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# "The worry that you are yourself": Darl's unforgivable neurodiversity in *As I lay dying*

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“THE WORRY THAT YOU ARE YOURSELF”:

DARL’S UNFORGIVABLE NEURODIVERSITY IN *AS I LAY DYING*

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A Thesis

Presented To

Eastern Washington University

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

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By Neal Hallgarth

Fall 2013

THESIS OF NEAL HALLGARTH APPROVED BY

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MASTER'S THESIS

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## Abstract

This paper is concerned with the character of Darl Bundren and the repeated motif of madness in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. Possible psychiatric explanations for Darl's madness, including linguistic evidence for his psychotic breakdown, are explored. The paper does not agree with the critical use of words such as "insane" or "crazy" as the book itself questions the verity of such labels. Critical analyses concerning Darl tend to be sympathetic but use derogatory language when defending the character. Articles related to the relatively new idea of neurodiversity will counter the backhanded sympathy with which the critics regard Darl. Sociological and psychological studies are used to provide scaffolding for the discussion of mental illness. The goal of conflating 21<sup>st</sup>-century social psychology with 20<sup>th</sup>-century literature is to condemn the atrocities committed against the character of Darl without condemning the character with a diagnosis. Any diagnosis that can be generalized as "madness" is in line with the same rationale used by the other characters in the novel (especially Darl's father, Anse) to justify the incarceration of Darl. In short, this paper builds a sympathetic defense of the character of Darl that follows in the tradition of existing criticism while condemning the derogatory language used for functional people suffering from a mental illness.

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## Literature Review

The leading diagnosis of the character Darl Bundren, as given by the critics, is schizophrenia (Simon 106). John K. Simon establishes this precedent as early as 1963 in his article “‘What Are You Laughing at Darl?’: Madness and Humor in *As I Lay Dying*,” and it has been the assumed diagnosis ever since (Hayes; Kinney; Simon). Critics use schizophrenia to describe the language William Faulkner uses to establish Darl’s unique narrative voice (Hayes; Ross), to postulate a wartime experience leading to the schizophrenic episode (Branch; Sutherland), or to determine the strained familial relationships between the Bundrens (Delville; Handy; Simon; Rossky). Concerning the last point, that of familial relationships, not until 2007, when Benjamin Widiss mentioned that Anse acts without regard to the emotional wellbeing of his children, was a more precise assessment than mental illness actually made (99). Indeed, a family may provide not only the genetic code for a preexisting mental state, but also the impetus for a mental breakdown. A family can influence a relative’s mental state (positive or negative) based on his or her support or proximity (Blgbee; Bovier; Martire; Seltzer) if, indeed, the relative suffers from schizophrenia—again, a diagnosis given by the critics based on one episode within the book. This diagnosis is neither clinically sound (Atkinson 22) nor fully supported by the text (Howe 137-138).

Simon simultaneously diagnoses Darl with schizophrenia and uses the term interchangeably with the two words “madness” or “insanity” (104). Critics use these two generalizing terms over seven decades of criticism to describe Darl’s mental state. “Madness” and “insanity” also give direct ownership to Darl—especially when used as the collocation

“Darl’s Insanity” (Palliser 629)—and release the rest of the Bundrens from any obligation. The term “insanity” begs the question: how can a family take care of a member who, by nature, cannot be taken care of? So, although critics are generally sympathetic toward Darl’s plight (Delville; Handy; Hayes; Kinney; Palliser; Simon; Rossky; Vickery; Waggoner; Widiss), they use damning language that at least tacitly supports the ostracism and incarceration of Darl by the other Bundrens (Campbell; Handy; Howe; Palliser; Simon; Slatoff; Rossky; Waggoner).

In *William Faulkner: A Critical Study*, Irving Howe is correct when he says that Faulkner does not prepare the reader for Darl’s breakdown (137-138). Although the language used in Darl’s sections is distinct from other characters in regards to textual voice (Hayes; Matthews; Ross; Widiss), none of the Darl chapters before his last reads as a cypher or word salad (a random mix of words and phrases). Early criticism from the 1940s until the beginning of the 1960s regards the language difference found in the Darl chapters, on the whole, as a possible failure by Faulkner to express character clearly (Campbell; Howe; Kazin; Slatoff). According to Howe, Darl is Faulkner’s “half-formed mouthpiece” (137). Enough was successfully expressed, however, for early critics to also apply the label of “insanity” to the character (Campbell; Howe; Slatoff). Two of the earliest critics, Vickery (242) and Slatoff (190), are both sympathetic to the character and laudatory of Faulkner, however, and his use of Darl to create ambivalence and moral ambiguity. Vickery, it should be noted, is a lone exception to the early critics, as she applies no labels to Darl but instead writes of the character as losing “contact with the external world and objective reality” (241).

Modern critics view this same dissociation in one of two ways: either, like some earlier critics, as a failure on Faulkner’s part to convey character through language or voice (Beck; Branch; Delville) or as a means to write the phenomenon of emotional distance (Delville;

Hayes). Michel Delville, in “Alienating Language and Darl’s Narrative Consciousness in *As I Lay Dying*,” notes that even though Faulkner used language that is impossible for the characters themselves to use given the limitations of their economic and educational statuses, the ideas contained within the language are not wholly incongruous with the characters’ identities (61). It is, in short, the language of thought unhindered by speech, something closer akin to descriptions of images and impressions rather than a literal denotative transcript of an interior monolog. Delville terms this linguistic device as “metaphysical reflexions” [sic] and invokes Jacques Lacan to say it is a language which captures “the self’s eccentricity to the self” (69-70). Where earlier critics derided this linguistic rift between Faulkner’s authorial voice and a character’s voice (especially Darl’s), modern critics conflated the two into metaphysical strengthening of character. When coupled with the idea that Darl can be read as schizophrenic, then the language becomes appropriate to convey his objective distance from reality (Delville; Hayes; Palliser).

The perceptive abstraction shown in Darl’s chapters has also interested critics. Darl’s only straightforward narrative concerns Jewel earning enough to get a horse. Critics reason that something happened between the Darl that recounts this recollection of youth and the Darl that is present in the events of the novel. The most obvious explanation is, of course, World War I (Branch, Simon, Sutherland). In making this connection, however, the critics do not suggest that Darl may be suffering from PTSD, a more clinically sound diagnosis than schizophrenia. Instead of listing actual war experiences, the critics hypothesize the mind-expanding effects of cubist art, following Vickery’s reasoning that “the images are not Darl’s experience but rather snatched from some region beyond his reasoning and comprehension” (197). In “Darl Bundren’s ‘Cubistic’ Vision,” William G. Branch imagines that Darl, fighting the “French War (45)” would have been exposed to the same exhibitions as Faulkner was when he was in Paris (45). Michael

Millgate presents a list of Faulkner's work "obsessed" with the First World War but fails to include *As I Lay Dying* (387). If Millgate's contention is correct, however, then this obsession would account for Darl's utterance that "Darl had a little spy-glass he got in France in the war" (254). Whether or not Darl saw cubist art in Europe, Faulkner does make allusions to the spatial play of solid forms in time and movement. The first chapter, when Darl and Jewel pass around and through the cotton-house, respectively, the description is "cubist". Most critics lean to the description of the burning barn, however, as the prime example of cubism (Branch; Rossky; Simon). Cubism, then, gives Darl a possible means to express himself in a dissociative way (Branch; Matthews; Rossky; Simon; Widiss). Ronald Sutherland is the only critic who gives more credence to the trauma of war and the distance from "native soil" as the primary reasons for Darl's dissociation (543-544), allowing for a character study rather than an examination of linguistic motivators and use.

The Bundrens share only a small amount of dialog with one another, yet the relationships they share are distinct. The absence of communication is one indicator of the isolation each member of the family experiences even when together (Delville 67). Mother and wife Addie Bundren has a strong influence over each member; she creates a "psychological center" that forces the family to stay together (Rossky 90). The critical consensus is simply that the family has difficulty getting along and that this difficulty creates mounting tension on the journey (Delville; Handy; Hayes; Rossky; Simon; Vickery). Darl poses a threat to Anse, Cash, Dewey Dell, Jewel, and, posthumously, Addie (Baldanzi; Hayes; Palliser; Vickery). The nature of the threat may change, but the threats are all variations on the fear of exposure.

Benjamin Widiss, in "Fit and Surfeit in '*As I Lay Dying*,'" points out that Addie undermines all other narration when she says "words don't ever fit even what they are trying to

say at” (100). According to Widiss, this rejection extends to the titles bestowed upon the rest of the family by Anse. Therefore, “Mrs. Bundren” is a title that only exists as words, not as true identity. Anse proves this when he quickly bestows the title to a new woman soon after Addie is buried. Widiss explains this as “wrenching the appellation from its accustomed denotation without warning or fanfare” (99). Addie’s attitude toward language seems to be in line with Darl’s sparse use of language. Even in thought, Darl tends to create generalizations out of specific problems (Matthews; Widiss).

Despite any similarities, however, Addie’s and Darl’s relationship is at odds. According to Elizabeth Hayes, Faulkner made intentional edits to his manuscript to omit any use of the word “Ma” from Darl’s chapters (59). Now, except for three instances, Darl refers to his mother as “Addie Bundren.” Watson G. Branch further emphasizes the broken relationship and says Darl felt “unwanted and unloved” (42-43). In “Fate and Madness: The Determinist Vision of Darl Bundren,” Charles Palliser suggests that Darl, because of his knowledge of Jewel’s true paternity, is a direct threat to Addie: “Darl understands how far the destructive and obsessive selfishness of Addie...is responsible for the family’s present state” (628). Other critics have pointed out that selfishness is a trait shared equally among the Bundrens (Delville, Palliser, Rosky, Widiss).

Palliser isolates Darl and Jewel as exceptions to the Bundren’s selfish motivations. Jewel is the only family member who is sincere about seeing Addie’s funerary rights carried out (630). Although it may be more obsession than selfishness, Darl does seem to be somewhat motivated by having the chance to observe Jewel. Darl is far more fascinated with Jewel than is any other Bundren (Branch, Hayes, Simon). Even though Jewel does not have a hidden motive, he still feels threatened by Darl over matters of actual paternity. Dewey Dell feels similarly threatened,

as Darl is the only one aware of her pregnancy (Palliser 624). Darl also threatens Anse, for in Darl's chapters we have the coincidence of God's will and Anse's own wishes: "'God's will be done,' he says. 'Now I can get them teeth'" (52). Darl's keen observations threaten to expose the selfish motivations of the other family members. Even Cash, who is the most sympathetic to Darl, has reasons to feel threatened. Cash has labored to craft the perfect coffin. If there is no body to be seen, then there is no evidence (Baldanzi 42), which is also a testament to Cash's craftsmanship. Darl's intellectualism may be considered threatening to a family who could be considered white trash by the larger community, especially by the people of Jefferson (48).

Darl and Vardaman, the youngest brother, share some linguistic traits when dealing with the existentialist dilemma of "being and not being" (Delville; Hayes; Simon; Widiss). Vardaman, however, selects transitional objects (i.e., bananas and a toy train set) as coping mechanisms, whereas Darl selects no object to replace the loss of Addie (Widiss 109). Having an existential crisis, however, diminishes the severity of Darl's mental state as it proves self-awareness in a larger, social context. This creates the argument of whether Darl is actually suffering from a mental condition.

According to Jacqueline M. Atkinson in "To tell or not to tell the diagnosis of schizophrenia," [sic] many psychiatrists believe that a single episode is not enough to diagnose schizophrenia (22). No matter how eccentric Darl may be, only one chapter shows evidence of a mental breakdown, and this occurs when Darl is aware he is being incarcerated. Given clinical definitions, however, Darl shows signs of PTSD rather than schizophrenia. Dissociation after family trauma, combat, natural disasters (such as floods), and man-made disasters (such as fire) is common for someone suffering from PTSD (Ozer and Weiss; Scott). Other symptoms include sleeplessness and hypersensitivity (Scott 294). In addition, someone who suffers trauma without

adequate support from his or her family will take longer to recover (Ozer 170). PTSD was not included in the DSM-III until 1980, but experts as early as Sigmund Freud recognized that “shell-shock” was a psychological disorder (Scott 296). It should be noted that at the time Simon wrote his criticism, the definition, categorizations, and diagnoses of schizophrenia had expanded in the DSM-II (Holzman; Lezenweger).

The idea of neurodiversity, first forwarded by sociologist Judy Singer in the early 1990s, eliminates the need for diagnosis. It renders the question of Darl’s exact condition moot because it accepts only the given: he thinks differently. The cause for his “otherness” is not as much of a concern as his present condition, which seems to be highly functional. In fact, many critics consider Darl’s attempt to destroy Addie’s body a rational act (Delville; Handy; Hayes; Kinney; Palliser; Simon; Rossky; Vickery; Waggoner). Neurodiversity is a widening umbrella that shelters many conditions (e.g., autism, dyslexia, ADHD) and can apply to anyone who is considered to be wired differently: “Many atypical forms of brain wiring also convey unusual skills and aptitudes” (Silberman). Using this logic, the character of Darl does not need to be psychoanalyzed. Just as the rest of the Bundrens can be characterized by their selfishness, Darl can be characterized by his neurodiversity. While the rest of the Bundrens go along with Anse in trying to deliver a body so decomposed that the smell makes social pariahs of the entire family, Darl is the single, defiant member of the group who seeks to foreshorten a trip marred by disaster, injury, and loss.

“The Worry That You Are Yourself”: Darl’s Unforgivable Neurodiversity

INTRODUCTION

*As I Lay Dying* is the story of the Bundrens, a poor, Southern, agrarian family. The “dying” in the title refers to Addie, the matron of the family. The book opens with her vigil and ends just after her interment in the ground. Her husband and five children undertake an arduous trek from their hilltop farm to a burial plot in the town of Jefferson, Mississippi. Their trek becomes an odyssey as they must overcome overwhelming natural forces and the judgment of peers and strangers alike. William Faulkner was a modernist, however, and a realist<sup>1</sup>, so the Bundrens are not heroes nor is the funerary pilgrimage a hero’s journey. Although there are romantic trappings, many of the old Southern myths are dispelled.<sup>2</sup> Depending on the reader, the book becomes more tragic or darkly comic as the journey continues.

The five children are, from oldest to youngest: Cash, Darl, Jewel, Dewey Dell, and Vardaman. In succession of age, they are made to suffer in various degrees. The suffering comes

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<sup>1</sup> In his article “Faulkner’s Point of View,” Warren Beck distinguishes Faulkner from earlier Romantics such as Edgar Allan Poe: “While Faulkner differs radically from Poe in being a close observer and realistic reporter of the human tragedy, he departs just as radically from the naturalistic school’s baldly objective, documentary method. He is constantly interpretive; he sees his subjects in the light of humane predilections, and thus his realism always intends signification. This lifts his most extreme passages above sensationalism; and striking as his scenes are, his conception of novels as meaningful wholes is still more impressive, at least for qualified attentive readers” (349).

<sup>2</sup> Irving Howe explains the Southern myth and Faulkner’s relationship with it: “After its defeat in the Civil War, the South could not participate fully and freely in the ‘normal’ development of American society – that is, industrialism and large-scale capitalism arrived there later and with far less force than in the North or West. By the Reconstruction period New England regional consciousness was in decline and by the turn of the century the same was a pariah region or because its recalcitrance in defeat forced the rest of the nation to treat it as such, felt its sectional identity most acutely during the very decades when the United States was becoming a self-conscious nation. While the other regions meekly submitted to dissolution, the South worked desperately to keep itself intact. Through an exercise of the will, it insisted that the regional memory be the main shaper of its life.

It is therefore insufficient to say, as many critics do, that Faulkner is a traditional moralist drawing his creative strength from the Southern myth; the truth is that he writes in opposition to his tradition as well as in acceptance, that he struggles with the Southern myth even as he acknowledges and celebrates it [. . .]. Faulkner, however, is working with the decayed fragments of a myth, the somewhat soured pieties of regional memory, and that is why his language is so often tortured, forced, and even incoherent” (“The Southern Myth...” 357-360).

either from an environment fraught with peril or from their parents. During the events of the story, Addie is lying invalid on her deathbed until her demise, leaving Anse as the parent directly responsible for the children during their trip. Her illness and absence do not absolve Addie of her past abuses, but readers have more insight into Anse because his children and neighbors have similar observations. Anse manages either directly or indirectly to exacerbate the suffering through indecision, inaction, and his outright claims that the children owe him fealty in the form of labor, property, or money.

Even a simple summary of the story and characters, however, takes on the form of a single reader's experience. William Faulkner divided the fifty-nine chapters of the book among fifteen different narrators, making the gist of the novel elusive. So, while the story takes form among the narrators, readers must find points of unwitting corroboration to create context and meaning. The second child, Darl Bundren, is the dominant voice in the novel, acting as narrator in nineteen of the fifty-nine chapters. Much of the corroboration thus has to agree with Darl's observations. The second-most dominant is the youngest child, Vardaman, who narrates ten of the chapters. As Vardaman barely advances the plot in his sections, the reader becomes even more dependent on Darl's narration of events. The third most prevalent narrator is the Bundrens' neighbor Vernon Tull, with six chapters. As he provides a voice outside that of the Bundrens, his narration is invaluable for providing validity and counterbalance to the story.

Counting the chapters together, the narration clearly centers on the Bundrens and their farm. The Bundrens, together, account for 43 of the chapters. Vernon Tull and his wife Cora together have nine chapters. Their doctor, Peabody, has two chapters. The five people outside this sphere are allotted only one chapter each. So although all of the characters contribute to the telling of the complete story, Darl is the focal point; the other characters, in order of proximity,

exist on an ever-widening periphery. Despite the dependence readers have on Darl for the bulk of narration, the last chapter has allowed readers to dismiss him as insane, and by implication, unreliable.

Inasmuch as Darl is often described by those outside the family as the queer one or the one folks talk about, readers may not be surprised at Darl's mental breakdown near the end of the novel. The events leading up to the breakdown, however, are egregious by any standard. Significantly, the breakdown occurs after Darl learns he will be committed to an asylum. His complete mental breakdown is not the cause for his internment; the only justifiable cause is his crime, which is destruction of property. When his family has him committed as a patient rather than as a criminal, they rob him of recognition that he is capable of rational, pre-meditated action. Darl is wronged because he is different, riddled by war's wounds in ways that readers never learn because his family and friends never learn or care, and although those family members and friends do not dominate the book, they still regulate the point of view of the book by casting judgment on the character that happens to be the most necessary of the fifteen narrators.

## NEURODIVERSITY

When Darl's voice is reduced to a word salad in the last of his nineteen chapters, there is a temptation by readers to diagnose the character: "Darl's schizophrenia represents a surrender to the natural elements which form the threat of the novel, specifically to time and space" (Simon 106). Schizophrenia is a kinder, if clinical, label than generalized madness or insanity: "The fact of Darl's insanity raised the question of just how valid his insights are intended by Faulkner to be" (Handy 422). Outside the linguistic evidence of Darl's dissociated mental state at the end of the novel, Faulkner gives little evidence to an exact psychological or neurological condition.

In the novel, other characters describe Darl as queer. Outside of strangeness, the most supportable hypothesis for Darl's condition would be PTSD resulting from combat experience. The severity and prevalence of both PTSD and schizophrenia are also linked to family environment, however (Ozer 170; Holzman 281-282), and this common element is more important than the actual classification of Darl's mental state. Definitions and categorizations in the DSM have changed and expanded, so there will be continued temptation by readers to attribute the malady du jour to Darl as an explanation for his breakdown.

One term that is actually useful to explain Darl's mental state is neurodiversity.<sup>3</sup> Although first used for neurobiological disorders, neurodiversity has expanded to include all mental states. The purpose of applying the new label of neurodiversity before another label is to eliminate exclusion based on perceived cognitive differences. The origin of the cognitive difference is not as important as the diversity it provides to a larger group. Faulkner never fixates on the origin of Darl's "otherness"; it merely exists. Unfortunately, Darl's neurodiversity is disturbing to the other characters who, by contrast with Darl, consider themselves neurotypical.

#### PAST AND PERSONAL MOTIVE

From the beginning of the book, Darl is atypical neurologically.<sup>4</sup> His family gives some indication, however, that a change came upon him sometime in the past before the advent of the first narration. Darl's sister, Dewey Dell, is the first to describe Darl's difference: "Darl [. . .] that

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<sup>3</sup> Neurodiversity was first coined by Judy Singer to describe the inclusion of people with autism and quickly expanded to other conditions like dyslexia and ADHD. Currently, it is a catch-all for mental states that produce cognitive and learning differences (Silberman 117-118). Coincidentally, there may also be a temptation to read Asperger's Syndrome into Darl's character as people with Asperger's "tend to possess average to above-average cognitive and verbal abilities, while they also exhibit impaired social abilities and [. . .] fixed patterns of interest (Jurecic 422).

<sup>4</sup> Neurotypical is a neologism to refer to people whose actions, dialog, and lifestyles are used as evidence for a healthy mental state or the culture that supports the evidence (Jurecic 425). According to this standard, Darl is atypical.

sits at the supper table with his eyes gone further than the food and the lamp, full of the land dug out of his skull and the holes filled with distance beyond the land” (*As I Lay Dying* 27). His father, Anse, describes him the same way: “he’s got his eyes full of the land all of the time” (36). Anse also explains that an unnamed “they” shorthanded him out of Darl: “And Darl too. Talking me out of him, durn them [. . .]. I says to them he was alright at first [but] they begun to threaten me out of him, trying to short-hand me with the law<sup>5</sup>” (37). To be shorthanded is to be bereft of the labor of an employee or family member. The law he is referring to is most likely the Selective Service Act of 1917, especially the third registration open to men 18 years of age.

Darl mentions he has often been away from home. While delivering lumber, he and Jewel find overnight shelter, an occasion that reminds Darl of longer absences: “How often have I lain beneath rain on a strange roof, thinking of home” (81). When Darl has his mental breakdown and his speech and thoughts become dissociated, he thinks to himself in third-person point of view: “Darl had a little spy-glass he got in France at the war” (254). At a time of great distress, Darl provides a detail which belies a past that is far vaster than life on a farmstead. Because of the allusions to war and topographical distance, PTSD stemming from combat trauma is a likely explanation for Darl’s state of mind. The wartime events and its effects don’t unmake Darl, however; they transform him and how he views the world around him:

Darl Bundren’s experience “in France at the war” had a major role in determining both the substance and the mode of his vision of reality. Though Darl’s French experience is never described in *As I Lay Dying*, it was [. . .] important to him.

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<sup>5</sup> Quotations from *As I Lay Dying* are shot through with misspellings, colloquialisms, missing punctuation, and syntactical creativity. No edits have been made, nor will recognition of every purposeful departure from grammar be noted. As Beck described Faulkner’s style, “Faulkner’s interpretive bent has also led him to transcend the modern realists’ cult of a simply factual diction and colloquial construction and to employ instead a full, varied, and individual style” (349). Anse’s use of short-hand as a verb for making one shorthanded is just one example of the colloquial style used in the novel.

Darl, however, makes no obvious effort to counteract the wartime experience. In fact, what Darl saw in France has so marked his view of life and his mode of vision that Faulkner reveals it through identity: dislocation and disorientation are the reflection of maddening chaos. Because the journey to France is never narrated, its nature can only be hypothesized, but [ . . . ] the war showed Darl absurd and wasteful death (and, by extension, absurd and wasteful life) on a scale unimaginable to him had he remained at home in Yoknapatawpha County.

(Branch 42)

Due to the war, Darl is different from the other members of his family. World-weary, Darl has transcended simple day-to-day existence:

Darl has been overseas during the World War, which undoubtedly played havoc with his sensitive nature, broadening his awareness and deepening his sensibilities, creating a problem of readjustment to the temporarily forgotten crudeness of home life – a grotesque kind of crudeness which the atmosphere of the novel vividly impresses upon the reader. It is significant that Faulkner and Darl avoid mention of the war until the last, when, on the train to Jackson, he is rapidly losing his grips on sanity and is speaking of himself in the third person.

(543-44)

This experience may have led to his increased insights, but it has also induced tenuousness in his nature. Any involuntary re-experience of trauma becomes a potential irritant.

Branch also postulates that Darl had been exposed to Cubism, as Faulkner had, while in Europe. Darl is the only character that uses cubist imagery, so it helps create the distinction that

Darl has a unique background and perspective. Darl describes Jewel and his horse as a piece of art: "Moving that quick his coat, bunching, tongues swirling like so many flames. With tossing mane and tail and rolling eye the horse makes another short curvetting rush and stops again [. . .]. Save for Jewel's legs they are like two figures carved for a tableau savage in the sun" (12). The artistic comparisons continue throughout the chapters; from afar, Darl describes what Cash sees as he works on the coffin and looks into Addie's window: "It is a composite picture of all time since he was a child" (48). Vardaman becomes a poster as he reacts to Addie's death: "He begins to move slowly backward from the bed, his eyes round, his pale face fading into the dusk like a piece of paper pasted on a failing wall, and so out the door" (49). Darl describes Addie's recently dead face: "It is like a casting of fading bronze" (51). Anse is not permitted such a flattering artistic comparison: "It is as though upon a face carved by a savage caricaturist a monstrous burlesque of all bereavement flowed" (78). He also likens Anse to a piece of folk sculpture: "[H]e looks like a figure carved clumsily from tough wood by a drunken caricaturist" (163). While Darl is away, he imagines what is happening back home as Cash is taking an adze to the coffin: "Upon the dark ground the chips look like random smears of soft pale paint on a black canvas" (75). While Cash is lying injured on the riverbank, Darl continues the painterly similes: "his hair plastered in a smooth smear across his forehead as though done with a paint brush" (156). When Darl is in the river, he describes the coldness of the river as a sculptor: "It is like hands molding and prodding at the very bones" (158). Finally, Addie's coffin is described: "The front, the conical façade with the square orifice of doorway broken only by the square squat shape of the coffin on the sawhorses like a cubistic bug, comes into relief" (219). These painterly references lend a unique voice to Darl, helping to distinguish him from the other characters. Darl sees the world similar to the way an artist views an object: analyzing it, breaking it apart, and

reassembling it into something new. Darl often narrates with a point-of-view that is not just his own – a similar approach seen in Cubism. The effect of using multiple view-points is to lend greater context to familiar subject matter. Darl's re-contextualizing of both mundane and extraordinary events gives grandiosity to the other characters and the entire account of the Bundrens' struggles. Darl shares another characteristic with artists: detachment. In order to re-contextualize the world around him, Darl must do so at a distance. This distance exists only in his mind. Darl has the mind of an artist excepting the creative evidence, which could be used as a description of a neurodiverse mind.

Darl is not alone among the characters, however, in experiencing the trauma of extreme fear, horror, and helplessness and its consequences. With the help of their neighbor, Vernon Tull, the family has to cross over a bridge washed out by a flood. The flood becomes a traumatic event for everyone involved. Faulkner repeats the negation of self in characters faced with their mortalities. At this point, Tull also feels dissociation when he has to cross the flooded ford: "Yet here I was, and the fellow that could make himself cross it twice, couldn't be me" (139). When faced with traumatic events, characters become aware of themselves as an existent self. The existent self can then be dismissed as it has no ability to contextualize itself within the sum of the surrounding events. Tull is able to negate the self in the object form ("me"). The self becomes an object of disbelief, separate from the observer, though both self and observer are the same person. Tull, unlike Darl, is able summarily to dismiss the feeling as ultimately pointless – that it "aint worth the worry that you are yourself" (140). Darl never stops worrying about who he is. In fording the stream, all of the Bundrens face their own mortalities. For Darl, however, this is a potential re-experience of death. Darl's narration continues to change after this event. He is another object in a world of objects and conflating the actor with the observer becomes

increasingly difficult until a complete separation occurs. At the occasion of a stressful event, however, Tull expresses an objective doubt about himself and exhibits some of the same thought-pattern that marks Darl as unusual.

After crossing the river with calamitous results, Darl begins to use language in a more abstract manner, but at the same time, a manner more apt in capturing his mental condition: “As though the clotting which is you had dissolved into the myriad original motion, and seeing and hearing in themselves blind and deaf; fury in itself quiet with stagnation” (164). Darl refers to the generalized reader or listener, “you,” as unbecoming into something larger and an understanding without the need of senses. Contrary emotions are also used to communicate some unmoving state. There is a complexity, but it is abstract – without concrete forms or connections. Until the scene of his mental breakdown, these abstractions increase in Darl’s narration. After conversing with Dewey Dell, his thoughts bear little relation to the conversation: “‘You had more trouble than you expected, selling those cakes in Mottson,’ I say. How do our lives ravel out into the no-wind, no-sound, the weary gestures wearily recapitulant: echoes of old compulsions with no-hand on no-strings: in sunset we fall into furious attitudes, dead gestures of dolls” (206-207). Darl’s thought process concentrates on the dissolution of being, repeating the prefix “no” to negate the agency of a prime mover or the existence of an afterlife to “ravel out into.” In this absence, fury remains as the most memorable emotion. Darl is not capable of expressing or showing this emotion, but the thought reveals that a fury is repeated within his abstractions.

Another cause of Darl’s diminishing mental state is the diminishing physical state of his brother Cash. Cash’s leg is broken when he is swept down river in the flood. Darl is the only one to actually acknowledge the seriousness of Cash’s condition: “He is bleeding to death is Cash” (207). When the family sets his leg in concrete to prevent its being jostled in the wagon, Darl

thinks again about the comforting potential of absence: “If you could just ravel out into time. That would be nice. It would be nice if you could just ravel out into time” (208). The repetition of raveling out into nothingness creates a greater distance from the actual events. The distance continues until Darl experiences a complete dissociation from self at the end of the novel. Darl’s deterioration is not the effect of neurobiological determinism. His breakdown is not doomed to happen at some time even before the events of the story unfold. Darl worsens with the unfolding. The increased stress of disaster and injury contribute significantly to his already tenuous state.

The change in Darl’s narration can be seen when compared to the chapter where he tells the story from the past. In the chapter where Darl narrates when Jewel worked to earn enough to buy a horse, he is able to do so without existential musings or abstractions. As a narrator, he is able to comment on the story he is telling. As Jewel becomes wearier from working day and night, Darl is able to remember his reaction: “I thought it was right comical” (131). When Darl and Cash guess that Jewel is seeing a woman, Darl is able to respond with humor: “I used to admire her, but I downright respect her now” (133). Darl’s thoughts pertain clearly to the related events. This is a different Darl from the Darl returned from war. The realizations of his family’s inability to express themselves or solve problems begins to change Darl, a change shown by a shift in language. The profundity of the shift is expressed without personal meaning:

It was as though, so long as the deceit ran along quiet and monotonous, all of us let ourselves be deceived, abetting it unawares or maybe through cowardice, since all people are cowards and naturally prefer any kind of treachery because it has a bland outside. But now it was like we had all – and by a kind of telepathic agreement of admitted fear – flung the whole thing back like covers on the bed and we all sitting bolt upright in our nakedness, staring at one another and saying

“Now is the truth. He hasn’t come home. Something has happened to him. We let something happen to him” (134).

The family has a collective unconscious. Their shared traits hinder them but also give them an understanding of one another. They allow their shared deceptions to continue to dangerous conclusions, however, and their deceptions aid in the disastrous results of their funeral journey.

Darl’s frame of mind before setting fire to the barn – a combination of fury and mental distance from the trauma occurring to his family and himself – is an attempt to mentally create a safe distance from a worsening series of events. Burning the barn becomes the only way to bring a possible cessation of the series of traumatic events. Darl is responsible for setting the fire and trying to burn up the putrefying corpse of Addie, an understandable action under the conditions.

For all of the chapters that Faulkner allots Darl, few details are given about the character himself. Faulkner gives greater detail about Darl’s perception of the world than the person occupying that world and reporting upon it. The vacuum created by a narrator’s lack of self-reflection does provide a clear enough psychological and philosophical model to base critical responses on, however, a vacuum that has led to seventy five years of critical speculation. The other narrators in the book occasionally mention Darl’s behavior as strange, but they never go into any specific detail. Read together, though, the multiple perspectives of the different narrators create a whole. To appreciate any one character necessitates taking the varied narrators’ accounts as a whole. In an oblique fashion, then, the character of Darl emerges, however ambiguous.

The strangest behavior described on more than one occasion is Darl’s laughter. While riding along in the back of the Bundren wagon, he seems to be laughing aloud at some private joke (according to more than one narrator). Anse sees the laughing as a sign of his son’s

peculiarity. Given the nature of the Bundrens' funerary procession, Darl might be laughing at any number of absurdities, but most likely he is laughing at his brother Jewel's true paternity.

This paternity is an absurdity because Jewel is perhaps the most sincerely loyal to Addie, the Bundrens' deceased matron, yet Jewel is the only half-sibling among the five siblings. Jewel's existence belies Addie's indiscretion with the preacher, Whitfield. Darl may be the only one privy to the indiscretion (or to actually admit knowledge of the deed). The Bundrens are bound by the idea that belonging to a family obligates a strict loyalty to other family members, and they use this obligation as justification to take the perilous trip to Addie's family plot in Jefferson, but Addie was obviously not as bound to the idea, as proven by her affair.

And yet the Bundrens find themselves traveling further away from home. Darl is also privy to some of the selfish secondary motivations of his father and siblings. He understands the whole proceeding is a kind of act, a performance by the family. When he asks Jewel, "whose son are you?" (212), he questions the wholesome Christian nature of the journey that the father Anse invokes as rationale.

Although farce itself is no crime, when Cash becomes critically injured trying to move the wagon and coffin across the river, the threat of death brings a pall of seriousness. Cash's worsening condition is a direct result of the bumbling attempts of his family to alleviate his pain. Vardaman describes Darl trying to help Cash by finding the correct level for his suspended leg:

We stop. When Darl loosens the rope Cash begins to sweat again. His teeth look out.

"Hurt?" Darl says.

"I reckon you better put it back," Cash says.

Darl puts the rope back, pulling hard. Cash's teeth look out.

“Hurt?” Darl says.

“It don’t bother none,” Cash says. (196)

The family’s solution to prevent Cash’s leg from hurting is to improvise a cast:

“‘It’ll be easier on you,’ pa says. ‘It’ll keep it from rubbing together.’”

“‘I can last it,’ Cash says. ‘We’ll lose time stopping.’”

“‘We done bought the cement, now,’ pa says” (207).

When Peabody sees Cash’s leg, after Darl has been taken away, he is outraged and assesses the extent of the injury:

“Don’t you lie there and try to tell me you rode six days on a wagon without springs, with a broken leg and it never bothered you.”

“It never bothered me much,” he said.

“You mean, it never bothered Anse much,” I said. “No more than it bothered him to throw that poor devil down in the public street and handcuff him like a damn murderer. Dont tell me. And dont tell me it aint going to bother you to lose sixty-odd square inches of skin to get that concrete off. And dont tell me it aint going to have to limp around on one short leg for the balance of your life – if you walk at all again.” (240)

The situation becomes a killing joke. Darl’s laughter might be inappropriate, but it is a reaction to the dark humor surrounding the hapless family. Darl laughs again when he is being handcuffed, reduced to a “poor devil” in “the public street.”

The consequences of continuing the journey under false and selfish motives are real. Darl is now faces an existential dilemma. Knowing enough to reveal the hypocrisies of the journey and family (Addie’s affair, Jewel’s paternity, Dewey Dell’s pregnancy) puts Darl in the unique

position to stop the farce. Doing so could at least prevent further injury to his brother Cash, if not prevent further calamity from occurring to the family. Seen in this light, the act of burning the coffin is ethical, even if setting fire to the barn where the coffin rests is not.

There is no prior evidence that Darl is a firebug. The barn burning is the only evidence of a destructive act. Darl lures Vardaman away from the barn before burning it. Darl instructs Jewel to save the animals in the barn. Darl obviously has no desire to harm any living creature. His goal is to cremate Addie's body. Jewel thwarts Darl's plans, though. The trip will continue, Cash's condition will worsen, Dewey Dell will be cheated, Addie Bundren will be summarily replaced, and Darl will be committed. Jewel has lost his horse. Vardaman has gained bananas. Anse has gained teeth, gramophone, and a wife. Anse's insistence is based on his duty to his wife, a duty that did not extend to observation of a mourning period. And given Anse's hatred of roads, such a journey would not have happened if it hadn't been for the opportunities to be had.

Had Darl succeeded in purging the family follies in fire, Anse would have been thwarted of his gains. If readers consider a bunch of bananas as negligible, Anse is the only family member who comes through the ordeal in a better personal situation. Immolating Addie's body at such a late point in the journey would not have helped Darl's siblings, but within the family dynamic it would have served justice. Anse would have been as bereft as the other characters.

Serving in a war, enduring natural disasters, and opposing his family are enough reasons to explain a mental breakdown. Readers, however, often look for unsupported diagnoses. Darl is labeled often with madness, and specifically with schizophrenia. If Darl truly had schizophrenia, the narrator would be unreliable, and yet Darl provides clear detail. As a character, Darl is capable of life-saving action that provokes lucid thought. He remains highly functional as an

observer, thinker, and occasionally as an actor. Even his struggle to solidify an identity is one to which most readers may relate. The complete dissociation comes late in the novel, after Anse no longer considers Darl an asset to the family and Darl is forcibly taken away.

## PERCEPTIONS OF DARL

Even though Darl often narrates in an informal, conversational manner, he doesn't often speak with the other characters. Tull says of Darl, "I have said and I say again, that's ever living thing the matter with Darl: he jus thinks by himself too much" (*As I Lay Dying* 71). Although Darl is next to the other characters, observing and reporting on them, he is not actually interacting a great deal with them. This isolation allows for other characters to project upon Darl.

Tull's wife Cora has a vastly different view of Darl than any other character: "I always said Darl was different from those others. I always said he was the only one of them that had his mother's nature, had any natural affection" (21). Cora is easy to dismiss, given her self-righteous, unreflective concern for herself and her own matters, but she doesn't go as far as to say there was a special relationship, only a similarity existing between Addie and Darl. She does give her bias, however, when she describes Darl looking wordlessly at his mother. Cora says, "It was the sweetest thing I ever saw" (21). While sweetness might not be involved, Darl does have unspoken communication with some of his other siblings, notably Cash and Dewey Dell. The same could be happening with Addie at the time of Cora's appraisal. Given that the knowledge shared between Darl and Dewey Dell and Darl and Cash always concerns some secret, the understanding that would pass between Darl and Addie is about Jewel's true paternity. So although the moment may not be sweet, it is heavily emotional and of great import. Cora's interpretation of Darl's wordless appraisal of his mother might be more accurate than she

realizes: “He just stood and looked at his dying mother, his heart too full for words” (25). Given the emotional limitations imposed by this family, perhaps his heart truly is too full for words.

When Darl sees Jewel riding after the family wagon on his horse, he begins to laugh, and Anse expresses shame at having to witness his laughter: “we hadn’t no more than passed Tull’s lane when Darl begun to laugh. Setting back there on the plank seat with Cash, with his dead ma laying in her coffin at his feet, laughing. How many times I told him it’s doing such things as that that makes folks talk about him I don’t know” (105). As the narration of the neighbors attests, however, more folks talk about Anse than Darl. As they progress, their neighbors and the folks in town talk about the entire family, especially the smell of Addie’s decaying body. Anse’s fear that Darl’s behavior will mark him as a pariah is absurd when compared to the way the Bundrens are, collectively, outsiders.

Anse is not completely wrong about how the neighbors view Darl. However, it becomes a distinction that shows how little the Bundrens are actually known in the larger community. When their neighbor Samson sees them, he can only identify one of them by name: “[T]hey just sat there, Bundren and the girl and the chap on the seat, and Cash and the second one, the one folks talks about, on a plank across the tail-gate, and the other one on that spotted horse” (114). The Bundren children are given the most general of distinctions, for they are unknown. They spend most of their time up on their hilltop farm, and gossip becomes a stronger identifier for Darl than any actual interaction with the community.

Vernon Tull goes deeper into how the neighbors view Darl: “He don’t say nothing; just looks at me with them queer eyes of hisn that makes folks talk. I always say it aint 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” (125). Tull has the most contact with the Bundrens, and so his assessment might be the most reliable. He is correct when he says Darl does not talk a lot and does observe others closely. According to this description, Tull expresses what the other people in the county must feel: fear of the strange. Tull also tells Cora what he witnessed as Darl and Cash tried to cross the river in the wagon:

When I told Cora how Darl jumped out of the wagon and left Cash sitting there trying to save it and the wagon turning over, and Jewel that was almost to the bank fighting that horse back where it had more sense than to go, she says “And you’re the one of the folks that says Darl is the queer one, the one that aint bright, and him the only one of them that had sense enough to get off that wagon.” (153)

According to Tull’s story and Cora’s interpretation, Darl shows rational decision-making and a will to live. Self-preservation is an instinctual act, which is in itself proof of a fully functioning mind. Cora gives the only suggestion that Darl may be intellectually challenged, possibly a result of the stigma that links strange behavior with idiocy. At the very least, he has the same mental capacity as Anse. Cora says of Anse’s absence from the wagon as it crossed the river: “I notice Anse was too smart to been on it a-tall” (153). When Tull crosses the bridge twice, he refers to himself as both subject and object, demonstrating the mental rift that occurs during a traumatic event, a rift that applies also to Darl’s familial trauma. Tull’s similarities to the Bundrens show the universality of the human experience. Tull cannot always understand or stand side-by-side with his neighbors, however. In these accounts, the particular universe of Bundrens is clearly outlined. Tull clearly feels like an object when he makes eye contact with Darl. This feeling is in agreement with Darl’s unique point-of-view of others.

## FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS

The Bundrens in *As I Lay Dying* have the same dynamic as Faulkner's other families. The family members and their interactions with one another define them. His past and his family shape Darl.

Donald M. Kartiganer remarks on Faulkner's use of family to inform individual character:

[M]ore perhaps than the chronicler of a mythic corner of Mississippi, Faulkner is the premier American novelist of family. His people, however uniquely and memorably portrayed, invariably trail behind them clouds of familial qualifiers: the grandparents, parents, and siblings whose cumulative identity is the indispensable context of individual character. The bulk of Faulkner's people are not so much single separate persons as collective enterprises, the products and processes of family dramas apart from which the individual actor is scarcely intelligible. Confronting the single member of the Sartoris, Compson, McCaslin, or Snopes lines, or even the less amply elaborated lines such as Bundren, Hightower, Sutpen, or Varner, we soon find ourselves addressing family complexes, synchronic and diachronic systems whose individual units take their meanings from their transactions with each other. ("Quentin Compson... 381)

The Bundrens' collective enterprise, though the family keeps its distance from the community, is their predictability, even to outsiders. After Peabody's team of horses arrives at the Tulls' farm without a driver, Cora knows what has happened already: "It's Addie Bundren. She's gone at last" (68). Tull is less intuitive when he claims, "I be durn if it didn't give me the creeps, even when I didn't know yet. But Cora did" (70). When Vernon Tull and the rest of the neighbors are at the Bundren house, someone mentions, "If it takes wet boards for folks to fall, it's fixing to be

lots of falling before this spell is done” (90). Vernon Tull’s daughter Kate astutely makes the prediction concerning another of Anse’s motives for going to Jefferson: “Or if it aint her, he’ll get another one before cotton-picking” (34). And Anse does indeed find another wife as soon as Addie is buried.

Anse’s replacement of Addie is abrupt because, though she passes early in the story, she has perhaps the largest impact on the family dynamic. Addie admits to being a cold person. Before meeting Anse, she was a teacher. After she sent her students away from school, she would go by the water and “hate them” (*As I Lay Dying* 169). She had this same cold attitude toward her children:

Addie [...] is surely a psychological force acting upon the rest of her family. To a degree, at least, the children do react to and complete themselves in terms of Addie’s attitudes toward them. Clearly, as Darl indicates, he is motherless and therefore homeless. Through his horse, Jewel acts out not only his intense, near incestuous love for Addie but also the rage and hostility which the son is apt to feel for the source of his painful conflict. For Jewel the horse is properly a “sweet son of a bitch.” If Dewey Dell and Vardaman are incomplete persons, “vegetable” and “idiot,” as has often been suggested, perhaps their deficiency may be ascribed to Addie’s lack of love for them. (Rossky 90).

Addie’s coldness began with the first child, Cash. Before giving birth, she explains her realization, “And when I knew that I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible” (171). After giving birth, she describes her use of the word, “love”, with her only child at the time: “I knew that that word was like the others: just a shape to fill a lack [...] Cash did not need to say it to

me nor I him” (172). When she becomes pregnant again, she goes through a process of denial and anger: “Then I found that I had Darl. At first I would not believe it. Then I believed that I would kill Anse” (172). She diminishes her own children as actual people: “And when I would think *Cash* and *Darl* that way until their names would die and solidify into a shape and then fade away, I would say, All right. It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter what they call them” (173). She considers her first two children as an extension of herself when she self-identifies: “I was three now” (173). This is not an inclusive, familial extension, but a selfish one. Addie can only think of other objects and persons in terms of herself.

Addie is only able to give her perspective posthumously in the story. Rather than a confessional beyond the grave, Addie’s chapter is created by what is known and remembered of her by her children, by Whitfield whom she had an affair with, and by her neighbor Cora. This collective memory becomes her voice. The only human moment given by Addie is during the birth of Jewel: “With Jewel – I lay by the lamp, holding up my own head, watching him cap and suture it before he breathed – the wild blood boiled away and the sound of it ceased. Then there was only the milk, warm and calm, and I laying calm in the slow silence” (176). Addie provides the most concrete detail here – a complete, serene memory. There is little surprise that it concerns Jewel, Addie’s favored child, a bastard:

In any event the significance of the Addie-Jewel-Darl relationships extends beyond the psychological. Absurdity is revealed in another pattern. In her attempt to live her own life vitally, to seek fulfillment through her violence, love and sin, Addie creates for others, ironically, complexity and pain. The particular irony is frequent in Faulkner: Man raises his hands toward a dream; but we are all

manacled wrist to wrist so that, as one of us raises his hands, perhaps very nobly, he jerks his neighbor's wrists painfully. (Rossky 90)

Darl comments on the relationship between Addie and Jewel as being more physical in nature: “[M]a always whipped him and petted him more” (18). Whether it is abuse or affection, there are outward signs of passionate emotion shared between the two. That this affection is displayed in front of the other children reaffirms Addie's other mothering tendency: negligence. Darl and Vardaman, the youngest child, have a conversation in which Darl confirms that Addie did not give each child adequate attention. After Vardaman tells Darl that Darl exists by stating, ““But you are, Darl,”” Darl replies, ““I know it,” Darl said. “That's why I am not *is*. *Are* is too many for one woman to foal”” (101). Jewel, in Darl's mind at least, has the status of “is” because of the singular attention he receives.

Darl makes a connection between Jewel's and Addie's existences, but not between his own and Addie's. In light of Addie's rejection of Darl, which Darl has always sensed but which only receives corroboration on Addie's monologue, the emotional connection between Darl and his mother has in fact been severed by Addie, while the bond between Jewel and Addie is the strongest in the novel” (Hayes 57).

Cora Tull confirms the passionate relationship between Addie and Jewel: “Not that Jewel, the one she labored so to bear and coddled and petted so and him flinging into tantrums or sulking spells, inventing devilment to devil her” (*As I Lay Dying* 21). Cora later considers this Addie's main fault: “When the only sin she ever committed was being partial to Jewel that never loved her and was its own punishment, in preference to Darl that was touched by God Himself and

considered queer by us mortals and that did love her” (168). Cora continually defends Darl, but there is little evidence that he and Addie expressed, let alone shared, love. Darl does display some sympathy for what Addie experienced in life when describing her hands as “a curled, gnarled inertness; a spent yet alert quality from which weariness, exhaustion, travail has not yet departed, as though they doubted even yet the actuality of rest, guarding with horned and penurious alertness the cessation which they know cannot last” (51). If Addie did return any love or sympathy for her other children besides Jewel, even by default of simply being family, she does not express it.

Also, according to Cora, Addie’s love of Jewel borders on blasphemy: ““He is my cross and he will be my salvation. He will save me from the water and from the fire. Even though I have laid down my life he will save me” (168). Addie’s devotion to Jewel is oddly prescient, just as her consideration of Jewel as savior is odd. The family dynamic must have been strained as one child is given attention and sacred status, while the mother barely considers the others worthy of consideration.

Addie’s relationship with her husband, Anse, is the same as with her children. He is something outside. Addie refers to the physical nature of their relationship as a “violation.” Ironically, even though Addie is dismissive of any true connection between herself and Anse, she speaks to Cora using Anse’s motto: ““I know my own sin. I know that I deserve my punishment. I do not begrudge it”” (167). She echoes her husband’s Christian pride that masks as suffering.

Cora also gives her own opinion of Addie: “She lived, a lonely woman, lonely with her pride, trying to make folks believe different, hiding the fact that they just suffered her because she was not cold in the coffin before they were carting her forty miles away to bury her, flouting

the will of God to do it. Refusing to let her lie in the same earth with those Bundrens” (23). Cora becomes the voice of reason when postulating the other options the Bundrens had while Addie was dying. After the description of Addie, Cora recalls a conversation with her husband:

“‘But she wanted to go,’ Mr Tull said. ‘It was her own wish to lie among her own people.’”

“‘Then why didn’t she go alive?’ I said. ‘Not one of them would have stopped her’” (23).

For all of Cora’s faults and misjudgments, she does have common sense. She is foolish, but not a fool. Cora is also practical when imagining another solution for Addie’s funeral: “Like as not, if they hadn’t decided to make that last load they would have loaded her into the wagon on a quilt and crossed the river first and then stopped and give her time to die what Christian death they would let her” (24). The only explanation as to why the Bundrens did not enact a more sensible solution is their pride and privacy.

Maintaining privacy, though, is folly in the Bundren household. Darl describes the echo-chamber effect created by the construction of the house. The house itself creates an effect not unlike voices in the head. “I enter the hall, hearing the voices before I reach the door. Tilting a little down the hill, as our house does, a breeze draws through the hall all the time, upslanting. A feather dropped near the front door will rise and brush along the ceiling, slanting backward, until it reaches the down-turning current at the back door: so with the voices. As you enter the hall, they sound as though they were speaking out of the air about your head” (19-20). The environment explains why unspoken communication is so common within the family. The environment coupled with the lack of social or familial support, also explains Darl’s inability to recover or regulate his condition. His strangeness is the one family shame that is open to

comment by family and friends. The Bundrens' numerous secrets, in general, are difficult to hide from one another, yet there is a need to continue with secrecy.

The illusory privacy and respect afforded to Addie while she is dying is greater than she enjoys after she actually dies. Cora says so in her accurate description of the entire family:

It was Darl, the one that folks say is queer, lazy, pottering about the place no better than Anse, with Cash a good carpenter and always more building than he can get around to, and Jewel always doing something that made him some money or got him talked about, and that near-naked girl always standing over Addie with a fan so that every time a body tried to talk to her and cheer her up, would answer for her right quick, like she was trying to keep anybody from coming near her at all. (24)

The doctor, Peabody, confirms Addie's need for privacy:

I have seen it before in women. Seen them 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. That's what they mean by the love that passeth understanding: that pride, that furious desire to hide that abject nakedness which we bring here with us, carry with us into operating rooms, carry stubbornly and furiously with us into the earth again. (45-46)

This pride and privacy does not extend to having the coffin made secretly or out of sight. Addie wants the coffin for purposes of concealment during the trip. The coffin is not only something that the family can wait for, but evidence that, for all attempts at privacy, Addie's demise is looming. Addie last words are a command to Cash, "'Cash,' she says; 'you, Cash!'" (46) in order

to inspect the boards that he is shaping for the coffin. The object of concealment can be planned open and in advance, but the trip itself must be delayed until the exact moment of death. Addie's pride takes precedence over her own wish to be buried in another location. Her will exudes its influence even after she dies.

Darl tells a story in the past where Addie uncharacteristically gives up her pride. He observes as Addie is forced to show overt signs of love for Jewel when Jewel has been secretly working to save enough money to buy a horse:

It was ma that got Dewey Dell to do his milking, paid her somehow, and the other jobs around the house that Jewel had been doing before supper she found some way for Dewey Dell and Vardaman to do them. And doing them herself when pa wasn't there. She would fix him special things to eat and hide them for him. And that may have been when I first found it out, that Addie Bundren should be hiding anything she did, who had tried to teach us that deceit was such that, in a world where it was, nothing else could be very bad or very important, not even poverty. And at times when I went in to go to bed she would be sitting in the dark by Jewel where he was asleep. And I knew that she was hating herself for that deceit and hating Jewel because she had to love him so that she had to act the deceit. (130-131).

Addie breaks down in front of the family trying to express the despair she is suffering because of Jewel: "'Jewel,' ma said, looking at him. 'I'll give – I'll give – give -' Then she began to cry. She cried hard, not hiding her face, standing there in her faded wrapper, looking at him and him on the horse, looking down at her, his face growing cold and a little sick looking, until he looked

away quick” (135). Darl makes the fateful discovery later the same day: “That night I found ma sitting beside the bed where he was sleeping, in the dark. She cried hard, maybe because she had to cry so quiet; maybe because she felt the same way about tears she did about deceit, hating herself for doing it, hating him because she had to. And then I knew that I knew. I knew that as plain on that day as I knew about Dewey Dell on that day” (136). Darl is referring to knowing family secrets, whether it be Dewey Dell’s pregnancy or Addie’s affair with another man.

Darl also recalls Anse’s reaction when Jewel buys the horse. Anse claims it was disrespectful: “‘So you bought a horse,’ he said. ‘You went behind my back and bought a horse. You never consulted me; you know how tight it is for us to make by, yet you bought a horse for me to feed. Taken the work from your flesh and blood and bought a horse with it’” (136). Jewel is defiant: “‘He wont never eat a mouthful of yours,’ he said. ‘Not a mouthful. I’ll kill him first. Dont you never think it. Dont you never’” (136). Anse displays the same egocentric attitude as Addie. The father can only think of his son’s actions in terms of his own benefits or losses. He cannot recognize Jewel’s independence. Anse’s reactions are also hypocritical as Anse has a contentious relationship with work.

His family and friends describe Anse’s relationship to work: “I have never seen a sweat stain on his shirt,” Darl says. “He was sick once from working in the sun when he was twenty-two years old, and he tells people that if he ever sweats, he will die. I suppose he believes it” (17). Significantly Darl’s assessment includes the wry opinion, “I suppose he believes it” which suggests that Darl himself does not. Like Jewel, Darl is a threat to Anse. Whereas Jewel is a threat to Anse because of his identity as an independent laborer, Darl is a threat because he can see through Anse’s excuses. Dewey Dell confirms the same account of Anse, with the same amount of skepticism: “Pa dassent sweat because he will catch his death from the sickness [. . .]

And pa thinks because neighbors will always treat one another that way because he has always been too busy letting neighbors do for him to find out” (26). This opinion is not only shared by the family. Vernon Tull also characterizes Anse’s reluctance to work by describing his clothes: “Except for the lack of sweat. You can tell they ain’t been nobody else’s but Anse’s that way without no mistake” (32). Tull reveals how the neighbors have become accustomed to fill that lack: “Like most folks around here, I done holp him so much already I can’t quit now” (33). Tull doesn’t do it for nothing, however; he is willing to trade for the labor of Anse’s children. As he watches Cash make the coffin, he thinks, “If Cash just works that careful on my barn” (33). Anse employs and hires out the labor of his children, while he himself is unwilling to work under the belief it will kill him. Anse is adept at enabling his own slothfulness by refusing participation. He is a passive-aggressive personality.

When Anse does decide to act, his ability to tarnish any situation is almost comical. First he fumbles with a makeshift rain guard that Cash has made for the light: “He goes to the lantern and pulls at the propped raincoat until he knocks it down and Cash comes and fixes it back” (78). Tull notices Anse cannot even tend to himself without botching the job: “He has shaved, but not good. There is a long cut on his jaw” (86). This clumsiness takes on a bit of the tragic when he has similar luck with Addie’s remains: “He touches the quilt as he saw Dewey Dell do, trying to smoothe it up to the chin, but disarranging it instead. He tries to smoothe it again, clumsily, his hand awkward as a claw, smoothing at the wrinkles which he made and which continue to emerge beneath his hand with perverse ubiquity [. . .]” (52). Anse’s first thought after Addie passes is a selfish one: “‘God’s will be done’ he says. ‘Now I can get them teeth’” (52). Anse, although sometimes comical, is also selfish. He invokes Addie’s wish to be buried in Jefferson as the motive for the trip, but he does not conceal the fact that teeth are also a motivation. Anse’s

single-minded determination is more responsible for what befalls his family than any other factor. Darl's condition grows worse from what he observes and experiences and Anse is the incompetent instigator of the entire proceedings.

Anse shows awareness that shame is inherent in the trip they are undertaking, but he takes credit for it as part of his labors toward salvation: "It's bad that a fellow must earn the reward of his right-doing by flouting hisself and his dead" (111). He ends this speech, characteristically, by repeating, "But now I can get them teeth. That will be a comfort. It will" (111). Anse is aware of how he is being perceived, but can only think of what he is to gain. Any other human cost, including that exacted from his children, is another means toward the end.

According to another neighbor, Samson, Anse is somewhat happy to hear about the flood. "[H]e would be kind of proud of whatever come up to make the moving or the setting still look hard" (114). Even though Anse is somewhat satisfied with the difficulty of crossing the river, he isn't actually there with Addie's body to carry through the promise he made her. As Cora says critically: "If he had been a man, he would a been there instead of making his sons do what he dursn't" (153). As the wagon is overturned in the river and Cash disappears, Vernon blames Anse outright: "See what you done now? See what you done now?" (154). Neighbors see the hypocrisy and even guilt Anse is responsible for, even if Anse refuses to acknowledge it.

Anse also refuses to do what is best for his children. Anse refuses Samson's offer to let either himself or any of his children sleep in the house, speaking on everyone's behalf: "We wouldn't be beholden" (117). He initially turns down a similar offer by another neighbor, Armstid: "I thank you, ' pa said, 'We'll use in the shed yonder. I know it's a imposition on you'" (181). Anse finally accepts the offer of dinner by saying he's doing it for Addie: "It's for her

sake I am taking the food. I got no team, no nothing. But she will be grateful to ere a one of you” (182). Anse won’t directly accept food offered to his children. He also claims it’s for Addie’s sake that he won’t borrow a team of mules. Instead he has to buy his own team by taking money from Cash and selling Jewel’s horse. After taking from his children without asking their permission, Anse again claims he earned the money and the right himself: “Fore God, if there were ere a man in the living world suffered the trials and floutings I have suffered” (189). Anse continues to extort money and health from the rest of the family so the journey will continue. Addie’s sake takes precedence over the children.

Anse shows an inability to feel actual emotion for the welfare of Cash after he is injured in the river. He puts the most absurd positive spin possible for such a situation: ““A fellow might call it lucky it was the same leg he broke when he fell offen that church”” (163). Armstid offers to take Cash in while the rest of the family continues to Jefferson, but Anse refuses.

Jewel replies to Samson’s offer of food for his horse with the same response that Anse often gives: “I don’t want him beholden to no man” (116). Jewel is the only child that overtly stands up to both parents, and a part of his stubborn defiance mirrors the same characteristics possessed by his parents.

There is so much to admire about Jewel, and Darl and Jewel are so much at odds in the book, that readers have sided with Jewel over Darl. Early on, Jewel is the moral voice of the book. He curses at the notion of the trip before it begins. He is the only person to challenge Anse openly. Once relenting to the journey, Jewel becomes Addie’s protector. He is the only member of the family to retain some sense of personal integrity. In saving the coffin from flood and fire, his actions are heroic, yet his commitment to Addie preempts any possibility of rational decision.

Like Anse, Jewel is more concerned with obligation than love. Perhaps so much can be said for Jewel's character because of Darl's fascination with Jewel. Darl reports Jewel's and Anse's exchange about Addie. Anse, speaking to Jewel and Darl, is having a hard time making up his mind about using the family wagon for a delivery of wood. In his typical fashion, Anse turns down Darl's suggestion that Vernon Tull's wagon could be used in case Addie dies. Addie only asks one thing of Anse, but Anse refers to the request as a litany of promises and conditions. Anse invokes Addie's wishes thusly:

“‘She wanted that [coffin] like she wants to go in our own wagon,’ pa says. ‘She’ll rest easier for knowing it’s a good one, and private. She was ever a private woman. You know it well.’”

“‘Then let it be private,’ Jewel says. ‘But how the hell can you expect it to be –’”

Jewel doesn't finish his sentence, but he is obviously trying to voice concern as to the respect being shown Addie. In Jewel's opinion, the family is eager to get rid of her, and they aren't helping her with their overt signs that she is going to die: “‘If everybody wasn't burning hell to get her there.’” Anse's response shows that he either has no idea how Jewel feels about Addie or he is just trying to be purposely hurtful: “‘You got no affection nor gentleness for her. You never had’” (19). The whole exchange has a bit of theater to it; Darl and Jewel are already prepared to go before asking Anse.

Jewel has also maintained a way to make money separate of the family, thus furthering his separate identity from the family. Darl notices that Jewel has recently gotten a haircut: “He has been to town this week: the back of his neck is trimmed close, with a white line between hair and sunburn like a joint of white bone” (39). Jewel has a way of raising money for himself. Jewel

offers Tull to pay for his mule: “I’ll pay for your damn mule. I’ll buy it from you right now” (126). Jewel always had some way of raising his own money.

Darl does not use the inclusive “our” when informing Jewel about Addie’s death: “It’s not your horse that’s dead, Jewel” (94). The word “mother” loses its denotation when used as a thought. Vardaman also strips the word of its denotation and looks for a suitable replacement. “Mother” in Darl’s thoughts becomes a synonym for “comfort,” “purpose,” and “connection.” Darl expresses this idea by saying: “I cannot love my mother because I have no mother. Jewel’s mother is a horse” (95). Just before setting the fire, Darl asks Jewel directly, “Your mother was a horse, but who was your father, Jewel?” Darl is offering the information more than asking and Jewel acknowledges this by calling Darl a liar. Darl tells Jewel to save the horses in the burning barn to succor him, but Jewel ends up saving both the animals and the corpse from flames. The action is heroic. Again, at odds with Darl’s attempt, Jewel is cast in a flattering light, yet his actions prolong the family’s trials.

Darl has a closer relationship with his other siblings. They share the ability to understand each other without speaking. As their situations become more dire, they lapse into thought. Dewey Dell and Darl are able to have a conversation completely without speaking:

“What you want, Darl?” I say.

“She is going to die,” he says. And old turkey-buzzard Tull coming to watch her die but I can fool them.

“When is she going to die?” I say.

“Before we get back,” he says.

“Then why are you taking Jewel?” I say.

“I want him to help me load,” he says. (27-28)

In this conversation, the word “say” indicates an immediate understanding between siblings. It occurs instantaneously – faster than actual speech. It must be presented as dialog, however, as it is a type of communication.

This kind of communication would seem to indicate an intimacy, but Darl and Dewey Dell have an antagonistic relationship. The antagonism stems from Darl’s knowing that Dewey Dell has an unwanted pregnancy:

I saw Darl and he knew. He said he knew without the words like he told me that ma is going to die without words, and I knew he knew because if he had said he knew with the words I would not have believed that he had been there and saw us. But he said he did know and I said ‘Are you going to tell pa are you going to kill him?’ without the words I said it and he said ‘Why?’ without the words. And that’s why I can talk to him with knowing with hating because he knows. (27)

But at the same time, Darl presents a threat to Dewey Dell because he knows Dewey Dell is seeking an abortion: “You want her to die so you can get to town: is that it?” (39-40). Darl confronts Dewey Dell with her selfish motivations, though these are unfounded because Dewey Dell does show actual, universal signs of affection and grief for a dying Addie. As perceived by Darl:

“Ma,” Dewey Dell says; “ma!” Leaning above the bed, her hands lifted a little, the fan still moving like it has for ten days, she begins to keen. Her voice is

strong, young, tremulous and clear, rapt with its own timbre and volume, the fan still moving steadily up and down, whispering the useless air. Then she flings herself across Addie Bundren's knees, clutching her, shaking her with the furious strength of the young before sprawling suddenly across the handful of rotten bones that Addie Bundren left, jarring the whole bed into a chattering sibilance of mattress shucks, her arms out-flung and the fan in one hand still beating with expiring breath into the quilt. (48-49)

Dewey Dell also shows respect to the body: "Dewey Dell stoops and slides the quilt from beneath them and draws it up over them to the chin, smoothing it down, drawing it smooth" (51). Even though Dewey Dell shows tenderness toward Addie, Darl's observation that she is eager to go to Jefferson has a sound basis. Anse, when he is briefly considering Samson's advice to bury Addie in New Hope, says, "My heart is open to ere a man." Dewey Dell replies, "I don't care what your heart is" (115). Addie helps hold Anse to the promise and thus prolongs the journey.

The antagonism between Darl and Dewey Dell, however, rests on Darl. Darl continually objectifies Dewey Dell. First, as he watches her climb in the wagon: "her leg coming long from beneath her tightening dress: that lever which moves the world; one of that caliper which measures the length and breadth of life" (104). Then, when Dewey Dell feels Darl's gaze upon her: "The land runs out of Darl's eyes; they swim to pin points. They begin at my feet and rise along my body to my face, and then my dress is gone: I sit naked on the seat above the unhurrying mules" (121). Beyond the obvious sexual imagery, Dewey Dell describes the sensation when Darl is able to see the true nature of a person. Dewey Dell realizes that Darl is seeing her pregnant condition. Finally, after surviving the river, Darl describes Dewey Dell's in a grotesque manner: "Squatting, Dewey Dell's wet dress shapes for the dead eyes of three blind

men those mammalian ludicrosities which are the horizons and the valleys of the earth” (164). Darl observes and reports on others, but with Dewey Dell, he is also likening her to objects and reducing her body to its constituent parts. If anyone can talk about Darl for the queer way in which he looks at people, it is Dewey Dell.

The objectification diminishes Dewey Dell’s character. She, like Darl, has a period of existential reflection. When talking to a cow, she gives a series of contrasting statements: “You dont know what worry is. I dont know what it is. I dont know whether I am worrying or not. Whether I can or not. I dont know whether I can cry or not. I dont know whether I have tried to or not” (64). Unlike Darl, Dewey Dell’s worry concerns action and thought, however, and not the actual condition of being. Her speech mimics Darl’s own abstract positive and negative paradigms – the being and not being.

Vardaman also has a metaphysical meditation on being and not being. Vardaman begins his rationalization of death after Addie dies. He recognizes the same condition of death in the fish he caught and cut into pieces: “It is cut up into pieces of not-fish now, not-blood on my hands and overalls. Then it wasn’t so” (53). In Vardaman’s state of grief and disbelief, the language used to describe his thoughts changes radically as he describes Jewel’s horse:

It is as though the dark were resolving him out of his integrity, into an unrelated scattering of components – snuffings and stampings; smells of cooling flesh and ammoniac hair; an illusion of a co-ordinated whole of splotched hide and strong bones within which, detached and secret and familiar, an *is* different from my *is*. I see him dissolve – legs, a rolling eye, a gaudy splotching like cold flames – and float upon the dark in fading solution; all one yet neither; all either yet none. I can

see hearing coil toward him, caressing, shaping his hard shape – fetlock, hip, shoulder and head; smell and sound. I am not afraid. (57)

The diction used is impossible for a rural child like Vardaman, but Faulkner is using language to describe the overall feeling and sensation – the description of thought patterns rather than thought words. Faulkner uses such language also for Darl during the flood, another occasion for disbelief. Darl explains the guide rope they are using to help keep them stable in the river. The rope is “bellied faintly in a prolonged and resonant arc” (158). Although the Darl chapters employ heightened diction, this is one example where it becomes uncharacteristic, but it is nonetheless consistent with the heightened occasions when Faulkner uses it.

Vardaman’s free association of the sum of his experiences and memories prefigures Darl’s last chapter where he loses coherency:

The train is behind the glass, red on the track. When it runs the track shines on and off. Pa said flour and sugar and coffee costs so much. Because I am a county boy because boys in town. Bicycles. Why do flour and sugar and coffee cost so much when he is a country boy. “Wouldn’t you ruther have some bananas instead?” Bananas are gone, eaten. Gone. When it runs on the track shines again. “Why aint I a town boy, pa?” I said. God made me. I did not said to God to made me in the country. If He can make the train, why cant He make them all in the town because flour and sugar and coffee. “Wouldn’t you ruther have bananas?” (66)

These are Vardaman's thoughts not his speech, nor are they an inner monolog. Faulkner uses language as a tool to mimic sense experiences, the mind's memories ordering themselves into logical sequence, a process of reasoning that occurs faster than the words can be read.

Narrative voices as echoes of consciousness [treat] the sections as interior monologues. The 'reality' being imitated in any section is the narrator's psyche; his narrative voice is merely a tool that the artist manipulates in order to represent consciousness. The narrator's voice can be augmented by the author's intruding voice in order to "convey eloquently the character's secret obsessions, to bring into the light of language all the unspoken obscurity seething within his tortured mind." (Ross 303)

Darl, at the end, understandably has difficulties ordering his experiences into a logical sequence. After being handcuffed and placed on the train, Darl refers to himself from the third-person point of view. He has fully become the observer, separate from the actor. His thoughts are arranged in a free association, where the details of the scene are reminiscent of Darl's personal observations and opinions, but the logical sequence is lost:

They pull two seats together so Darl could sit by the window to laugh. One of them sat beside him, the other sat on the seat facing him, riding backward. One of them had to ride backward because the state's money has a face to each backside and a backside to each face, and they are riding on the state's money which is incest. (254)

In the end, logic and order have been challenged and defied. Darl laughs and repeatedly utters the word “yes” to himself in answer to his own questions. This is the ultimate end to a series of stressors that begin back in the flood.

Darl and Cash are the only two siblings who show support and understanding of each other. Darl and Cash also share the innate ability to understand not only thought, but being. It is at the scene of the flood that they share such understanding, and again, in the face of awful realization, the diction becomes heightened: “[H]e and I look at one another with long probing looks, looks that plunge unimpeded through one another’s eyes and into the ultimate secret place where for an instant Cash and Darl crouch flagrant and unabashed in all the old terror and the old foreboding, alert and secret and without shame” (142). Here, the brothers emulate the propriety and pride of their parents, but in an attempt to mask their fear of dying in the flood waters.

At the beginning of the novel, Darl describes his and Jewel’s heights from an objective viewpoint. “Jewel and I come up from the field, following the path in single file. Although I am fifteen feet ahead of him, anyone watching us from the cottonhouse can see Jewel’s frayed and broken straw hat a full head above my own” (3). The viewpoint belongs to no one; Darl merely imagines it. He repeats the use of a remote viewpoint as Cash awakens after almost drowning in the river: “He opens his eyes, staring profoundly up at our inverted face” (163). This perspective is, of course, impossible for Darl because the only person inverted from his viewpoint would be Cash. Darl sympathizes with and can imagine what Cash is experiencing at this time; the impossible angle, belonging to Cash, is tied to great suffering.

Cash, in turn, is the only one sympathetic to Darl. Cash describes the scene when Darl is taken into custody:

But the curiouesest thing was Dewey Dell. It surprised me. I see all the while how folks could say he was queer, but that was the very reason couldn't nobody hold it personal. It was like he was outside of it too, same as you, and getting mad at it would be kind of like getting mad at a mud-puddle that splashed you when you stepped in it. And then I always kind of had a idea that him and Dewey Dell kind of knowed things betwixt them. If I'd said it was ere a one of us she liked better than ere a other, I'd a said it was Darl [...] [I]t was Dewey Dell that was on him before even Jewel could get at him. And then I believed I knowed how Gillespie knowed about how his barn taken fire. (237)

Cash suggests that Dewey Dell's attack on Darl is a betrayal of the unspoken nature of their relationship. Cash sees Darl's strange behavior as something that cannot be taken personally; it is simply his personality. His condition is not meant to be an offense to others. Cash says this is a kind of universally understood condition: "But I aint so sho that ere a man has the right to say what is crazy and what aint. It's like there was a fellow in every man that's done a-past the sanity or the insanity, that watches the sane and insane doings of that man with the same horror and astonishment" (238). Cash's description uses a generalized every man, but his assessment is an apt description of Darl. Cash's opinion of Darl is the only one that likens Darl to everyone else. Certainly, Darl is an observer beyond simple definitions of sanity or insanity.

Between the prideful plays at propriety fronted by both parents, the children are doomed to be taken in tow on an unplanned trip to fulfill a promise made years ago. Outside of Addie's affection for Jewel, little concern is given to the development of children as individual entities. This is the condition in which Darl was raised, and the inability of either parent to waver at any point increases the hardship endured by the children. The trip also intensifies the sibling rivalry

between the Bundrens. The children are not expressive emotionally, as shown by the disparity between the eloquence of their thoughts and the language use elicited by their dialog. They each exist, at times, in their own separate head-space. Yet these unspoken similarities engender a greater ability for them to understand one another. The exception is, of course, Jewel.

Jewel's very existence negates a need for the propriety of the trip promised to Addie. She did not keep her commitment to the family, which doesn't mean she is no longer a part of it, but she should not be in a place to demand unwavering loyalty from her family. To compound the absurdity of the already corrupt illusion of an intact familial bond, at least two members of the family have ulterior motives for the trip. For Anse and Dewey Dell, the funeral is a front to reach Jefferson. Combined with the Bundren trait of pride, everyone urges the increasingly improbable trip forward into greater calamity, which is at the peril of Cash's life. To have stripped away the front of the funeral would have ceased the suffering. Seeing that Darl didn't want anybody harmed in the barn fire, even the animals, the singular purpose must be to destroy Addie's body. Even Darl tries to mask the event as an accident and does not attempt to directly burn the coffin. At his most desperate and destructive, Darl still realizes how his actions would be perceived.

Darl, for all his detachment, is capable of acting selfishly. He removes Jewel from Addie's deathbed. Dewey Dell asks why Darl is taking Jewel along, and she intimates that there is no actual reason for him to be doing so. Darl answers in the obvious, "I want him to help me load" (28), circumventing the extra reason Dewey Dell was actually asking for. Darl, as did everyone else, knew Addie was going to die soon, so taking the wagon was purposeful.

There is no clear evidence either way indicating if Darl has or has not actually ambushed the trip with his stalling tactic. Assuming he has, however, the fact that the wood spills out on

their delivery could also have been Darl's doing. Speculation aside, Darl is capable of selfishness, perhaps even jealousy, which are emotional responses of a functional mind.

Even when Darl wrestles with the juxtaposition of being and not being, he is conscious of his identity – a musing on existence that is usually taken for granted:

In a strange room you must empty yourself for sleep. And before you are emptied for sleep, what are you. And when you are emptied for sleep, you are not. And when you are filled with sleep, you never were. 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 if I am or not. Jewel knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know whether he is or not. He cannot empty himself for sleep because he is not what he is and he is what he is not. (80)

If other characters are not so conscious, it can be read as hypocrisy - a single person living with two versions of himself without confusion. Whitfield is such a character. If Whitfield himself is not conscious of it, others such as Vernon Tull are. "It's like they are not the same. It's like he is one, and his voice is one, swimming on two horses side by side across the ford and coming into the house, the mud-splashed one and the one that never even got wet, triumphant and sad" (91). Darl is aware of the duality in himself; the struggle comes from establishing relationships with other people based on the duality. In relation to Addie, if Jewel "is," then Darl feels he "is not." He uses the dualistic paradigm as gross category to measure existence. In doing so, he fails to conflate or compromise with himself, but is more relatable because he struggles with identity.

Darl has a communication with Cash and Jewel at the flooded river, where Darl is aware of both Cash's and his detachment. Darl starts, and his voice changes to a more familiar tone, suffused with the folksy quality exhibited by the neighbors.

When we speak our voices are quiet, detached.

"I reckon we're still in the road, all right."

"Tull taken and cut them two big whiteoaks. I heard tell how at high water in the old days they used to line up the ford by them trees."

"I reckon he did that two years ago when he was logging down here. I reckon he never thought that anybody would ever use this ford again."

"I reckon not. Yes, it must have been then. He cut a sight of timber outen here then. Payed off that mortgage with it, I hear tell."

"Yes. Yes, I reckon so. I reckon Vernon could have done that."

"That's a fact. Most folks that logs in this here country, they need a durn good farm to support the sawmill. Or maybe a store. But I reckon Vernon could."

"I reckon so. He's a sight."

"Ay. Vernon is. Yes, it must still be here. He never would have got that timber out of here if he hadn't cleaned out that old road. I reckon we are still on it." (142-143)

The language reflects a shared anecdote - a story told, heard, and re-told frequently enough that it doesn't need conscious thought to be spoken aloud between the two brothers. Darl and Cash use

this memory to reassure themselves in the face of certain disaster: “we now sit, talking quietly of old security and old trivial things” (143). Darl is no longer queer at this moment. Darl refers to himself properly in the self-identifying “I” and “me.” So Darl is capable of communicating normally – in a way that is recognized as typical. That he is able to do so shows that he has some semblance of others within his behavior. He is not flatly and unwaveringly strange.

In this scene, thought and speech are distinct. As Darl observes Jewel, he describes him: “Jewel looks at him, then at me, then his face turns in in that quiet, constant, questing about the scene” (143). Here, “quiet, constant, questing” is not coded in a deep, unspoken dialog, but adroitly observed by Darl. Darl joins in the conversation, awaiting a command to action: “Jewel looks at us again, his expression sober and alert and subdued. His voice is quiet. ‘What you want me to do?’” (144). There is no conflation of thought, speech, or emotion. Darl has become a reliable narrator, his feelings and character relatable.

## ETHICAL ACTION

Old-school readers might locate the so-called moral center of this novel within Jewel. They would be hard-pressed to consider Darl the moral center for his apparent disrespect of his mother's body, and so necessarily they sided with Jewel, his antagonist. Identifying a key character as the moral center of a book is not a vain reaction. The indiscretions in *As I Lay Dying* compel a search for a moral center. For any mode of civilization, the act of interring, entombing, submerging, cremating, concealing, or preserving the dead is a spiritual, psychological, and hygienic practice. Disposing of the dead is a necessity. When disposal or preservation is not possible, perfumes and incense can be utilized. By any standard, the Bundrens' taboo is an abominable one. Their ceremony becomes an absurd imitation of a solemn social tradition. The

six Bundrens are not able to communicate effectively or work together. They burden neighbors while turning down any direct offers of help. An individual's reaction to worsening conditions is the only possible ethical action. Because of the sacred ties to funeral rites, stopping the debasement of a proper death ceremony by any means is also a moral action. Allowing Addie a modicum of dignity in death is some indication of family obligation, if not love.

The indignities begin as soon as they place Addie in the coffin. As Vernon Tull views the body, he sees, "They had laid her in it reversed [. . .]. head to foot so it wouldn't crush her dress" (88). The condition of the dress is more important than properly laying the body. No matter how the Bundrens try to make things right, they continue to make terrible decisions. When Vardaman was naively trying to put air holes in the coffin to allow his mother to breathe, he accidentally bored into Addie's face. "[T]hey had made her a veil out of mosquito bar so the auger holes in her face wouldn't show" (88). As ridiculous as the whole journey begins, all the family members are determined to see it through as a proper funeral procession.

Darl imagines that even Addie, in death, endeavors to stop the trip as the men try to carry the coffin: "For an instant it resists, as though volitional, as though within it her pole-thin body clings furiously, even though dead, to a sort of modesty, as she would have tried to conceal a soiled garment that she could not prevent her body soiling" (98). In Darl's mind every force possible, even the deceased, wants to forestall their departure. Darl projects his wishes to stop the journey again when he sees the sign to New Hope: "New Hope Church. 3 mi. It wheels up like a motionless hand lifted above the profound desolation of the ocean [. . .] the white signboard turns away its fading and tranquil assertion" (108). Darl continually sees everything as a sign to stop, but the unspoken communication is that they will continue despite the constant opportunities to solve the problem in a rational way.

The Bundrens evolve spiritually and physically in a vacuum, a 'present' limited in time (ten days) in scope (the journey to Jefferson), a temporal continuum but also an enclosed space in which they are trapped and to which their actions, thoughts, perceptions and emotional reactions will be confined. Theirs is a tragedy of alienation and of loneliness. Though Darl may be the most tragic figure of all, the other Bundrens are also imprisoned [sic] in their own isolated selves and are virtually incapable of communicating – let alone sympathizing – with each other. Genuine dialogues are rare and they almost never lead to any mutual understanding or compassion. As a result of their isolation, The Bundrens are forced to retreat into positions of immobile and helpless observers. (Delville 67)

This isolated existence determines their reception along the way to Jefferson. Any move they make to imitate normalcy is ultimately discovered to be foolish, vain, and inefficacious.

The greater taboo for the Bundrens than desecrating the dead is to lose face. Anse has not traveled off his farm in twelve years, and yet keeping up appearances becomes a monomaniacal goal. Before they leave, Anse mimics propriety when he sees Cash trying to carry his tools with him to stop at Tull's on the return trip: "‘It aint respectful,’ pa says. ‘It’s a deliberate flouting of her and me’" (101). Anse allows himself the luxury of having a secondary reason, but he does not want to allow Cash the same, even though Cash is not bringing the tools for a selfish reason. Anse is playing his part completely in the farce, chastising others for his own indiscretion.

All the Bundrens participate in a mock display of pride, denying how much they are breaking one taboo to save another. Their attempt to have a proper burial is discouraged by their neighbors. Samson responds to the Bundrens' plan for burying Addie: "I got just as much respect

for the dead as ere a man, but you've got to respect the dead themselves, and a woman that's been dead in a box four days, the best way to respect her is to get her into the ground as quick as you can" (116). Samson's wife calls what Anse is doing an "outrage" (117). In spite of these admonishments, they do exactly what Anse claims to be trying to avoid: "flouting" of the dead.

By the time they get to Mottson, before they reach Jefferson, the whole endeavor is a failure. A resident of Mottson, Moseley, tells the secondhand account:

It was Albert told me about the rest of it. He said the wagon was stopped in front of Grummet's hardware store, with the ladies all scattering up and down the street with handkerchiefs to their noses, and a crowd of hard-nosed men and boys standing around the wagon, listening to the marshal arguing with the man. He was a kind of tall, gaunted man sitting on the wagon, saying it was a public street and he reckoned he had as much right there as anybody, and the marshal telling him he would have to move on; folks couldn't stand it. It had been dead eight days, Albert said. They came from some place out in Yoknapatawpha county, trying to get to Jefferson with it. It must have been like a piece of rotten cheese coming into an ant-hill, in that ram-shackle wagon that Albert said folks were scared would fall all to pieces before they could get it out of town, with that home-made box and another fellow with a broken leg lying on a quilt on top of it, and the father and a little boy sitting on the seat and the marshal trying to make them get out of town. (204)

The marshal advises Anse to take Cash to the doctor, not put the broken leg in cement. The marshal also informs him that it is an enforceable offense to endanger public health. Albert's

account to Moseley exposes the Bundren procession for its true motley appearance. Addie has been reduced to an “it,” eliminating all privacy, pride, and propriety. Anse’s only reply is ““We’re doing the best we can”” (204).

Anse places responsibility on the entire family by using the collective “we”. As patriarch, he should be in charge, but instead, uses his passive-aggressive personality to influence those around him. Armstid notices the reason is “Because be darn if there aint something about a darn 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” (192). Anse uses this influence against his own children. Early in the book, Anse is reluctant to give his approval to Jewel and Darl concerning the delivery of wood. Later he admits, ““It means three dollars”” (30), which is a selfish motive similar to those he chided Darl and Jewel for. Tull offers his horses to Anse so he doesn’t have to wait for Jewel and Darl to return. “Take my team, Anse, I said” (92). Anse claims not to make the decision on his own. The decision belongs to his wife, who is now dead, of course. ““We’ll wait for ourn, he said. She’ll want it so. She was ever a particular woman”” (92). Anse again eschews personal responsibility.

According to the neighbors, Anse is not quite as beholden to others as he makes out to be. Tull tells the others what Anse told him:

“He promised her,” I say. “She wanted it. She come from there. Her mind was set on it.”

“And Anse is set on it, too,” Quick says.

“Ay,” Uncle Billy says. “It’s like a man that’s let everything slide all his life to get set on something that will make the most trouble for everybody he knows.”

(89)

Anse wills his children forward, in spite of any disaster that befalls them. He doesn’t face these disasters as a decision-maker, however. He never offers solutions. Anse says of the downed bridge: ““If it was just up, we could drive across it”” (126). Anse maintains an incredulous attitude about the downed bridge:

So they finally got Anse to say what he wanted to do, and him and the gal and the boy got out of the wagon. But even when we were on the bridge Anse kept on looking back, like he thought maybe, once he was outen the wagon, the whole thing would kind of blow up and he would find himself back yonder in the field again and her laying up there in the house, waiting to die and it to do all over again. (137)

Earlier on, Jewel knows whom to blame when he switches between cursing Darl, ““Goddamn you. Goddamn you,”” to cursing Anse, ““Goddamn him. Goddamn him”” (95). Anse wanted Jewel away when Addie died as much as Darl wanted Jewel away.

Anse’s will pushes the family forward even when logic dictates that the journey should end. A promise made, but not felt, is the reason for the endless, awful momentum that injures, robs, and shames the family of what little pride they are pretending to have. Against forces of nature and the insistence of neighbors and strangers, the Bundrens continue a funeral that began too late. Darl instigates another force, another obstacle against the odyssey and is punished beyond the crime of property damage for doing so. In the face of the Bundrens’ misguided

excuses to deliver the body of their matron, Darl's action is a sane one. Given his background and deteriorating mental condition, his destructive act is understandable. The fact that Darl exists differently between thought and action makes him far more sympathetic than Anse who exists only in inaction:

The paradoxical quality of the real Darl resides finally in the tension between these two different aspects of human experience. The Darl who taunts his brother with the fact of their mother's death because to his brother Addie's dying is too painful to face, the Darl who sees his sister's dilemma but offers only silent repudiation, the Darl who sets fire to the stock-filled barn of a helpful farmer in order to cremate his mother – such a Darl is easy to judge. He is jealous and vindictive, lacking in family responsibility, socially incompetent, and even felonious.

But the Darl of being, the Darl we know by Faulkner's discovery of a way 'to see into the hear,' is not easy to judge. Indeed, we are not moved to judgment. It is enough that we understand. Darl's *doing*, his external acts, the part he plays in the unfolding of events, become understandable in the light of our insight into the reality of his felt experience. (Handy 438)

Darl is incapable of fronting with the same affected decorum as the rest of the family. He is far more interested in his family than those outside of it. Anse and Addie as parents were responsible for the negligence and abuse against their children, and after Addie's death, the sole responsibility belongs to Anse. Darl understands the absurd nature of each Bundren's particular form of family dysfunction. As he has his whole life, Anse neglects his responsibilities while

passively enforcing his unmoving will on everyone around him. The final injustice takes place when Anse commits Darl to a mental institution for the sake of continuing an easy life.

Darl sees the world objectively, sometimes likening people and things to other objects in his memory. He thinks about his own existence, but does not often observe himself. Though he may know how others view his behavior, he doesn't actually become self-conscious enough for his behavior to change. He shows symptoms of neurological disorders, but the only suggestive evidence is for PTSD. If Darl is regarded as neurodiverse, a diagnosis is not necessary. His difference sets him apart. His difference puts him at odds with his other family members, but in a way that could possibly benefit other family members besides Anse. Darl is driven to action, and even though the action is destructive, it is reasonable when the situation is fully considered.

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