is 15,611, of which 6,298 are white and 9,313 are black. Originally inhabited by the Chickasaw Indian tribe, white settlers first came to live in the area around 1800. Prior to the Civil War, the area was home to a number of large plantations, including Grenier's in the southeast, McCaslin's in the northeast, Sutpen's ("Sutpen's Hundred ") in the northwest, and Compson's and Sartoris's in the immediate vicinity of Jefferson. The name "Yoknapatawpha" is apparently derived from two Chickasaw words: Yocona and petopha, meaning "split land." According to some sources, that was the original name for the Yocona River, also an actual river running through southern Lafayette County. According to Faulkner, Yoknapatawpha means "water flowing slow through the flatland." Arthur F. Kinney, however, postulates an additional possibility for the origin and meaning of the name. In *Go Down, Moses: The Miscegenation of Time*, he suggests Faulkner might have consulted a 1915 *Dictionary of the Choctaw Language* in which the word is broken down as follows:

*ik patafo*, a., unplowed.

*patafa*, pp., split open; plowed, furrowed; tilled.

*yakni*, n., the earth; ...soil; ground; nation; ...district....

*yakni patafa*, pp., furrowed land; fallowed land.

Hence, Kinney suggests, the literal meaning of "Yoknapatawpha" in Choctaw would be "plowed or cultivated land or district" (21–22).

**Yoknapatawpha County Map:** In his 1936 novel *Absalom, Absalom!*, the sixth novel set in Yoknapatawpha County, Faulkner included a hand-drawn map of his apocryphal county. In the map's "key" he declares the geographical size of the county (2,400 square miles) and its population (Whites, 6298; Negroes, 9313), and he "signed" the map "William Faulkner, Sole Owner & Proprietor." The map depicts how the general dimensions of the county resemble those of his actual Lafayette County, Mississippi, with the Tallahatchie River serving as the county's northern border and the Yoknapatawpha River the southern boundary. The county seat of Jefferson (in the same general area that Oxford occupies in Lafayette County) lies in the dead center of the county, and is the intersection of major roads to the north (towards "Memphis Junction"), south (towards "Mottson"), east, and west, with additional roads leading northwest toward Sutpen's Hundred, northeast (towards the MacCallum place), and southeast, where the hamlet of Frenchman's Bend lies along the Yoknapatawpha River. The map is significant because it depicts not just events from *Absalom, Absalom!* but also key places from his earlier Yoknapatawpha novels. Later, Faulkner would publish another updated map of the county with Malcolm Cowley's edition of *The Portable Faulkner*, but this one remains the one most often referred to as a geographic record of the county.

**Yoknapatawpha River:** The southern boundary of Yoknapatawpha County, and apparently based on the actual Yocona River in Lafayette County, Mississippi. ("Yocona" is a corruption of "Yoknapatawpha.") The hamlet of Frenchman's Bend is located along the river. According to *The Hamlet*, slaves from the first plantation in the area straightened a nearly ten-mile stretch of the river to prevent flooding. In *As I Lay Dying*, the river flooded, washing several bridges out, so Anse Bundren and his family were initially unable to cross the river as they were trying to transport the body of Addie Bundren to Jefferson for burial

**Jefferson:** The county seat of Yoknapatawpha County and situated in almost the exact geographic center of the county, about seventy-five miles southeast of Memphis. The town originated around 1800 as a Chickasaw Agency trading post, the first agent at which was Doctor Samuel Habersham; during the town's early years it was called "Habersham's" or "Habersham." Other early white settlers in the area included Louis Grenier (who later moved to Frenchman's Bend and built the house later known as the Old Frenchman's Place) and Alexander Holston, who established the first inn in town, the Holston House. In 1833, the community was named "Jefferson" after the mail rider Thomas Jefferson Pettigrew to appease him for taking the lock from his mail-pouch to put on the door of the jail. Much of the early history of the town is told in the first and third prose sections of *Requiem for a Nun*.

The town resembles William Faulkner's real-life home of Oxford in several key ways: the courthouse square, with a southward-looking statue of a Confederate soldier, the stores located on the square, and other key locations in the fiction resemble real-life places in Oxford. At least



one difference, however, is not present in the fiction: the University of Mississippi is located in Oxford, but according to Faulkner, Jefferson is located about forty miles from Oxford.

- [Bundren family homepage](#). Info, analysis, links. Although I wouldn't agree with some of the analysis (I don't buy for a second that the novel "mocks" rural people), this site has links and offers summaries/analysis of the novel.

of their arduous journey to [Jefferson](#) to bury their dead matriarch, [Addie](#), among her people, against the threats of flood and fire, is told in [As I Lay Dying](#).

### **A Bundren family genealogy**

**Bundren, Addie:** A former schoolteacher, married to [Anse](#) for more than thirty years, who died and eventually was buried in [Jefferson](#) after a long and arduous journey in [As I Lay Dying](#). She bore two children, [Cash](#) and [Darl](#), before a feeling of betrayal primarily by her husband's empty word "love," but also by the [general lack of meaning in words](#) led her to have an affair with [Rev. Whitfield](#), in which her third child, [Jewel](#), was conceived. Shortly thereafter, she made Anse promise to bury her in [Jefferson](#), among her "people," after she died, thus initiating the journey that constitutes the primary plot line of [As I Lay Dying](#). She bore two more children after Jewel, both of them Anse's: [Dewey Dell](#) (her only daughter) "to negative Jewel" and [Vardaman](#) "to replace the child I had robbed him of." She served as narrator of one chapter in the novel.

**Bundren, Anse:** A poor farmer in the southern part of [Yoknapatawpha County](#) near [Frenchman's Bend](#), married to [Addie](#) for more than thirty years, and father of four children in [As I Lay Dying](#). Lazy and shiftless, and claiming he would die if he were ever to sweat, he relied greatly on the services of his family and neighbors; as Anse's neighbor [Armstid](#) > said, "durn if there aint something about a durn fellow like Anse that seems to make a man have to help him, even when he knows he'll be wanting to kick himself next minute." The journey to [Jefferson](#) to bury his dead wife, [Addie](#), was a promise he made to Addie, but his continued perseverance in getting there, despite the trials along the way and even after Addie's body has begun to decompose and attract buzzards, is a testament both to his dogged persistence and to an unconscious selfishness; as he said after his wife died, "But now I can get them teeth. That will be a comfort. It will." When Anse tried to cross the flooded [Yoknapatawpha River](#) at [Tull's bridge](#) (which had been swept away), his mules were drowned and [Cash's](#) leg was broken. He was able to secure a new team in part by trading [Jewel's](#) horse for them, and later, he nearly caused Cash to lose his leg by putting a cement cast on it. He concurred in the decision to have [Darl](#) committed to the mental asylum in Jackson, and he was able to talk [Dewey Dell](#) out of the ten dollars (which [Lafe](#) had given her for an abortion) in order to purchase teeth; the money may also have been a factor in getting the "[duck-shaped woman](#)" (from whom he borrowed a shovel to bury Addie) to marry him at the end of the novel. He served as narrator of three chapters in the novel.

**Bundren, Cash:** Oldest son of [Anse](#) and [Addie Bundren](#) in [As I Lay Dying](#). A carpenter by trade, he once broke his leg while working on a church; later, he broke the same leg while trying to cross the flooded [Yoknapatawpha River](#) with the wagon carrying Addie's coffin, which he began building before she died. He nearly lost his leg when Anse put a cast on it made of cement. Somewhat simple-minded, his thoughts primarily derived from his craft; early in the novel, he explained thirteen reasons why he "made it [her coffin] on the bevel," including reason number 6: "Except." Later, after he and his family had reached [Jefferson](#) and [Darl](#) had been sent to the asylum on the train, he summarized his philosophy in carpentry terms: "But it's a shame, in a way. Folks seems to get away from the olden right teaching that says to drive the nails down and trim the edges well always like it was for your own use and comfort you were making it. It's like some folks has the smooth, pretty boards to build a courthouse with and others dont have no more than rough lumber fitten to build a chicken coop. But it's better to build a tight chicken coop than a shoddy courthouse, and when they both build shoddy or build well, neither because it's one or tother is going to make a man feel the better nor the worse." He welcomed the journey to Jefferson as an opportunity to get a "graphophone." He served as narrator of five chapters.

**Bundren, Darl:** The second child of [Anse](#) and [Addie Bundren](#) in [As I Lay Dying](#). The most prolific voice in the novel (he narrated 19 chapters), Darl seemed to possess a gift of clairvoyance which allowed him to

narrate, for instance, the scene of Addie's death, even though he and Jewel were away getting a load of lumber at the time of her death. Similarly, he knew Dewey Dell was pregnant because he had seen her with Lafe, and he knew that Jewel was illegitimate. Nevertheless, he was regarded by others as strange; as Cora Tull says, he was "the one that folks says is queer, lazy, pottering about the place no better than Anse." Out of jealousy, he constantly taunted Jewel, Addie's favorite child, and except for Jewel, he alone among the Bundrens had no ulterior motive for wanting to go to Jefferson. When they are trying to cross the flooded Yoknapatawpha River, Darl was useless in trying to save the wagon or Addie's coffin from the flood waters, and later, when they stayed at Gillespie's place, he set on fire the barn where Addie's coffin was, ostensibly to end the arduous journey with Addie's decomposing corpse. Rejected by his mother, Darl exhibited signs throughout the novel of an ego at odds with itself; lacking a definitive way of identifying himself, he demonstrated in his narratives detailed descriptions of events but seldom did he reveal any emotional attachment to his subjects. At the end of the novel, he was committed to a mental asylum in Jackson for burning Gillespie's barn. On the train to Jackson, his identity was completely severed when he began to refer to himself in the third person. He appears also in "Uncle Willy."

**Bundren, Dewey Dell:** Fourth child, and only daughter, of Anse and Addie Bundren in *As I Lay Dying*. Impregnated by Lafe, Dewey Dell welcomed the trip to Jefferson as an opportunity to get an abortion (for which Lafe had given her ten dollars). Turned down in "Mottson" for an abortion by Moseley, she tried again in Jefferson, but instead she was tricked into giving sexual favors to Skeet MacGowan. Furious at her brother Darl because he knew she was pregnant, she led the charge to have him committed to the asylum in Jackson after he had burned Gillespie's barn.

**Bundren, Jewel:** The illegitimate son of Addie Bundren and Rev. Whitfield, and Addie's third child. As a token of Addie's refusal to abide by society's standards regarding fidelity in marriage, he was her favorite child. As a result, he exhibited a sense of selfishness in his attitude toward her and his siblings; as he said (in his single monologue in the novel), "If it had just been me when Cash fell off of that church and if it had just been me when pa laid sick with that load of wood fell on him, it would not be happening with every bastard in the county coming in to stare at her because if there is a God what the hell is He for. It would just be me and her on a high hill and me rolling the rocks down the hill at their faces, picking them up and throwing them down the hill faces and teeth and all by God until she was quiet...." Only Darl knew Jewel was illegitimate, a fact about which Darl taunted him by saying, "Who was your father, Jewel?" Fiercely independent, he worked nights for Mr. Quick to buy a horse (a descendent of the spotted horses which Flem Snopes had brought into the county twenty-five years before). Nevertheless, he acquiesced when Anse traded his horse, among other things, for a new mule team when theirs were drowned trying to cross the flooded Yoknapatawpha River. Throughout the novel, Jewel exhibited quiet anger at everything, as when he nearly started a fight on the road into Jefferson with passers-by commenting on the smell of Addie's decomposing body. Even so, he was instrumental in saving the coffin from the two major threats along the way; in a sort of rage, he saved the coffin from the flood waters and later single-handedly saved it from a fire (set by Darl) in Gillespie's barn. Near the end of the novel, he released some of his anger upon Darl by helping to subdue him when Darl's part in the fire was discovered and it was decided to commit him to an asylum in Jackson.

**Bundren, Mrs.:** A duck-shaped Jefferson woman and owner of a "graphophone" from whom Anse Bundren borrowed shovels to bury Addie. Anse surprised his family at the end of the novel by announcing he had married her.

**Bundren, Vardaman:** The fifth and youngest child of Anse and Addie Bundren in *As I Lay Dying*. On the day his mother died, he caught a large fish; later, he began to associate the fish with his dead mother (leading to what is perhaps the most infamous sentence in Faulkner's work). Believing Dr. Peabody had killed his mother, he chased away Peabody's horses and buckboard. When Addie's body lay in the coffin, he bored holes into the lid so she could breathe, inadvertently drilling holes into her face. He looked forward to the trip to Jefferson so he could get a red toy train; when he arrived, though, it was not in the store window. He saw his brother Darl set fire to Gillespie's barn, which he then told to Dewey Dell.

## Meet the Bundrens

**Bundren, Addie:** A former schoolteacher, married to Anse for more than thirty years, who died and eventually was buried in Jefferson after a long and arduous journey in *As I Lay Dying*. She bore two children, Cash and Darl, before a feeling of betrayal – primarily by her husband's empty word "love," but also by the general lack of meaning in words – led her to have an affair with Rev. Whitfield, in which her third child, Jewel, was conceived. Shortly thereafter, she made Anse promise to bury her in Jefferson, among her "people," after she died, thus initiating the journey that constitutes the primary plot line of *As I Lay Dying*. She bore two more children after Jewel, both of them Anse's: Dewey Dell (her only daughter) "to negative Jewel" and Vardaman "to replace the child I had robbed him of." She served as narrator of one chapter in the novel.

**Bundren, Anse:** A poor farmer in the southern part of Yoknapatawpha County near Frenchman's Bend, married to Addie for more than thirty years, and father of four children in *As I Lay Dying*. Lazy and shiftless, and claiming he would die if he were ever to sweat, he relied greatly on the services of his family and neighbors; as Anse's neighbor Armstid said, "durn if there aint something about a durn fellow like Anse that seems to make a man have to help him, even when he knows he'll be wanting to kick himself next minute." The journey to Jefferson to bury his dead wife, Addie, was a promise he made to Addie, but his continued perseverance in getting there, despite the trials along the way and even after Addie's body has begun to decompose and attract buzzards, is a testament both to his dogged persistence and to an unconscious selfishness; as he said after his wife died, "But now I can get them teeth. That will be a comfort. It will." When Anse tried to cross the flooded Yoknapatawpha River at Tull's bridge (which had been swept away), his mules were drowned and Cash's leg was broken. He was able to secure a new team in part by trading Jewel's horse for them, and later, he nearly caused Cash to lose his leg by putting a cement cast on it. He concurred in the decision to have Darl committed to the mental asylum in Jackson, and he was able to talk Dewey Dell out of the ten dollars (which Lave had given her for an abortion) in order to purchase teeth; the money may also have been a factor in getting the "duck-shaped woman" (from whom he borrowed a shovel to bury Addie) to marry him at the end of the novel. He served as narrator of three chapters in the novel.

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they stayed at Gillespie's place, he set on fire the barn where Addie's coffin was, ostensibly to end the arduous journey with Addie's decomposing corpse. Rejected by his mother, Darl exhibited signs throughout the novel of an ego at odds with itself; lacking a definitive way of identifying himself, he demonstrated in his narratives detailed descriptions of events but seldom did he reveal any emotional attachment to his subjects. At the end of the novel, he was committed to a mental asylum in Jackson for burning Gillespie's barn. On the train to Jackson, his identity was completely severed when he began to refer to himself in the third person.

Bundren, Dewey Dell: Fourth child, and only daughter, of Anse and Addie Bundren in *As I Lay Dying*. Impregnated by Lefe, Dewey Dell welcomed the trip to Jefferson as an opportunity to get an abortion (for which Lefe had given her ten dollars). Turned down in Mottson for an abortion by Moseley, she tried again in Jefferson, but instead she was tricked into giving sexual favors to Skeet MacGowan. Furious at her brother Darl because he knew she was pregnant, she led the charge to have him committed to the asylum in Jackson after he had burned Gillespie's barn.

Bundren, Jewel: The illegitimate son of Addie Bundren and Rev. Whitfield, and Addie's third child. As a token of Addie's refusal to abide by society's standards regarding fidelity in marriage, he was her favorite child. As a result, he exhibited a sense of selfishness in his attitude toward her and his siblings; as he said (in his single monologue in the novel), "If it had just been me when Cash fell off of that church and if it had just been me when pa laid sick with that load of wood fell on him, it would not be happening with every bastard in the county coming in to stare at her because if there is a God what the hell is He for. It would just be me and her on a high hill and me rolling the rocks down the hill at their faces, picking them up and throwing them down the hill faces and teeth and all by God until she was quiet...." Only Darl knew Jewel was illegitimate, a fact about which Darl taunted him by saying, "Who was your father, Jewel?" Fiercely independent, he worked nights for Mr. Quick to buy a horse (a descendent of the spotted horses which Flem Snopes had brought into the county twenty-five years before). Nevertheless, he acquiesced when Anse traded his horse, among other things, for a new mule team when theirs were drowned trying to cross the flooded Yoknapatawpha River. Throughout the novel, Jewel exhibits quiet anger at everything, as when he nearly starts a fight on the road into Jefferson with passers-by commenting on the smell of Addie's decomposing body. Even so, he is instrumental in saving the coffin from the two major threats along the way; in a sort of rage, he saved the coffin from the flood waters and later single-handedly saved it from a fire (set by Darl) in Gillespie's barn. Near the end of the novel, he released some of his anger upon Darl by helping to subdue him when Darl's part in the fire was discovered and it was decided to commit him to an asylum in Jackson.

Bundren, Mrs.: A duck-shaped Jefferson woman and owner of a "graphophone" from whom Anse Bundren borrowed shovels to bury Addie. Anse surprised his family at the end of the novel by announcing he had married her.

Bundren, Vardaman: The fifth and youngest child of Anse and Addie Bundren in *As I Lay Dying*. On the day his mother died, he caught a large fish; later, he began to associate the fish with his dead mother (leading to what is perhaps the most infamous sentence in Faulkner's work). Believing Dr. Peabody had killed his mother, he chased away Peabody's horses and buckboard. When Addie's body lay in the coffin, he bored holes into the lid so she could breathe, inadvertently drilling holes into her face. He looked forward to the trip to Jefferson so he could get a red toy train; when he arrived, though, it was not in the store window. He saw his brother Darl set fire to Gillespie's barn, which he then told to Dewey Dell.

#### Other Minor Characters in *As I Lay Dying*

Armstid: A farmer in the Frenchman's Bend region of Yoknapatawpha County. He gives shelter to Anse Bundren and his family when their mules drowned in the flooded Yoknapatawpha River. He also serves as narrator of one of the chapters. His wife in this novel is named Lula.

Gillespie : A farmer in *As I Lay Dying* who made the mistake of letting Anse Bundren and his family stay

with him one night during the Bundrens' journey to Jefferson. During the night, Anse's son Darl set fire to the barn where Addie's coffin rests in order to end the family's horrible funeral procession.

**Lafe:** The father of Dewey Dell's unborn child. He gives Dewey Dell ten dollars for an abortion.

**MacGowan, Skeet:** A clerk in Uncle Willy Christian's drugstore in Jefferson. He seduces Dewey Dell Bundren when she comes in for medicine to induce an abortion. He also served as narrator for one chapter in the novel.

**Moseley:** A Mottstown druggist in *As I Lay Dying* who refused to give Dewey Dell Bundren any medicine to induce an abortion. He advised her to marry Lafe. He also narrates a chapter in the novel.

**Peabody, Dr. Lucius Quintus:** An obese country doctor in Yoknapatawpha County. He is described as seventy years old and weighing 225 pounds. He is summoned to Addie Bundren's bedside too late. Later in the novel, he saved Cash's broken leg, which Anse had "set" with cement. He narrates two chapters in the novel.

**Samson:** A farmer who lets the Bundrens sleep on his place overnight when Addie's body has reached its most offensive state of decay. He served as narrator of one of the chapters.

**Whitfield, Reverend:** A preacher in Frenchman's Bend. According to the self-righteous Cora Tull, Whitfield "wrestled with [Addie Bundren's] spirit, singled her out, and strove with the vanity in her mortal heart" – which was certainly true, as he had an affair with Addie in which he impregnated her with her third child, Jewel. When Addie was dying, he expressed guilt and resolved to confess his sin to Addie's husband, Anse, but when he found Addie had already died, he concluded his confession was no longer necessary, saying "when I framed the words of my confession it was to Anse I spoke them, even though he was not there." He served as narrator for one section of the novel.

### **Style and Technique of the Novel and its Effectiveness**

The narrative technique of Faulkner is that he tells the story through his characters by giving them each short sections throughout the story in which they are the narrators. This technique, which is called "stream of consciousness", serves many purposes.

First, it forces the readers to become more involved in the story because they must make their own assumptions and conclusions based on what is provided by each character. He also allows the readers to see into the minds of each character, determining for themselves what type of person they really are. Because Faulkner does not interject his own views, the reader is only subjected to the opinions of the characters regarding themselves and each other.

Another purpose of this technique is to allow the reader to see events from the different perspectives of the characters. This way the reader can extract from the different narratives the information to form an unbiased opinion on the actual event. The author also includes narrations from characters who are not part of the Bundren family to give the reader objective views for the Bundrens and their journey. These outside narrators are mainly included to remind the reader that the Bundrens are not normal people and to present a hint of reality.

### **Sources and Acknowledgments**

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*As I Lay Dying:*

## Commentary

Faulkner's first novel published after *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying* has been acclaimed as one of Faulkner's greatest novels as well as a self-proclaimed "tour de force" by Faulkner himself. Like the novel before it, it is told in stream-of-consciousness fashion by fifteen different speakers in some 59 chapters. In its depiction of the Bundren family's quest to Jefferson to bury their dead matriarch, Addie, among her "people," against the threats of flood and fire, the novel explores the nature of grieving, community, and family.

## The Story

As the novel opens, Addie Bundren lies dying in her bed in her family's farmhouse in southeastern Yoknapatawpha County. Neighbors come to visit, while outside her oldest son, Cash, is sawing and hammering together her coffin. Her second son, Darl, convinces his brother Jewel (Addie's third son) to go with him to pick up a load of lumber. Though he realizes Addie will probably die before they return, he convinces his father, Anse, that it is okay because "It means three dollars." Darl's apparent goal is to make sure that Jewel, Addie's favorite son, will not be at her side when she dies. While Addie's daughter, Dewey Dell, stays with her, her youngest son, Vardaman, goes fishing and catches a very big fish, which Anse tells Dewey Dell to cook for their dinner. (Later, Vardaman begins to confuse the fish with his dead mother, resulting in Faulkner's shortest, and one of his most famous or infamous chapters: "My mother is a fish.") Dr. Peabody arrives at the Bundrens' house just in time to watch Addie die, and in outrage Vardaman chases away his horse and wagon. They are later recovered by Lon Quick. Just after Addie's death a violent storm breaks, and Darl's and Jewel's lumber-laden wagon loses a wheel in a ditch. Meanwhile, young Vardaman drills holes into the coffin lid (so his mother can breathe), and inadvertently drills into her face. By the time the coffin and the wagon's wheel are repaired, three days have passed, but finally, the family can set off on their journey to bury Addie.

## The Journey

Years earlier, shortly after Darl was born, Addie had asked her husband to bury her in Jefferson, where her "people" were from, when she died. So to keep the promise he made to Addie, Anse sets off with his children toward Jefferson. As the novel's plot proceeds in stop-start fashion through the discrete monologues by the various speakers, more and more information is revealed about the Bundrens, their grief, and their society. The most conscientious Bundren, as well as the most detached, is Darl who, it turns out, has always been regarded as odd by those who know him. Nevertheless, he is near-omniscient in his knowledge about his family: he knows, for instance, that his sister Dewey Dell is pregnant, and he also intuits that Jewel is only his half-brother that he is not Anse's son. All of the Bundrens except for Darl and Jewel have ulterior motives for wanting to go on the long journey to Jefferson. Anse, the most selfish of them, wants a new set of teeth. Cash wants a phonograph (or as he calls it, a "graphophone"), and Vardaman wants to get a toy train. Dewey Dell wants to get an abortion (with the ten dollars that Lafe, the would-be father, has given her).

## The First Threat: Flood

Their first major hurdle in their journey is the flood-swollen Yoknapatawpha River. They go well out of their way to one bridge, which has been swept away, then return to a bridge closer to home, which is likewise damaged by the flood. They nonetheless decide to chance crossing which turns out to be a mistake. In the process, Cash's leg is broken and their mules are drowned; it is only by sheer strength (or rage) that Jewel is able to keep Addie's coffin from being swept away as well. Now that the Bundrens are muleless, neighbors of the Bundrens believe Anse will want to borrow their mules, but he has something else in mind. He makes an arrangement with a kinsman of Flem Snopes to trade Cash's eight dollars (which he had planned to use to buy the phonograph) and Jewel's beloved horse, for which Jewel had worked many nights to obtain and which he treats more kindly than most human beings, for a new team of mules. To continue their journey, the Bundrens had to go south to "Mottson" in the neighboring county and then head north along the main road to Jefferson.

While in Mottson, they are treated with ever-increasing outrage: Addie's decomposing body is beginning to smell and to attract buzzards. Dewey Dell tries to get an abortion but she is rebuffed by a morally upright and law-abiding pharmacist. To doctor Cash's broken leg, Anse buys some cement and uses it to place a cast on Cash's leg.

### **The Second Threat: Fire**

About midway between Mottson and Jefferson, the Bundrens spend a night at Gillespie's place. During the night, the barn where Addie's coffin was being stored catches fire, and again it was saved only by the ferocity of Jewel's efforts. Vardaman reveals that he had seen something, but Dewey Dell tells him not to repeat it.

### **The Journey Complete**

Nine days after Addie's death, the Bundrens finally arrive in Jefferson. Anse borrows some shovels from a "duck-shaped" woman to dig her grave, and finally, his promise to her has been fulfilled. Cash is sent to the doctor and Darl whom we discover set the fire in Gillespie's barn to put their outrageous journey to an end is sent to the mental asylum in Jackson to avoid the Bundrens being sued by Gillespie. Vardaman looks in the store windows for the toy train, but it was nowhere to be found. Dewey Dell finds a pharmacist who says he will help her, but instead he tricks her into granting him sexual favors. Anse convinces her to give him the ten dollars (that Lave had given her), which he uses to buy a new set of teeth. As the novel ends, he re-appears before his family with the duck-shaped woman who happens to own a phonograph and introduces her by saying, "Meet Mrs. Bundren."

### **What's in a Name? Etymology and *As I Lay Dying***

#### **by Faye Friesen and Charles Peek**

Faulkner identifies some 600 inhabitants of Yoknapatawpha by name, often obviously delighting in the play of their names on the ear. Lump Snopes and Temple Drake are more obvious examples, but they alert us to Faulkner's use of names in general. Helen Lang Leath has called attention to the significance of names in *As I Lay Dying*, suggesting that the names Cash and Jewel represent tangible value while Darl, short for "darling," connotes an intangible attachment (65). The idea that "cash" and "jewel" have the same connotations for us seems unlikely, but, even if we don't accept Leath's interpretation, it is still worth seeing what naming might contribute to understanding *As I Lay Dying*.

Readers often think of "Bundren" as "burden," perhaps appropriately given Faulkner's remark that he "took this family and subjected them to the two greatest catastrophes which man can suffer—flood and fire, that's all" (Pilkington 87). But the morphemic root of Bundren is "bund," meaning a league, confederacy, or association. The Bundren family is forced to try to function as at least a loose confederacy, and the ironies of the funeral journey and their return home both point to this need and the family failure to achieve it.

There is little point belaboring our obvious associations with "Cash," except to remind ourselves that the name "Cash" is not all that uncommon (Johnny Cash, Cash McCall, J. W. Cash). And Vardaman, too, was a name known in Mississippi history. Even here, however, one interesting feature of the name is that "vard" is the older Scottish form of "ward." It could refer to an under-age orphan, which is pretty much how we see Vardaman, a view reinforced when Addie says of Anse, "And then he died. He did not know he was dead" (160). Hence, when Addie, too, dies, there is a sense in which Vardaman becomes an orphan. "Vard" or "ward" could also suggest, as in "warehouse" (vardhus) a guard house or prison, emphasizing how trapped Vardaman is within the general family prejudice.

Something similar is found in the name Dewey Dell. Dew could point to youth and how quickly it evaporates, as Dewey Dell's comes to an end with her pregnancy. Moreover, "dell" means a young girl (wench) of a

vagrant class. The Bundrens, while not technically vagrant, not only appear close to it, but act much like it, particularly in scenes such as the borrowing of the shovel to dig the grave.

Darl may, of course, mean "darling" as Leath suggests. Even so, it would seem the use of "darling" is to be taken ironically. As Olga Vickery suggests of Addie's relationship to Darl, ". . . she denied him a place in her affections and in her world of consciousness exclusively . . . (58). Thus the name points up the very lacks which perplex Darl and make his "connection with the external world increasingly precarious and insecure" (58).

In this light, then, the origin of "jewel" is telling. While Faulkner may well have been led to this mostly by trying to find some intertextual echo for "Pearl" (Matthews 154), his association with Addie is stressed by the origin of "jewel" in the Old French "jouel," a diminutive form of "jou" meaning "delight" (*Dictionary of First Names*).

Ste. Adelaide, wife of Otto the Great, Holy Roman Emperor, may seem a mighty stretch from Addie Bundren. It is doubtful Addie's children will "rise up to call her blessed," an inscription we know Faulkner knew. So, in some ways, this, too, is perhaps ironic. Still, it is not altogether ironic. However harsh Addie is, it seems hard to read *As I Lay Dying* without getting a sense that in some ways Faulkner admired this woman. She had much to overcome in her own upbringing and tried to overcome it. Such signs as there are of her Puritanism, she repudiates in her affair. Generally she flaunts convention and seeks to know by doing. However hard it might have been to have been her child, is it altogether farfetched to find in her the basic ingredients of "adal," short for "noble," and "heid," meaning "sort" (*Dictionary of First Names*)?

It is possibly with Anse that the etymology of names is most revealing. The *OED* defines "anserous" as goose-like, stupid, and silly. Clearly Faulkner has something of this in mind because he describes Anse as "a tall bird hunched" (156). It is perhaps reaching too far to look at related terms like "anatase." Yet possibly not. Anatase, a mineral of titanium dioxide, is a crystal which, when heated, pours a yellow brown molasses-colored liquid. What then of Addie's recollection of Anse: I would think about his name until after a while I could see the word as a shape, a vessel, and I would watch him liquify and flow into it like cold molasses flowing out of the darkness into a vessel, until the jar stood full and motionless . . . (159).

These associations of the family with their names gain support from the origins of some names of neighbors and lookers on. Cora Tull spends her time pointing to the sins of others. Vickery states that Addie's death "is but another moral lesson to be interpreted by Cora Tull as she elbows her way to heaven" (64). Not surprisingly, "Cor" is defined as a "vulgar corruption of God" (*OED*). In Greek mythology, Kore (maiden) is the "euphemistic name of the goddess of the underworld Persephone, and would not have been a well-omened name to take" (*Dictionary of First Names*). Her husband, Vernon, was always coming to help the Bundrens and was there at the river crossing. "Vernal" means coming, appearing, happening.

Lucius Peabody, the doctor, is characterized by Faulkner positively. "Lucius" is an obsolete form of "luscious," meaning "sweet and highly pleasant to taste or smell" (*OED*).

Moseley, the druggist in Mottstown, refuses to help Dewey Dell get her abortion. "Moses" is "applied allusively to someone resembling Moses in his character" as the lawgiver or leader (*OED*). We find Moseley representing himself as a "respectable druggist" and "A church member for fifty-six years in this town" (187). As a lawgiver, he tells Dewey Dell, "The Lord gave you what you have even if he did use the devil to do it; you let Him take it away from you if it's His will to do so" (188). He advises her to "go back to Lefe and you and him take that ten dollars and get married with it" (188).

Finally, Skeeter MacGowan, the drugstore clerk in Jefferson, is yet another of Faulkner's characters who can

be tied to the etymology of his name. "Mac" is slang for a pander, and "gowan" is a drug, specifically opium, thus relating him to his job in the drugstore. "Skeet" means to squirt or eject fluid.

"Are you sure it'll work?" she says.

"Sure," I says. "When you take the rest of the treatment."

"Where do I take it?" she says.

"Down in the cellar," I says (231).

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References to *As I Lay Dying* are from the Noel Polk Corrected Text, Vintage Books, 1987. Etymologies of Bundren family names are all from the *OED* except for Addie, and Jewel, some of which is taken from the *Dictionary of First Names*, as are the etymologies for neighbors and bystanders.

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