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# Tears of a Clown: Reexamination of Disabled Narrators in William Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*

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TEARS OF A CLOWN: REEXAMINATION OF DISABLED NARRATORS IN  
WILLIAM FAULKNER'S *THE SOUND AND THE FURY* AND *AS I LAY DYING*

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A Thesis

Presented to  
the Faculty of Arts and Humanities  
University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by

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August 2017

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Title: Tears of a Clown: Reexamination of Disabled Narrators in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*

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### **Abstract**

This thesis argues that Darl Bundren of Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, and Benjy Compson of *The Sound and the Fury* exhibit certain similarities, suggesting that, in relation to Donald M. Kartiganer's model from the introduction of *The Fragile Thread: The Meaning of Form in Faulkner's Novels*, they would be paired together better than his initial couplings. This argument proposes to discuss why Darl Bundren is the reincarnated version of Benjy Compson in terms of their internal discourses, narratorial skills, and disability within each novel. As both characters could easily be labeled "disabled," this endeavor will also speculate as to why they are so similar, why Faulkner gives them the most dominant voices in each novel and why their disability creates as well as destroys their entire being. This thesis will also show that both Benjy's and Darl's sections within each novel demonstrate that both characters exhibit specific advantages within their internal and external discourse, their perceptions of the world around them that allow them to be the most equipped narrators in the telling of each of their family's downfalls. Both men's disability is actually more of an unexplored advantage than a hindrance in relation to narration.

## **Acknowledgements**

I dedicate this Master's thesis to Jack Hillhouse. You may have lost your battle with depression, but you inspire me everyday to be better and to keep getting up in the morning and filling my lungs with air. Thank you for always putting a smile on my face. You are missed.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

In 1979 U. of Mass. Press published Donald M. Kartiganer's critique of Faulkner's form entitled *The Fragile Thread: The Meaning of Form in Faulkner's Novels*. Kartiganer opens his analysis of Faulkner's work by introducing Random Houses' coupling of *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* into a single Modern Library volume in 1946. Kartiganer quotes Faulkner as having said, "I had never thought of *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* in the same breath" (Blotner 1208). Faulkner did say positively of the two novels, "both of them happened to have a sister in a roaring gang of menfolks" (Gwynn and Blotner 207). Although I do agree with Kartiganer's argument that "Most of the major characters of *The Sound and the Fury* are reborn in *As I Lay Dying*, in guises suited to their new social status," I must take issue with his pairings of some characters.

The Caddy and Dewey Dell pairing is obvious and easily understandable given their promiscuity and dominant role as the only participating female/sister within the immediate families. My argument focuses more on Benjy of *The Sound and the Fury* and Darl of *As I Lay Dying*. Kartiganer argues that Quentin is transfigured into Darl: "Quentin, the sensitive artist figure transforming his sister's sex life into a Byronic tale of mortal sin, becomes the articulate and impotent visionary Darl" (325) Kartiganer also claims, "And finally Benjy, childlike at thirty-three, becomes the real child Vardaman"

(325). Although these pairings and Kartiganer's well-formed argument lead the reader to believe that these characters are suited to be each other's reincarnation, the language within each character's narrations, as well as the measurement of depth of each man's character, body and soul, suggests something different.

The similarities between each of these novels simplistically justifies why Random House wanted to pair them together in a Modern Library single edition collection in 1946. Both exhibit single, narratorial sections by individual characters in a stream-of-consciousness form. Both, as Kartiganer says, "revolve[s] around a single, sorely tried family" (324). But Kartiganer's research points to characters that are too easily matched together by the focus on the characters' literal forms and motivations. As Kartiganer believes that Quentin transforms into Darl and Benjy to Vardaman, the language and analysis of their minds in Benjy and Darl's sections suggests a better dyad. Both Benjy and Darl's sections overflow with pictorial, classificatory and eloquent stream-of-consciousness musings. Not only do they see what others don't and report it in expressive, articulate diction as opposed to their family members and other characters surrounding them, they narrate more so about others than themselves. Benjy is the ideal objective narrator. He sees and speaks the truth. Darl sees the actual and the interpreted. He sees the actions and the underlying motives. He is also an omniscient narrator of his family members, exhibiting clairvoyant behaviors. His sections reveal that his focus is on that of others' musings, interactions and struggles.

Both characters within their perspective novels live in post-Civil War, southern towns in Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County in Mississippi, both assisting in

telling the story of each of their families' downfalls, as well as new beginnings. Benjy, a thirty-three year old, mentally handicapped, white male introduces his family, the Compsons, to the reader via a spastic, erratic and, on Faulkner's part, experimental style. Jumping from childhood memories back to the present back to memories, Benjy's mind shakes the reader's understanding of narration, language and form. It is impossible to not become frustrated with Benjy's opening section of *The Sound and the Fury* and understandably so. Since Faulkner uses physical obstacles and triggers to ignite memories within Benjy's internal discourse, Faulkner tries to indicate these time changes with italics. He initially thought:

Of printing that first section in different colors, but that would have been too expensive. That was about 1930, I think, and at that time they had not advanced the printing of different, separate colors as they have now, and that would have been almost prohibitive in color. (Meriwether and Millgate 147)

Although difficult to read, one eventually finds footing in understanding the Compsons and their downfall in Yoknapatawpha County.

*The Sound and the Fury* follows the disintegration and collapse of the Compsons, told through four different perspectives. The first comes to the reader via the mentally-handicapped and youngest son, Benjamin (Benjy) Compson, who is constantly unaware of time, the past and present all jumbled into one reality for himself as he navigates the world with the mind of a child. The second narration comes from the oldest, most self-reflective and contemplative son, Quentin, who is constantly obsessed with his sister's innocence, her honor and protecting it until incestuous thoughts eventually eat him alive via suicide while attending Harvard University. The third section enters the mind of the



second youngest brother, Jason Compson, whom Faulkner thought of as his greatest villain. Obsessed with money and taking revenge on his sister, Jason takes care of his niece while keeping all the money intended for her care himself. The final section, although sometimes attributed to the perspective of Dilsey, the family's African-American cook, is actually told by an objective narrator. Kartiganer says it as clearly and concisely as possible, "*The Sound and the Fury* portrays family tribulation as a decline from greatness: idiocy, madness, alcoholism, promiscuity, and theft as symptoms of a tragic Fall of Southern Princes" (324).

*As I Lay Dying* is what Faulkner called his "*tour de force*." During an interview, Faulkner says, "Well, I judge my books by how much work and agony went into 'em. Something like *As I Lay Dying* was easy, real easy. A *tour de force*. It took me just about six weeks. (With a grin.) I could write a book like that with both my hands tied behind my back" (Meriwether and Millgate 222). Similar to *The Sound and the Fury* in terms of its stream-of-consciousness sections, *As I Lay Dying* tells the story of a family on a quest. Kartiganer says of Faulkner's *tour de force*, "[it] tells a comic tale of perseverance at a price. Unburdened with governors and generals, the Bundrens need only haul Addie's moldering body to Jefferson and put her third son, Darl, on a train to Jackson in order to persuade us that they will survive" (325). Appearing more simplistic than its former counterpart, *As I Lay Dying* reveals the inner-workings of a poor, Southern family trying to find someone and some thing to fill the void their matriarch has left behind.

Unlike *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying* is all about action. The Bundrens live in the present and consistently move into the future. Unlike the Compsons, they are

not concerned too much with the past but with the erasing of it and the finding of each of their picturesque futures. The Bundrens' collective goal is to deliver their mother's body back to her hometown of Jefferson. Before she dies, she asks one thing of her husband, to bury her in Jefferson with her people. All of the children, and especially the father, Anse, agree to take her body to Jefferson, but each has a different motive than that of the collective, obvious goal. We learn of each child's objective, as well as Anse's, through their narratorial sections. Concerned with the quest ahead of them, each child expresses the pain of losing their mother, how they are coping with it and what their next actions will be while on their journey.

Within *The Sound and the Fury*, Benjy Compson, the youngest of the Compsons, reports the facts. He is distinct and leaves nothing out. The reader sees through his eyes with no commentary—just certainty in the truth. Darl opens *As I Lay Dying* with his description of him and his brother, Jewel, walking in a field. He discusses Jewel positioned in the field in relation to Darl, his hat and the scenery around them. All his narration through his stream-of-consciousness points to telling other's stories. Not only do Benjy and Darl resemble each other in relation to their commentary on others' lives, but also each is labeled by their family as “odd,” an idiot, “loony” and/or different. Benjy's disability is easily apparent—he is a thirty-three year-old mentally disabled male whose mindset is that of a young child. He moans and yells when he is upset, yet his stream-of-consciousness language is like that of a white, aristocratic male living in the South. Although raised more so by his African-American cook, Dilsey—whose language is that of an uneducated, poor black Southerner—Benjy's internal discourse uses the

language attributed to that of a white man. His mind is that of a child, as he has no prejudice towards anyone.

According to Faulkner, Benjy does not know good or evil, right or wrong. He just speaks the truth and nothing more. Yet there is this favoritism he has towards his sister, Caddy—his fixation. Faulkner argues that all the brothers have a fixation towards Caddy in both good and bad ways. If it be true that Faulkner believes Benjy is an “animal” (Meriwether and Millgate 246), an objective narrator who does not know the difference between good and evil, right and wrong, like the Prologue to an Elizabethan play, then why give him any connection to the family and continuation to the very end through the story and downfall of the Compsons? Why make him bellow and moan at all when he hears the word “caddie” when the golfers on the green call out for their young, eager-to-please attendants? Why give him any link to the family if he doesn’t mean anything to the family but to be an unfeeling, disinterested, blubbing man-child with no resources to care for himself?

Darl’s opening scene of *As I Lay Dying* sets the story for his mother, Addie Bundren’s death and each of the family member’s involvement in the journey to her desired gravesite in Jefferson—her hometown. Although Darl is seen on the surface as distinctly different from Benjy—not having the mind of child due to any mental handicap—the former shares more similarities with the latter than what is seen initially. Like Benjy, Darl’s stream-of-consciousness diction is movingly expressive, unmistakable is his exactness and unique beyond measure in comparison to his family members and others around him. His mind speaks with a tongue unlike others around him. He reveals a

level of education via his language not present in any of his immediate family member's vocabulary.

As Darl opens *As I Lay Dying* by describing himself and his brother Jewel walking through a field, he starts to explain the setting:

The path runs straight as a plumb-line, worn smooth by feet and baked brick-hard by July, between the green rows of laidby cotton, to the cottonhouse in the center of the field, where it turns and circles the cottonhouse at four soft right angles and goes on across the field again, worn so by feet in fading precision. (Faulkner 3)

In a contrasting fashion, Jewel's only narration in the entire novel is sharply different:

It's because he stays out there, right under the window, hammering and sawing on that goddam box. Where she's got to see him. Where every breath she draws is full of his knocking and sawing where she can see him saying See. See what a good one I am making for you. I told him to go somewhere else. I said Good God do you want to see her in it. (Faulkner 14)

Jewel's narration entails his feelings about Cash, the eldest brother, making their mother's coffin and wanting her to like it. His focus is on his emotional observation of Cash's constant sawing and desire for their mother's approval. You can feel the anger and pain he has within him while he watches his mother slowly pass away. He doesn't understand Cash's intentions to make his mother a beautiful coffin. All he sees is the immediate future of having lost her and her body lying in that box.

Darl does not start to express strong self-reflection until further into *As I Lay Dying*. Instead, his initial focus appears to be on that of others and their own struggles. He can be seen as the detective to the life of the Bundrens. He wants to know and understand more, even though he is indeed a Bundren. His narration is fascinated more

with everyone else's actions than his own. There is an immediate sense of "The Other" with Darl—he does not feel he belongs with his family. It is only when he starts to question his own existence that he unconsciously finds the answers to his questions—this leads to his breakdown and the family committing him to an asylum in Jackson.

Through searching his subconscious and undergoing an existential crisis, Darl is able to find the answers to why or even if he feels he really exists in reality. Both Darl and Benjy give the stories of their families. With their descriptive narrations, their language, their role within their families, how Faulkner uses them and their disabilities, their pairing seems more fitting than Kartiganer's coupling. Being labeled as "disabled" in modern terms (Hagood, *Faulkner, Writer of Dis-Ability* 125) also adds truth to the argument that Darl is the reincarnated version of Benjy. Both present the stories of their families, both seen as an "Other," but Darl has developed from Benjy into a non-mute, self-reflective, still unique and considered an outsider, individual amongst his family members. Both narrators and their sections within each of the novels are used as tools to tell the stories of their family members rather than themselves. Their disabilities—one being most likely Autistic and the other being quite severely depressed over his mother's infidelity and death—are used as tools to set the basis, the backdrop, the history of each of their families' stories.

Michael Berube's perspective on disability studies in literature shows a less pessimistic view and analysis. Berube's March 2005 article, "Disability and Narrative," takes a different approach to analyze the representation of disability in literature. From movies to novels, Berube calls on such well-known masterpieces as Disney's childhood

classics *Dumbo* and *Finding Nemo* as examples of how disabilities in narratives can be represented in favorable, enthusiastic, comical and encouraging ways. Berube acknowledges that disability can turn into and be reinterpreted as exceptionality—“as when Dumbo finds that the source of his shame (his big ears) is actually the source of his power” (569). Faulkner takes an “idiot boy” like Benjy and uses his mind full of memories to create the setting, the backdrop, and the history of the Compsons. Berube notes, as this thesis will support, that “Benjy seems to have a formidable memory; in that respect, he is an ideal narrator for a novel whose characters are obsessed with the past...” (575).

As for Darl Bundren, his nineteen sections within the fifty-nine first-person narrations in *As I Lay Dying* are not linearly challenged or ruined with issues of spatiality like Benjy’s, but his descriptions of his family, especially his brother Jewel (the bastard child of their mother), evoke and create a beautiful summation of his complex, depressed, jealous mind. As he grapples with the loss of his mother and his family’s complete disregard for her body and burial in Jefferson, he plays out the scenes of his sister and brother’s doings, friends of the family, and his egocentric, lazy father’s actions or lack there of. His clairvoyance adds to the reader’s curiosity about his narratorial skills, adding more to the argument that his voice is less for his own reflection and more for the greater good of the story of the Bundren’s—in other words, he is a Faulknarian tool.

But what if these two characters, these narrators, these tools were more than just devices, were more than disabled, deranged, and “Idiot Boy” instruments? What if these two narrators were the key to the family’s entire stories? What if more analysis and

interpretation into these two narrators uncovers that they are not as idiotic as what is simplistically surmised from their internal and external discourse within each novel? What if, like *Dumbo*, Dory in *Finding Nemo*, *X-Men* and other fantastical, “disabled” characters in movies and novels alike, they are actually more capable than other characters in telling these stories? What if they are the perfect storytellers for each family in that their idiocy, depression and severe pain from loss is better interpreted through their eyes because of something different within their genetic makeup? What if Faulkner saw that with pain comes depth and introspection, thus in turn creating growth and advancement?

This thesis argues that Darl Bundren of Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* and Benjy Compson of *The Sound and the Fury* exhibit certain similarities suggesting that, in relation to Donald M. Kartiganer’s model from the introduction of *The Fragile Thread: The Meaning of Form in Faulkner’s Novels*, they would be paired together better than his initial couplings. This argument proposes to discuss why Darl Bundren is the reincarnated version of Benjy Compson in terms of their internal discourse, narratorial skills and disability within each novel. As both characters could easily be labeled as disabled, this endeavor will also speculate as to why they are so similar, why Faulkner gives them the most prominent voices in each novel, and why their disability creates as well as destroys their entire being.

This thesis also undertakes the challenge to demonstrate that each character’s disability can and does show to be an advantage in different aspects of their life, especially in telling the story of their family’s downfalls. Faulkner may or may not have

been aware of this, but he does use Darl Bundren with depression from his mother's infidelity, lack of love and subsequent death, and Benjy with his feeble-mindedness, "idiocy", and lack of external discourse with others as being hindrances, but allowing other aspects and parts of each narrator's mind to change, to advance, to grow and show an advantage over other characters. Benjy can recall the past and all his family's memories beautifully in order to layout the framework of the story of the downfall of the Compsons. Darl is very acutely aware of his surroundings—just like Benjy—and tells of his family's journey to deliver their mother's body to her hometown of Jefferson. Both Benjy Compson and Darl Bundren are both beautiful characters that are the only two members of each of their families who can properly and wonderfully tell of the downfall of the Compsons and the Bundrens as accurately and wonderfully as Faulkner has them do. They are inaccurately and simplistically labeled as "loony" and "crazy" with no regard to a deep analysis of each of their language and roles within the novels.



## Chapter Two: Benjy Compson and The Beginning

Donald M. Kartiganer's article entitled, "The Meaning of Form in *The Sound and the Fury*" takes an interesting stance on *The Sound and the Fury* as it compares it to Faulkner's latter work *As I Lay Dying*. As a newcomer to Faulkner, one may think it natural to compare *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*. Both novels exhibit individual first-person narratorial sections overflowing with internal discourse from major characters. Like diary entries, each novel is broken into these sections that show the reader a specific point of view of each family and their downfalls. But Faulkner never thought of these two novels "in the same breath" (Blotner 1208). This shows that Faulkner's use of individual narratorial sections should not be the main reason to compare the two novels, and rightly so. It is important to note that both of these novels are "not a sequence of bizarre incidents happening to single hero, but a sequence of bizarre heroes happening to a single incident" (Kartiganer 325). The macabre-like dark humor, more apparent in *As I Lay Dying*, adds to the understanding that these novels do not contain narrations full of different stories from multiple individuals, but that the reader is seeing the same events multiple times through the eyes of many different characters.

Kartiganer's main reason for comparing the two novels and seeing so many similarities between the two is that he believes, "Most of the major characters of *The*

*Sound and the Fury* are reborn in *As I Lay Dying*, in guises suited to their new social status” (325). This thesis agrees strongly with that statement, but for different reasons than what Kartiganer presents. Within the first two pages, Kartiganer makes clear who his pairings are and why. He starts with the obvious female comparison, Caddy and Dewey Dell. Both are the young, female characters who engage in promiscuous activities and who are the only sisters in a family of boys. That is something that is easy to agree with. He goes down the list to all of the boys, and though some of them are somewhat questionable, this thesis, as stated earlier, takes a different conclusion on two main pairings. Kartiganer gets to Darl Bundren and Benjy Compson, and pairs them with others saying:

Quentin, the sensitive artist figure transforming his sister’s sex life into a Byronic tale of mortal sin, becomes the articulate and impotent visionary Darl.... And finally Benjy, childlike at thirty-three, becomes the real child Vardaman. By no means an idiot, Vardaman yet owns a child’s perception that enables him to identify his dead mother as a fish—as remarkable in its own way as Benjy’s ability to smell his grandmother’s death or the feeling of guilt in his sister. (325)

Kartiganer simplistically pairs these characters for reasons that only scratch the surface of each family. He does not delve deep enough into each character and his/her effect on their perspective families and situations.

To start with the first issue, Kartiganer’s pairing of Quentin with Darl only looks at both character’s self-reflective internal discourse. On looking at Quentin and Darl’s internal discourse and their self-contemplative minds, they could be lumped together for only that purpose, but Kartiganer misses the big picture of each characters role within each novel. One piece of this thesis’s argument hopes to prove that Darl, from *As I Lay*

*Dying*, is a reincarnated version of Benjy from *The Sound and the Fury*. To start this endeavor off, one can start chronologically with the earlier written and published work, *The Sound and the Fury*, to examine the complex character that is Benjy and his role within the novel.

In order to see that these two characters are a better-suited match, one must delve into each character's language and role within their families and the novels of their lives. To preface this beginning analysis of Benjy's character, critic Harry M. Campbell helps the novice, Faulknerian reader, and writes a strong, succinct and understandable summation of *The Sound and the Fury* in comparison to *As I Lay Dying*:

While the point of view in *As I Lay Dying* shifts frequently and abruptly from one character to another, the point of view in *The Sound and the Fury* is changed only three times with dates only a day apart prefixed for the sake of unity to the three of the four divisions of the book. Appropriately the story entitled *The Sound and the Fury* begins literally with a tale told by an idiot—the psycho-dramatic reverie of a thirty-three-year-old idiot, member of a degenerate aristocratic Southern family. Sights, sounds and smells recall to Benjy, as vividly as to Proust's Swann, whole sections of his childhood, but he confuses these memories with present occurrences. Through Benjy we learn about other members of the family. (311)

Even though one may not have studied heavily or even read either novel, it is easy to accept that these novels, at their most basic core, tell the stories of two American Southern families in the early 1910's and 20's that reek of "idiocy, madness, alcoholism, promiscuity, theft," jealousy and selfishness that present as signs of the tragic Fall of the South (Kartiganer 324). Both novels "come to us as a succession of stream-of-consciousness monologues, each novel a version of Faulkner's usual reversed picaresque structure" (324).

One of the main reasons that Benjy's internal discourse is the opening monologue of the story of the Compsons and their history is that his mind holds a great skill unlike that of the other characters. Since the Compson's stories live only in the past and there is essentially no action within *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner must employ a character who lives in the past and whose mind recalls memories with specific detail. Benjy's monologue opens on the morning of April 7, 1928, which is the present throughout his entire section, as well as his thirty-third birthday. He and Luster, the young, African-American boy, most likely Dilsey's grandson, who watches over him throughout the present day, are walking through the meadow on his family's property, adjacent to the golf course next door to them. He opens his narrative:

Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. They were coming toward where the flag was and I went along the fence. Luster was hunting in the grass by the flower tree. They took the flag out, and they were hitting. Then they put the flag back and they went to the table, and he hit and the other hit. (3)

Benjy explains with exquisite detail everything he is doing in the present with Luster. One cannot help but pay attention to Benjy's language. Two things come to mind when reading that small section of the first paragraph of the start of Benjy's narrative: first, his exactness when describing his surroundings, the trees, the flowers, the men hitting golf-balls. He moves from object to object, sight to smell, reaction to everything effortlessly. But images are still not immediately clear to the reader. It takes a couple of paragraphs for one to realize that he is speaking about the golfers on the course next to his family's home, and as they swing their clubs and send the balls towards the cup, they call out for their caddies.

The other point to notice in the above quote is Benjy's language. In order to see the stark difference his mind has to everyone else's external language within his section, the paragraphs continue on the first page with Luster yelling at Benjy for moaning loudly after the golfers yell out, "caddie!" He exclaims toward Benjy, "'Listen at you, now.' Luster said. 'Aint you something, thirty three years old, going on that way. After I done went all the way to town to buy you that cake. Hush up that moaning. Aint you going to help me find that quarter so I can go to the show tonight'" (3). Luster's external discourse is drastically different than Benjy's internal one. The first couple of paragraphs to start the section tell the reader much about Benjy's character, his thought process, his reactions to others and his language overall.

At first glance, Benjy's internal discourse seems common and nothing out of the ordinary. But as Luster, the first person within the novel to comment on Benjy's mannerisms, speaks out, it becomes understandable that Benjy is disabled. Benjy's internal discourse, his diction within his mind about the observations around him can sometimes be concluded as too advanced for him. Dr. Winthrop Tilley produced an article dated 1955 titled, "The Idiot Boy in Mississippi: Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*," which appeared in the *American Journal of Mental Deficiency*, in which Tilley says, "All things considered, Benjy seems to turn out a fabricated literary idiot whose correspondence to any idiot, living or dead, would be not only coincidental, but miraculous" (376). Tilley was one of the first medical practitioners to publicly voice his opinion on Benjy's mannerisms, attitudes and actions within *The Sound and the Fury* as being inaccurate. Although Tilley could be right, more and more literary critics with medical research voiced that Benjy's mind could be possible in reality.

Taylor Hagood's article, "The Secret Machinery of Textuality, Or, What is Benjy Compson Really Thinking?" examines Benjy's presence in the novel, and accuses other critics of not being able to fully, as he says, "roll up [their] sleeves and undertake this messy textual exploration" (93). Hagood's approach states:

In executing this task myself, I first want to point out that although disability studies was not a discourse available to Faulkner as it is now, he nevertheless realizes Benjy's marginalization on several levels and hinges that marginalization on the recognition of his disability. (93)

Benjy's handicap brings about more questions today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, because of disability studies, than it would ever have when the book was released to the public in 1929. Reviews surfaced all over the nation in late 1929 and the early 1930's identifying Benjy as the "idiot," because the common understanding of mentally handicapped individuals was that they were considered idiots and termed thus. The term "Autism" wasn't created in the medical field until 1943, but it is believed by most that Benjy suffered from some type of Autism. Being mentally handicapped is not the same thing for each individual who lives with that handicap. Therefore, Benjy's internal discourse could, in fact, be correct and possible.

The initial impression one might get from reading the first couple of sentences of Benjy's thoughts is that his mind is not as child-like as one might imagine. "Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. They were coming toward where the flag was and I went along the fence. Luster was hunting in the grass by the flower tree" (Faulkner 31). Immediately it is recognizable that Benjy's adjectives such as "curling" for the flower spaces suggests to the reader that his mind is more advanced than one might think of a mentally handicapped individual. Hagood continues

in his article, “The surprise of Benjy’s monologue is that we can understand him at all, that he is *so normal*. Not just normal, in fact, but more...an accomplished architect of narrative” (94). Getting back to Benjy’s “exactness” with describing his surroundings, the smells, the sights, the noises, the voices from the people around him, it brings up the question as to why Faulkner impregnated that vocabulary and awareness within him.

A primary goal of this thesis is to show that Benjy’s disability is used as a tool to tell his family’s story, and that his handicap is at the center of his entire being, and fuels his weaknesses and strengths, such as his unmistakably complex mind. His exact memory and sensitivity to his environment is something Faulkner deliberately gave him. Lorna Wing M.D. writes a compelling book about autism titled *Autistic Children* (1972) where she discusses the act of lying and not being truthful amongst autistic children. Lorna Wing writes on one point of Autistic children “they never tell lies. They do not understand why it should ever be necessary to avoid the truth, and in any case, lack the skill with language and ideas needed to invent lies” (27). Although Faulkner was not aware of the term Autism, he could be clearly aware, from personal experience, that mentally handicapped individuals (on the Autism spectrum) do not usually tell lies, especially children. There is a purity and innocence to them. Faulkner’s use of Benjy opening up the narrative of the Compson family and laying the framework of their history could be a strategic move to indicate that he is the only reliable narrator within the family due to his handicap.

After Faulkner wrote and published *The Sound and the Fury* in 1929, he later created an Appendix of the Compsons’ history in 1946 in *The Portable Faulkner* edited

by Malcolm Cowley. Faulkner's genealogy starts with the earliest known relative of the Compsons in 1699 and traverses time to the present-day Compsons that we read of in *The Sound and the Fury*. It is interesting to note that Benjy's section in the Appendix, of all the Compson's, is the shortest. Why give him so little back-story? Faulkner starts it:

Benjamin. Born Maury, after his mother's only brother: a handsome flashing swaggering workless bachelor who borrowed money from almost anyone, even Dilsey although she was a Negro, explaining to her as he withdrew his hand from his pocket that she was not only in his eyes the same as a member of his sister's family, she would be considered a born lady anywhere in any eyes. (213)

Faulkner continues to Benjy and his name change from Maury:

Who, when at last even his mother realised what he was and insisted weeping that his name must be changed, was rechristened Benjamin by his brother Quentin (Benjamin, our lastborn, sold into Egypt). (213)

Two main sections stand out most in Benjy's miniscule introduction; the first starts:

Who loved three things: the pasture which was sold to pay for Candace's wedding and to send Quentin to Harvard, his sister Candace, firelight. Who lost none of them because he could not remember his sister but only the loss of her, and firelight was the same bright shape as going to sleep. (213)

The second section ends his appendix with, "Committed to the State Asylum, Jackson 1933. Lost nothing then either because, as with his sister, he remembered not the pasture but only its loss, and firelight was still the same bright shape of sleep" (213). This Appendix scratches only the surface of who Benjy is, his role within the first-person narratives as a whole, and his capabilities within his disability.

Although Faulkner uses very little diction to describe Benjy, the Appendix doesn't show the impact Benjy has on the novel as a whole. His disability can be re-



envisioned into exceptionality. Readers know Benjy as an “idiot,” called by Luster and other characters as that “looney” or “it,” but it can be noted that his section stays with readers long after they’ve forgotten the story of the Compsons. Why does Benjy remain? He is an anomaly and rightly so. His internal discourse does not match his outward voice/sounds. He is a non-verbal, possibly Autistic man with the mind of a child, but what if he is the perfect narrator for his family? And what if he is more complex than readers, critics and Faulkner believe?

Without making too much of a case for Benjy’s feelings and why his emotions are muted within the novel, he still holds such a talent in comparison to the rest of his family and people around him. As stated earlier, the Compsons live in the past. With so many incidents and emotions the family has endured up until present day, the best way for their story to be told from the beginning is by someone who can be exact with details. They need a narrator to start off their stories with meticulousness to retelling each memory, as if the narrator relives it everyday seeing every detail without bias. They need an objective lens. In reflection of the whole (*The Sound and the Fury*), Benjy couldn’t have been a better narrator to tell the memories of the Compsons and lay the framework of their downfall. Even when other characters believe he cannot understand them, Dilsey and Roskus come to his rescue and state outright they know he knows more than people give him credit:

‘Saying a name.’ Frony said. ‘He dont know nobody’s name.’ ‘You just say it and see if he dont.’ Dilsey said. ‘You say it to him while he sleeping and I bet he hear you.’ ‘He know lot more than folks think. Roskus said. ‘He knowed they time was coming, like that pointer done. He could tell you when hisn coming, if he could talk. Or yours. Or mine.’ (Faulkner 20)

The African-American housekeepers and workers for the Compsons know Benjy just as, if not better, than his siblings. Luster watches over him during the day like a caregiver, but Dilsey is the real one who raised him and all his siblings. Her word throughout the Compson's story is always revered as true.

### **Chapter Three: The Truth Lies In The Memories**

Most readers approach this novel (after reading the first page) as a difficult, almost impossible obstacle. It is perceived to be a mess of present actions mixed with past memories that are thrown at the reader sometimes without any warning. Hagood states, from “The Secret Machinery of Textuality, Or, What Is Benjy Compson Really Thinking,” that in fact it is not a jumbled mess, but actually a certain way of creating a puzzle for the reader in order to solve like a mystery. “The text *is* contrived in a way that has a somewhat conventional precedent, for its strategies of plot construction, radical as they seem, actually replicate in principle the forms of plotting found in classic detective fiction” (96). What most see as a hodgepodge of memories is actually a strategic, clever way of presenting a puzzle for the reader to decipher the history of one family. With memories jumping around constantly, it makes it difficult for one to know when they are no longer in the present with Benjy and Luster. Faulkner indicates change in time with italics sometimes, but the inconsistencies of that cause the reader to constantly go back and reread in order to understand what is happening within the plot. Once the reader understands that Benjy is in the present when Luster is in his midst and is flashing back to memories about his family, it becomes clear that this is about discovering the history of this family.

Incidents in the present thrust Benjy into the past and he recalls a memory that relates to the present moment. The first memory he recalls is one of deception, cheating and lying. Benjy snags his shirt on a nail while crawling through a fence with Luster in the yard. That action thrusts Benjy's mind into the past when he snagged his shirt on that same nail years ago when he was just a child with his sister, Caddy. Benjy recalls, "*Caddy uncaught me and we crawled through. Uncle Maury said to not let anybody see us, so we better stoop over, Caddy said. Stoop over, Benjy. Like this, see. We stooped over and crossed the garden, where the flowers rasped and rattled against us*" (Faulkner 3). They were asked to deliver a letter from their Uncle Maury to a next-door neighbor, Mrs. Patterson. Benjy recalls that Uncle Maury told the kids to not let anyone see or catch them with that letter. Immediately one thinks that there is something quite important, and possibly deceptive, about that letter going to Mrs. Patterson next door. The reader later finds out that the letter to be delivered to Mrs. Patterson indicated that Uncle Maury was having an affair with her, of course unbeknownst to Mr. Patterson or any of the Compsons.

This memory is great example to show Benjy's distinct presentation of everyone else's discourse. Jumping to another time they delivered yet another letter to Mrs. Patterson, Benjy recalls what Caddy said:

'You want to carry the letter.' Caddy said. 'You can carry it.' She took the letter out of her pocket and put it in mine. 'It's a Christmas present.' Caddy said. 'Uncle Maury is going to surprise Mrs Patterson with it. We got to give it to her without letting anybody see it. Keep your hands in your pockets good, now.' We came to the branch. (Faulkner 9)

Benjy articulates his interaction with ease, as if there was nothing impeding his memory at all, as if it was just yesterday. While in this memory, it should be noted that Benjy is a child, around an age where he understands what is being said to him and how to obey others. Another reason this memory indicates that Benjy was still a child is that Caddy is present. While still living with her immediate family, Caddy always took care of and spent time with Benjy. She was the mother figure to him.

As we continue to analyze the above memory, Benjy's diction becomes more and more relatable to any reader. It is painless, simple, uncomplicated in all its wholeness. He does not include his opinion within the memory, as it is just objective, showing only the facts. Caddy takes the letter from Benjy, walks to the Patterson's front door and hands the letter to Mrs. Patterson. This memory sparks another memory in which Benjy took the letter to Mrs Patterson all by himself:

*Mr Patterson was chopping in the green flowers. He stopped chopping and looked at me. Mrs Patterson came across the garden, running. When I saw her eyes I began to cry. You idiot. Mrs Patterson said, I told him never to send you alone again. Give it to me. Quick. Mr Patterson came fast, with the hoe. Mrs Patterson leaned across the fence, reaching her hand. She was trying to climb the fence. Give it to me, she said, Give it to me. Mr Patterson climbed the fence. He took the letter. Mrs Patterson's dress was caught on the fence. I saw her eyes again and I ran down the hill. (Faulkner 9)*

Benjy reacts emotionally to Mrs. Patterson's eyes, because he knows he's upset her in some way. While reading the memory within the memory of how Benjy took another letter to Mrs. Patterson by himself, it is undeniable that Benjy's description of Mr. and Mrs. Patterson's actions in relation to each other and himself, as well as their diction, is so distinct, so perfectly retold that it seems almost robotic or genius-like. His mind seems

to be like a recorder of everything around him, spitting it back at the reader without any errors. Although interrupting the present moments on a constant, consistent basis, Benjy's memories give the reader concise, accurate character depictions of everyone around him. We can see, hear, feel and understand the anger, the frustration and overwhelming fear Mrs. Patterson has as she sees her husband intercept Uncle Maury's letter.

When one thinks of all the memories Benjy recalls within his narrative, they are all negative images and moments in time where the Compsons either lose a family member physically (the multiple family members who die) or emotionally (Caddy not being there anymore), or there is deception, lying, self-pity and pain. In the memory of Benjy and Caddy delivering Uncle Maury's letter to Mrs. Patterson, immediately the children are brought into a world of deception and lies, and they are not even aware of it. Caddy says to Benjy, "It's a Christmas present. Uncle Maury is going to surprise Mrs Patterson with it. We got to give it to her without letting anybody see it" (Faulkner 9). Caddy is completely unaware of what is going on between Uncle Maury and Mrs. Patterson which reveals to the reader both her and Benjy's age and innocence.

## Chapter Four: The Genesis of Benjy

There are many incidents/memories within Benjy's section that humanize him, show him to be more than just the objective narrator of the Compsons. Although Faulkner greatly achieves the objective voice through Benjy to tell of the Compson's downfall, it is important to note that he does not completely deprive Benjy of human attributes. Contrary to what Faulkner and other critics have surmised about Benjy, he is more than just an animal, an idiot boy and a difficult brother and son to his family and others. Without touching on too much biographical criticism and input from Faulkner himself, it is important to note what Faulkner started with when he began *The Sound and the Fury*. From interviews in Japan, 1955, Faulkner says of his beginning of *The Sound and the Fury*:

That began as a short story, it was a story without a plot, of some children being sent away from the house during the grandmother's funeral. They were too young to be told what was going on and they saw things only incidentally to the childish games they were playing, which was the lugubrious matter of removing the corpse from the house, etc., and then the idea struck me to see how much more I could have got out of the idea of the blind, self-centeredness of innocence, typified by children, if one of those children had been truly innocent, that is, an idiot. So the idiot was born and then I became interested in the relationship of the idiot to the world that he was in but would never be able to cope with and just where could he get the tenderness, the help, to shield him in his innocence. I mean 'innocence' in the sense that God had stricken him blind at birth, that is, mindless at birth, there was nothing he could ever do about it...And so I told the idiot's experience of that day, and that was incomprehensible, even I could not have told what was going on then, so I had to write another chapter. (Meriwether and Millgate 146-147)

Benjy and the idea of a person who could not lie, who only told of truth and facts, and who lived in the past and present all at once fascinated Faulkner. Although he constantly refers to Benjy as the “idiot boy” and animal, Faulkner overlooks the fact that Benjy’s mind, while he was a child, clung to Caddy as his mother figure and grew to feel the loss of her everyday. He knows, remembers, and laments her when he hears her name from anyone else.

Faulkner attests that Benjy only knew that something, someone was missing when Caddy had gone, but he (Benjy) could never say it was Caddy. Obviously Benjy could never physically say it was Caddy, but every time he heard her name, he bellowed loudly. He could not stop crying when he heard her name, when she did something wrong or when someone tempted him with her being there or not. From another interview Faulkner gave as he discussed *The Sound and the Fury* with greater emphasis on Benjy, the interviewer asked if Benjy could feel love. Faulkner replied:

Benjy wasn’t rational enough even to be selfish. He was an animal. He recognized tenderness and love though he could not have named them, and it was the threat to tenderness and love that caused him to bellow when he felt the change in Caddy. He no longer had Caddy; being an idiot he was not even aware that Caddy was missing. He only knew that something was wrong, which left a vacuum in which he grieved. He tried to fill that vacuum. The only thing was he had one of Caddy’s discarded slippers. The slipper was his tenderness and love which he could not have named, but he knew only that it was missing. (Meriwether and Millgate 246)

Benjy attached himself to Caddy when they were children because she was his mother figure; she was all of the boys’ mother figure. I believe Benjy knew she was gone and always knew that.



Benjy's mind always races between the present and the past, but it never inhibits him from his visceral connection with everything, especially the strong bond he once had and still has to his sister and their memories together. He holds onto those memories of Caddy, as the love he knows will always be there for him. Those memories are what make him up and what allow him to know and feel what love was and is. Although it may seem obvious, the only way for the reader to know about Benjy is through his own internal discourse and everyone else's responses to his bellowing and moaning. Other characters do speak of Benjy and his mannerisms, but those comments are only interpreted through his narration. His own voice is honest, pure and true with no implications of falsifying the memories, but Benjy's section is just that—Benjy's section. He narrates his life and the lives of his family members to the reader, but how can one determine that his internal discourse is the most accurate view of the family? We only know of Benjy's memories and his interactions with others by what he tells the reader from his internal discourse. There are no spoken words from him. And if we take Lorna Wing's concluded research that, if Benjy is Autistic, he cannot tell a lie, how can we truly believe he gives the most accurate account of the Compsons?

In reference to Benjy's discourse on the Compson family, it is important to note that Benjy does not speak aloud—he is mute. It can be deduced that Benjy's only direct discourse to the reader is through his internal discourse. The mind of a mentally handicapped individual would have been very difficult for Faulkner to navigate in order to create something plausible and realistic to his readers. Where did Faulkner start? How would he have thought to construct the internal, as well as external, discourse of a mute, mentally handicapped young man in the early twentieth century in Southern Mississippi?

One would have to think that Benjy's language or lack thereof would be influenced by the voices and words of others around him.

L. Moffitt Cecil writes of Benjy's language and makes many conclusions about the plausibility and also the genesis of Benjy's internal discourse through minute analysis of every noun, verb, adjective, adverb and more. Cecil writes:

Though it is understood that an interior monologue is not actually spoken, but instead is thought or experienced by a persona; and though it is conceded that the omniscient author, as monitor, reports to the reader the flux of images and ideas which transpire; still, dramatic integrity demands that both the content of the monologue and the language in which it is recorded be peculiarly and consistently appropriate to that persona whose consciousness is being exposed. The author is merely the medium, the transcriber, who assists in the communicative process. (33)

But does Benjy's internal monologue really fit the persona presented to others in reality? Cecil continues to investigate Benjy's rhetoric by breaking down many key moments in his narratorial section through each word and the punctuation that follows. Cecil writes, "Ironically, it can be said of Benjy Compson, perhaps more truthfully than of other characters in fiction, that he will be known by his 'speech'" (34). Although obvious, this is one of the most important realizations to start the process of understanding the character who is Benjy, his role within his family and the telling of each individual's story, including his own. His internal monologue is everything; his voice to the reader tells one the all-encompassing story of the Compsons. Without his introduction and shaping of the Compsons life, as well as the lives of the African-American workers on their property, one could never see the whole picture come together. But his section is more than just the Prologue to an Elizabethan play.

## **Chapter Five: The Animal Within**

Realizing the judgments of Benjy and his “animal-like” mind discussed earlier, one can conclude that he does have limitations and barriers around him, due to his mental deficiencies, that allow readers and critics, as well as Faulkner, to simplistically surmise Benjy as someone on the level of an animal. Cleanth Brooks writes of Benjy, “Benjy is locked almost completely into a timeless present. He has not much more sense of time than an animal has, and therefore he possesses not much more freedom than an animal does” (329). Again going back to Faulkner’s summation of Benjy but still taking it with a grain of salt, he was interviewed and asked whether Benjy could feel love: “Benjy wasn’t rational enough even to be selfish. He was an animal. He recognized tenderness and love though he could not have named them, and it was the threat to tenderness and love that caused him to bellow when he felt the change in Caddy” (Meriwether and Millgate 246).

Although critics, and even Faulkner, have dehumanized Benjy and continue to do that, what if his animal-like nature is more of a benefit than a disadvantage? What if his mind thinks in ways different than his family members’ that allows him to feel different things, find understanding in different ways, and not know of the pain and evil around him? Putting aside the broken language that is Benjy’s and his summation of the situations around him, whether they be the present or the past, as well as Faulkner’s expression of Benjy’s struggle connecting and understanding the language and actions of

others around him, what does come from his discourse is that of someone who's senses are quite receptive and more sensitive than others around him. If Benjy can be compared to an animal, he possesses more advantages through certain physical senses than his family members and others.

Looking closely at Benjy's use of language in terms of his senses, it could be argued that he suffers from synesthesia. What if, due to his muteness, his other senses were heightened and therefore stronger and more aware than other people's, such as his family's? Benjy reacts viscerally to everything around him. He says, "I could smell the cold"(4) as opposed to feeling it; "I could smell the clothes flapping" (9) as opposed to hearing them. When Benjy's and his sibling's grandmother, Damuddy, dies, Benjy knows he can smell it before anyone tells him what has happened. His sense of identifying aroma allows him to understand the world around him. This ability could be compared to a canine's, which does marginalize him, but he, and others, notice it to be something of a surprise or talent—something that is unmistakably different.

Benjy says of the smell he notices when his father passed away:

A door opened and I could smell it more than ever, and a head came out. It wasn't Father. Father was sick there...We went down stairs. The stairs went down into the dark and T.P. took my hand, and we went out the door, out of the dark. Dan was sitting in the back yard, howling. 'He smell it.' T.P. said. 'Is that the way you found it out.' (22)

T.P. asks the question to Benjy as he (T.P.) knows Benjy has found out that his father has died. When Benjy moans aloud T.P. is surprisingly shocked that Benjy could know, via the smell, that his father had just recently passed. Bodies do smell after death, but it had

been so soon that Benjy's sense of smell and understanding that it was death surpassed and exceeded everyone else's smell, and T.P. recognizes that.

Benjy's body presents itself to the reader as something unmistakably strong and uninfluenced from the rest of the world and his family. His sense of smell and/or synesthesia command such a voice for him that one cannot ignore the power behind it. He sees what others do not; he feels with everything in his body, but that power via his disability creates his marginalization. He deeply loves his sister, for she was his caregiver and mother figure. He lives in the memories of her, but can notice her absence when her name is used by other character's external discourse. Other family members like Benjy's mother, Caroline, and his brother, Jason, find themselves overcoming the obstacle that is Benjy's disability. His constant moaning aloud and impatience when things are taken away from him push the other characters to feel uncomfortable and anxiety-ridden. They try to control his loud moaning so that strangers do not comment or become disturbed by it. For the Compsons, one of their biggest hurdles is always trying to keep Benjy happy, calm and quiet.

## **Chapter Six: Mrs. Compson and The True Mother, Caddy**

The children's mother, Caroline Compson, is immediately introduced to the reader via Benjy's memories, and all one can think of is her utter annoyance and constant frustration with Benjy. After Benjy's first memory of delivering a letter with Caddy to Mrs. Patterson, he jumps into another moment from his childhood that shows Caroline's hypochondria and self-pitying attitude within the family dynamic:

"It's too cold out there." Versh said. "You dont want to go out doors."

"What is it now." Mother said.

"He wants to go out doors." Versh said.

"Let him go." Uncle Maury said.

"It's too cold." Mother said. "He'd better stay in. Benjamin. Stop that, now."

"It wont hurt him." Uncle Maury said.

"You, Benjamin." Mother said. "If you dont be good, you'll have to go to the kitchen."

"Mammy say keep him out the kitchen today." Versh said. "She say she got all that cooking to get done."

"Let him go, Caroline." Uncle Maury said. "You'll worry yourself sick over him."

"I know it." Mother said. "It's a judgment on me. I sometimes wonder."

"I know, I know." Uncle Maury said. "You must keep your strength up. I'll make you a toddy."

“It just upsets me that much more.” Mother said. “Dont you know it does.”  
(4)

This is the first instance we see that Caroline Compson disguises her self-centered, self-pitying, hypochondriac attitude within the family as worry and care for the children. The above quotation presents the family as having been quite accustomed to her neurotic, valetudinarian personality. Uncle Maury tries to calm his sister down by letting her know that it's best to let Benjy outside with Versh and be done with that conversation or she'll worry herself sick over it. He appeases her neurotic attitude by offering to make her a toddy.

The memory continues with Benjy and Versh outside in the cold on the Compson's property. Versh comments on Benjy's marginalization after Uncle Maury tells him to keep Benjy in the yard. Versh replies, ““Yes, sir.’ Versh said. ‘We dont never let him get off the place’” (4). Versh expresses to Uncle Maury that he (Versh) is fully aware of Benjy's mannerisms being different, not like everyone else and embarrassing to the Compson's, especially Caroline. The reader can feel the “Othering” Uncle Maury and Versh create for Benjy. There is no comment, no judgment or reflection by Benjy on these comments. He only reports the facts, but these small moments are important to note in order to see the distinction characters make between Benjy and everyone else.

Within the memory, the reader discovers soon that Benjy is still a child, but it is obvious that the family understands there is something different, a disability, about Benjy. That acknowledgment by the family is pointed out to the reader when the family changes his name from Maury to Benjamin. Continuing with the memory, out in the cold, feeling the frigid air with his body, Benjy runs to the gate waiting anxiously for someone.

Caddy comes up to it and we see a change in interactions with Benjy. Before, it is apparent that Benjy is a burden to others around him, even in the present with Luster. Everyone seems to be “handling” or baring the antics, the actions and the moans of Benjy. Caddy is different. Besides the small moment at the beginning with the letter being delivered to Mrs. Patterson with Caddy, this is the first instance the reader can feel the love Caddy shows to Benjy. Benjy revisits the memory, “‘Hello, Benjy.’ Caddy said. She opened the gate and came in and stooped down. Caddy smelled like leaves. ‘Did you come to meet me.’ she said. ‘Did you come to meet Caddy. What did you let him get his hands so cold for, Versh’” (5). There is a patience and desire to interact with Benjy. Caddy continues, “‘Did you come to meet Caddy.’ she said, rubbing my hands. ‘What is it. What are you trying to tell Caddy.’ Caddy smelled like trees and like when she says we were asleep” (5). Unlike the other characters such as his brothers, their mother and some of the African-American servants on their property, Caddy is the only one who truly has the love and patience Benjy needs and wants. As a young boy and someone who is always confined to the mind of a child, Benjy desires a mother figure. Caddy fills that void.

Benjy’s marginalization continues to present itself within his memories and in the present with Luster. His memories continue to show him as helpless and in need of other people’s assistance. He is constantly the topic of conversation for the Compsons and the African-American servants, like Dilsey. Benjy craves the outside world, the yard, and the smells. He wishes to go outside as much as possible, and it seems that others around him have to pain over the fact of dressing him properly for the weather. Faulkner shows that Benjy is incapable of caring for himself. Visualize a spectrum with opposite ends where



the Compsons, such as Caroline, Jason, Sr., Jason Jr. and Quentin are on one side of things, and Benjy and the African-American servants are on the other. Caddy can sometimes sit in the middle, confusing the reader to not know where she fits—who are her people? Another spectrum can be introduced where the Compsons are on one side, the servants on the other, and Benjy sits in the middle, lost and unable to find his identity. Caddy travels back and forth between the Compsons and Benjy's location. She searches for love and acceptance along that spectrum, finding that she loves her role caring for and loving Benjy like a mother.

Caddy's love, care, and patience for Benjy never ceases within his memories. When he is in need, she always chooses him over others. She understands that no one within her family is in his metaphorical corner, defending him and showing that he is not someone to be "dealt with" or handled. She shows the beautiful side of Benjy—that he is a person who desires love and affection and connectedness with others. Caddy continues to defend him while their mother views Benjy with pity and embarrassment, calling him a "poor baby." Caddy says, "You're not a poor baby. Are you. Are you. You've got your Caddy. Haven't you got your Caddy" (6). She repeats herself to Benjy, hoping he understands that she is a constant in his life. She would never stop loving him and will always be there for him. Eventually Benjy's memories show that Caddy marries a man and leaves the Compson family. She leaves Benjy and creates that emptiness within him—no more mother figure. But within these recent memories, Caddy shows the reader, through Benjy, that she is his defender and his protector.

Returning to a spectrum visual again, Caddy pushes and pulls back and forth between aligning herself with the Compsons—the Southern, white, Aristocratic family trying to find footing post-Civil War—and attaching herself to the middle where Benjy sits. She seems to always love and protect Benjy. She is his first and usually only defender of the love and humanity that lies within him. But there begins a change early on in their childhood where Caddy's womanhood, her promiscuity and her desire to explore those things take precedence. Within a family of boys with a mother who is constantly in bed and shows herself to be no proper role model or embodiment of love or affection, it's hard to blame Caddy for her obstinate mind and her curiosity about life outside the Compson pasture and property. She starts losing her grip on the mother figure role she has created for herself early on when the reader sees the vision from Faulkner that started this "beautiful failure" as he called it.

The vision that started this journey of the Compson's downfall shows a little girl in a tree with muddied drawers while she looks to see what is happening within her family's house. She climbs up the tree against the orders of Versh, and as she peers into a window of the Compson house across the pasture, her brothers look up and stare at her muddy bottom. This vision of Faulkner's started the story that we know today as *The Sound and the Fury*. In order to understand more of Benjy and his reactions to his surroundings, Caddy must be explored. Faulkner was fascinated by this vision of his. During another interview with Faulkner, he is asked how *The Sound and the Fury* began. Faulkner explains:

It began with a mental picture. I didn't realize at the time it was symbolical. The picture was of the muddy seat of a little girl's drawers in

a pear tree where she could see through the window where her grandmother's funeral was taking place and report what was happening to her brothers on the ground below. By the time I explained who they were and what they were doing and how her pants got muddy, I realized it would be impossible to get all of it into a short story and that it would have to be a book. And then I realized the symbolism of the soiled pants, and that image was replaced by the one of the fatherless and motherless girl climbing down the rainpipe to escape from the only home she had, where she had never been offered love or affection or understanding. (Meriwether and Millgate 245)

This dream, this vision of Faulkner's is the wholeness of the picture that is *The Sound and the Fury*. Caddy is at the center of it all, her everything embedded into the minds of all the characters around her. Her family member's and servants' lives all revolve around her actions and the consequences that follow.

Caddy's promiscuity creates the downfall for the Compsons. In the first section, Benjy introduces Caddy as his mother figure, his only companion and true defender of his humanity and love. Once Benjy reveals through his memories the moment Caddy muddies her bottom and climbs the tree, as well as the moments leading up to that vision (her demanding her brothers obey her while the children go outside during the grandmother's funeral in the family home), Caddy's entire being, this portrait of a loving, mother figure hoping to understand Benjy and always protect him, starts to disintegrate in front of the reader. Her goals, her lusts and desires to explore her sexuality, overtake her and show the true Caddy Compson. But what encapsulates the boys' minds, the being of the entire novel, is the downfall that is Caddy Compson and also her daughter, Quentin Compson. Judith L. Sensibar writes about the women in Faulkner's life and their influence on him and his writing:

Caddy Compson, the passionate center of his first great novel, never speaks to us directly. We are not allowed inside her head. The only way we ever hear her speak is through the minds of her three brothers. For each, her speech, her smell, her feel, her taste, the sight of her slight, lovely, literally and figuratively blackened body, almost constantly in motion, is the erotic core of their being. Fantasies of her dominate their waking lives. Her image rules their dreams. Her fierce courage, her constant violations of authority, her humor and compassion, her sheer sexual energy simultaneously excites and repulses them. (481-482)

Caddy is at the center of everyone's lives, because her growth from a little girl into a young woman and then into an adult creates the backdrop that is the downfall of the Compsons. Her actions show the reader that she, as well as her brothers, is a fatherless, motherless child trying to grasp life in the Post-Civil War, aristocratic South. Without the example of competent parents, Caddy's body and desires overtake her future, and she falls down a promiscuous path that ultimately destroys any possible future she had.

Although Caddy's actions and her body are at the center of novel, it is important and at the center of this thesis to understand Benjy's reactions to those actions. In every section of the novel—Benjy's, Quentin's, Jason's and the omniscient narrator at the end—everyone's lives and stories are in reaction to Caddy's actions. From disobeying authority to her inquisitive mind about her sexuality and lack of respect for southern patriarchy, Caddy's presence within Benjy's memories and narration only show negativity and despair for the Compsons. From her moment in the branch with Charlie, to pregnancy and birth out of wedlock, to her short-lived marriage to Herbert Hand, Caddy's actions defy everything that her Southern, aristocratic, white family stands for.

Caroline Compson is the perceived embodiment of white, Southern, aristocratic values and charm. She holds onto her illusive vision of strong patriarchy, order and

proper etiquette, as well as the social status that comes with her family's name. Before she was a Compson, she was always a young woman from the proper, aristocratic South whose image was everything. When she realized something was different with her youngest child, Maury (Benjy), she immediately wanted to change his name to not associate him with her family heritage. Although his sister Caddy and brother Quentin still loved and were sympathetic towards the situation at hand, Caroline couldn't bear to let her disabled son ruin her reputation.

Benjy Compson's name change signals his family's acknowledgment of his marginalization, and by changing his name, they "other" him. They create the space that is between Benjy and everyone else. Caroline Compson creates that space the more Benjy's memories show her to be more concerned with social status rather than being a competent mother. While in the present day that is April 7, 1928, Luster selfishly reaches for another piece of Benjy's birthday cake, and as Dilsey reaches to smack his hand and tell him not to take another piece before Benjy has had some, Benjy's mind retreats back to the memory that is the changing of his name:

*That's right, Dilsey said, I reckon it'll be my time to cry next. Reckon Maury going to let me cry on him a while, too.*

*His name is Benjy now, Caddy said.*

*How come it is, Dilsey said. He aint wore out the name he was born with yet, is he.*

*Benjamin came out of the bible, Caddy said. It's a better name for him than Maury was.*

*Mother says it is, Caddy said.*

*Huh, Dilsey said. Name aint going to help him. Hurt him, neither.*

*Folks dont have no luck, changing names. My name been Dilsey since for I could remember and it be Dilsey when they's long forgot me. (37)*

When Caroline says that Maury's name must be changed and Quentin suggests Benjamin, this is the moment the children's mother rejects Benjy as her child. She is ashamed of the disability he has and what judgments that could bring upon her as a mother.

Dr. Robert L. Blake delves deep into the Compsons to bring about analysis and understanding to better understand the idea of the family dynamic. He says of Benjy's name change, "The transposition of roles between Candace and Mrs. Compson is most dramatically evident in the Benjy section [...] The name change represents his rejection by his mother. Benjy looks to Candace for the tenderness, affection, and care that he needs" (323). Blake states that once Benjy's name is changed, Caroline rejects her son and chooses herself over him. Caddy therefore steps in as the mother figure to Benjy and fills the love within both herself and Benjy that was missing from their mother. By attaching herself to Benjy, Caddy finds love and acceptance from him that would never be expressed from their mother. By assimilating herself with Benjy as his caretaker and mother, Candace "others" herself and starts her journey of displacement from the Compson family and heritage.

## **Chapter Seven: Benjy and Caddy**

Although Caddy is at the center of the family and this novel, and her promiscuous actions lead to the downfall of the Compsons, it is easy for the reader to feel love and compassion towards her at the beginning of Benjy's story. When Benjy is found to be mentally disabled, Caddy is the only one to fill that hole within him—that lack of compassion and love towards him—the mother figure. It is understandable that readers can feel frustration and anger towards Caddy for her actions, but her love and constant comfort for and to Benjy can overshadow her irresponsible and sexually indiscriminate life. When the kids are children, Dilsey constantly calls on Caddy to come to Benjy's aid and calm him down. She shows patience and understanding towards him while he cries many times over. She searches for answers and reasons as to why he may be upset. In a very loving and tolerable way, Caddy wants to know what her little brother is thinking.

Key moments of Benjy and Caddy's interaction are usually marked by Benjy's memory of Caddy's smell. She always exudes the pleasantness of a tree's smell. Benjy associates that with her innocence. While growing up, Benjy always referred to Caddy as smelling like trees. That smell also is always associated with Caddy comforting Benjy or him finding peace at that moment. Nature and the world outside the Compson house is always a place for Benjy to retreat to, whether he knows it or not. His body constantly craves the pasture and the vegetation around it. He finds calm within it all. Caddy's

aroma of smelling like trees is another way for Benjy to find peace and understanding. That constant becomes order for him, and order for him is everything. When Caddy isn't present or cannot calm Benjy down, a jimson weed or flower is given to him. Dilsey and Luster are aware of the power of nature for Benjy. Although critics may see the jimson weeds and flowers given to Benjy as just something for him to play with and hold, like a tangible object to distract him, there is too much evidence showing his body's beautiful connection to nature and the harmony it brings him.

As something that could be attributed to his disability, Benjy's sense of smell and how it assesses situations and people around him, that sense starts to notice a change in Caddy. Going back to Berube's critique of disability studies within great pieces of literature and his assessment that Benjy's formidable memory presents to readers this "superpower" or "enhanced ability to make spatial and emotional associations across many years" (575), Berube missed the point of Benjy's biological reaction to the changes in people and events around him. His sense of smell, which may seem unimportant or trivial to others in the grand scheme of things, reveals his visceral reaction to Caddy's change via her sexual adventures. His memory is quite important and is understood as something of a power, as he is able to traverse with ease the timeline of memories of the Compsons; but his body is overlooked.

Certain memories of Caddy that Benjy's mind traverses show the reader that Caddy's smell perceived through Benjy indicates changes in her sexual maturity. As stated previously, a constant for Benjy is Caddy smelling like trees. Caddy always being outside with Benjy and down by the branch where she plays with her siblings connects



Benjy even more to nature. For Benjy, a connection to nature equals connection to Caddy. When Benjy's mind reverts to the memories of Caddy's wedding, he notices a change in her immediately after her wedding. Never liking when other men take Caddy away from him, Benjy can smell a difference in Caddy after her wedding. While Benjy's mind navigates the first time he ingested alcohol and became quite drunk with T.P., Versh and Quentin, he notices something different about Caddy when he hugs her. Benjy remembers while he stumbles about with T.P and Quentin, "Caddy put her arms around me, and her shining veil, and I couldn't smell trees anymore and I began to cry" (26). Although Benjy's mind is heavily altered from the alcohol, the change in Caddy's scent upsets Benjy because he knows she has changed. Order is important for Benjy, but any change with Caddy befuddles Benjy's mind to not understand and fear the possible loss of her.

For a mentally disabled character such as Benjy, order is what allows him to find peace and semblance in his life, but order with Caddy—his mother figure, his everything—is especially important. He connects familiarity with Caddy and her routine with him. Caddy coming home from school, Caddy playing with Benjy, Caddy comforting Benjy when he is crying, Caddy falling asleep with Benjy—all those actions and moments allow Benjy to feel grounded and at peace, because there has been repetition of those actions. Because she is his mother figure, Benjy does not want another man to take his position as the cared-for one. Caddy never underestimates Benjy understanding her and always searches for ways to understand him. Another memory that Benjy relives appears when Jason answers Caddy's question as to why Benjy is upset, "*Benjy, Caddy said, Benjy. She put her arms around me again, but I went away.* 'What is

it, Benjy.’ she said. ‘Is it this hat.’ She took her hat off and came again, and I went away. ‘Benjy.’ she said. ‘What is it, Benjy. What has Caddy done’” (26). Caddy pains herself constantly to find ways in which she has upset Benjy, aware that it is sometimes her actions that cause him to cry. Jason explains to Caddy, “‘He dont like that prissy dress.’ Jason said. ‘You think you’re grown up, dont you. You think you’re better than anybody else, dont you. Prissy’” (26). Jason notices the change in Caddy as well and points it out to her. This moment is one of the changes in Caddy that Benjy fears. Benjy perceives this change in her maturity and sexuality as something quite different and unfamiliar to him. Even though Benjy cannot name what has happened, he feels the change and does not like that it pulls Caddy away from him.

Another moment happens when they are still children and Caddy tries on perfume and her scent changes. Benjy reacts the same way as with any change with Caddy, because he knows it is unfamiliar and different than her tree scent. Although they are still just teenagers, Caddy notices how much the perfume affects Benjy. She decides to give it to Dilsey as a gift from Benjy. Her scent goes back to smelling like trees. All these moments when Caddy is maturing and Benjy can smell or see a difference in her body are negative and filled with pain. He cries out and becomes quite upset seeing these changes, because he can feel that something is different. The difference, the change creates a feeling of loss in Benjy—a feeling of moving forward in a different direction.

Through all the memories Benjy’s mind traverses, there is a clear picture of his family and their dynamic. Each section, Benjy’s, Quentin’s, Jason’s and the objective narrator’s, revolves around the past. Although there are many moments in the present, the

Compson's minds, thoughts and actions are constantly positioned within the past. Each narration is focused around Caddy and her role to each of the brother's. She leaves a hole within the family, pushing each of them to fill it with something or someone else. Benjy finds solace in order. Caddy leaves him and goes off to have a baby, marry a man, divorce and subsequently be banished from their family. Benjy fills his days with the reliving of the memories containing her sweet, tree-like scent. Quentin is consumed with the thought of incest and how much he covets his sister's innocence. Southern aristocratic patriarchy is what he will always stand for and believes in, but he fears his mind and thoughts as they continue to circle back to Caddy and her promiscuity. Jason is consumed with anger as he cares for Caddy's daughter, Quentin, named after the late brother. Jason takes advantage of his sister's child support via the money she sends. He felt betrayed in the past when she divorced her husband who promised Jason a job. The entire story circles back around when yet another Compson girl, Quentin, betrays her family and leaves them once again.

The major constant throughout the lives of the Compsons is Benjy and his extraordinary mind and body. But why didn't Faulkner just create a Prologue or an omniscient narrator to tell of the Compsons downfall? Why create a character so indiscernible, so complex and quite disabled to tell of the Compson's life? What does the reader, as well as the author, have to gain by hearing about the beginning and the end of the Compsons through the eyes of a mentally handicapped family member? Wouldn't it be easier to just employ a Prologue or omniscient narrator to tell the story of Compsons? Indeed it may be easier and more understandable via either of those ways, but Faulkner realized something more beautiful, more complex about the tale told by an idiot.

Although he continued to constantly refer to Benjy as an animal and one who should be pitied and grieved over, he still employed Benjy with a task grander than Faulkner really attributes to him.

Benjy is given the task of creating the living bubble of the Compsons. Benjy lays the foundation of their lives, as well as his, in the first narration to give structure, grounded-ness and stability to the story. Faulkner's obsession with disability and the ways to utilize it within his narration, as can be seen in other stories, manifests itself through Benjy in inexplicable ways. It allows the reader to see into almost the entire history of the Compsons via Benjy's intricate memory. It seems almost impossible to imagine a sane character, one that is fully-able to interact with others rationally, as well as take care of one's self, who could go through the multitude of memories, reliving them throughout the day via external triggers just as Benjy does. It seems difficult to find normalcy behind that act, as reliving memories as present day actions can be concluded as something quite odd. Therefore, Faulkner had to create a mind that could do that—someone who could lay the foundation of the Compson's lives with ease. Benjy and his disability allowed for it, and although Faulkner feels pity and shame for Benjy, he (Faulkner) did not understand or realize that Benjy's mind, from childhood to present day, has developed into something, not less than his siblings and others around him, but indeed vastly different. As mentioned earlier, Benjy's disabled mind reaches depths unimaginable and unexplored by Faulkner, allowing him (Faulkner) to give, either intentionally or unintentionally, the reader a character so moldable and unattached to any stereotype, form, model or idea within literature. The reader sees and feels a character who is able to be explored and understood more than any of the other characters.

Benjy's position within this story can be viewed through many different lenses. He could be seen as marginalized and "Othered" by Faulkner to be the dummy to his ventriloquism. His internal discourse, as well as his bodily actions, could be interpreted as inauthentic and hyperbolic; and many readers could take him for what he is interpreted as on the surface: an idiot full of sound and fury, signifying nothing as implied by the title. Yet critics and readers alike continue to be perplexed and fascinated by this creation. With all the criticism and research in the world since Faulkner produced his "failure," what is to be gained from analyzing Benjamin Compson? What does Faulkner tell us of the lives of white, Southern, aristocratic human beings and their understanding and interactions with mentally disabled characters? What does Benjy's narration tell the reader of Faulkner's understanding and representation of mentally handicapped individuals? Does he attribute nothing of significance to Benjy Compson and other like characters within his narratives? Or does he employ them as tools to lay the framework of everything and everyone around them to the reader? Are they only tools, dolls to Faulkner's puppeteering, to create the foundation of the stories to come? Or did Faulkner realize and understand the power and beauty behind their disabilities, behind Benjy Compson's disability? Is he not an extraordinary character who withstands the trials and tribulations of the Compsons, undergoes the loss of his mother figure, and continues on to live his life and find comfort in order? Does he not endure, just like Dilsey?

All strong and important questions, but the basis of this thesis finds strength and understanding in arguing that Benjy Compson's narration is more than just "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury." His mind, complex and strange as it may seem, continues to be critiqued on the level of normalcy that we as humans, some uninhibited

by disability, judge to be odd and disabled. The level of judgment, the line, the plane as it could be imagined, needs to be reevaluated and changed. Faulkner finds more depth and range within Benjy's disabled mind. Benjy does not fit a mold, a stereotype or is structured or confined into a mold of a man that society wants him to be. With more of the blank slate that Faulkner saw in Benjy, more space is created within and around Benjy to be the narrator Faulkner needs him to be. His disability allows him to not associate or fit into any conventional form, thus allowing Faulkner to create, discover and reveal more life within Benjy.

As readers and critics are able to see Marvel's fictional Spiderman and DC's Superman as characters with extraordinary powers unlike that of human beings, able to add value and life and beauty to our world, cannot the same be said for other disabled characters like Benjy Compson? Can we not finally see that his mind and memory vastly surpass the common man's brain? Can his disability not be seen as a hindrance anymore, but something of an extraordinary skill? Is it not true that man only finds advancement, expansion of the mind and future possibilities when the mind is opened to understand things differently, to shake up the status quo?

Reimagining Benjy in a different aspect less as someone with a disability but more as someone with extraordinary abilities still does not change how his handicap affects everyone else and the actions his family takes to inhibit his mind. Faulkner's use of Benjy's disability does reveal the lack of patience and understanding others around him have as they care for and try to interact with him. Disability is the negation of ability, and that's all that others see in Benjy—that he is unable to act normally and take care of

himself. But those judgments only scratch the surface that is Benjy Compson. The reader sees through his internal discourse that the language of his mind is quite normal and more understandable than one would expect from a mentally disabled individual. He recaptures the past with ease as external markers thrust him into his memories to be relived all over again, and the reader sits in amazement at the clarity of each recollection. But as his disability creates this plane in which he can navigate between the past and the present without difficulty in the slightest, his defect or abnormality pushes him into a lonely, uninhabited bubble of the “Other.” His marginalization via his disability creates his “Othering” and only allows the reader to see his internal discourse containing his own understandings, love and fear. Although he may not have the words to describe certain feelings, his body and the visceral feelings that come with his reactions indicate more than the reader may see initially.

Circling back to Hagood’s interpretations of disability within many of Faulkner’s text, he gives more credit to Benjy than Faulkner has attributed. Hagood claims in his most recent endeavor, *Faulkner, Writer of Dis-Ability*:

In sacrificing rather than overworking authenticity, Faulkner either intentionally or unintentionally introduces the possibility of Benjy’s also working within his own secret machinery of textuality in a way that runs counter to the dynamics and assumptions of Faulkner’s using him as a puppet. (103)

Hagood sees through the text that Benjy’s internal discourse indicates the golfer’s calling for their “caddie.” Benjy makes the distinction between Caddy, his sister, and a caddie on the golf course through the different, appropriate spellings. Hagood continues:

Intentionally or not, Faulkner gives us the possibility that Benjy is more prescient (and his cognitive disability even less quantifiable) than he has been seen as being by other characters as well as by readers. And this possibility leads the way to the further possibility that the great tragedy of Maury/Benjamin Compson is not that he is sadly and ironically confused by anything that sounds like the name of his sister but rather that the signifier itself (and the phoneme which he knows refers to the signifier) carries a much more complex set of meanings that are equally and just as deeply troubling and sad to him. (103)

Hagood beautifully makes apparent that Benjy knows and points out the distinction between “caddie” and “Caddy,” but the sound they both carry still pains him so, because that points to the deep meaning and loss of his sister. The language and sound of words affects Benjy more than the meaning behind them, regardless of his understanding them or not. Whether Faulkner meant to write “caddie” for the reader to make the distinction between the golfer’s assistants and Benjy’s sister, Caddy, it still came from within Benjy’s internal discourse. Benjy feels the pain of the word “Caddy or caddie” being spoken because either which way of being spelled, he still connects those words to the loss of his sister.

Taking away the picture that is given to the reader of Benjy’s outward appearance:

A big man who appeared to have been shaped of some substance whose particles would not or did not cohere to one another or to the frame which supported it. His skin was dead looking and hairless; dropsical too, he moved with a shambling gait like a trained bear, (Faulkner 171)

his mind still remains to be complex, and although he may be unaware of this complexity, Faulkner uses Benjy’s disability as an advantage to create a character to lay the framework and foundation of the story of the Compsons. Even though the reader hears of Benjy’s mistreatment by his brother Jason, the threats to send him to a mental



institution in Jackson, and his castration after “attacking” young girls on their way home from school, Benjy’s mind still stands the test of time and pain. For this broken family that lives in the past, has been without a mother’s love and the children’s lack of understanding as to the path they should follow in life, Benjy’s “disabled” mind, his internal discourse, given to the reader via the mouthpiece that is Faulkner, is the only way to properly communicate the foundation of the Compsons.

## Chapter Eight: Darl and The Bundrens

Darl Bundren stands his ground as being one of Faulkner's most linguistically endowed characters. One of five of the Bundren children, Darl comes into the world different, unlike any of his siblings. As stated earlier in the Introduction, the Bundrens and other characters within *As I Lay Dying* each tell the story of their lives and interactions with each other as the matriarch passes away; her final wish is to be buried in her original hometown of Jefferson. Addie Bundren, the mother of Darl, Cash, Jewel, Dewey Dell and Vardaman and wife to Anse Bundren, lies in her bed, slipping closer to death with every breath as her family and friends cope with her dying in their own ways. The title of the novel comes from a speech by Agamemnon in Homer's *The Odyssey*, "that occurs as Agamemnon, in Hades, relates to Odysseus the manner of his death: 'As I lay dying, the women with a dog's eyes would not close for me my eyelids as I descended into Hades'" (Fowler 48). The title apparently disturbed Faulkner's mind for years as he purported that death is quite uncertain and there is a disgrace to it.

As Addie Bundren slowly passes away at the beginning of the story, her family searches for meaning, working to fill the void that she leaves within each of their lives. In contrasting fashion to *The Sound and the Fury*, yet similar in many ways, *As I Lay Dying* is all about action. Her family makes the physical and treacherous journey to bury her with her family. The Bundrens face the agonizing truth that Addie has passed, and

they promised to honor her last wish to bury her body in another town. Similar to *The Sound and the Fury* in the fact that the story is told many times through the eyes of different characters via first-person narration, *As I Lay Dying* reveals to the reader that the Bundrens, a destitute, Southern family, can only go up from their current situation. There is a future for them, and although it may seem dim and quite selfish, they all move forward hoping to find new and better opportunities after Addie's death. Hyatt H. Waggoner says it quite succinctly, "The structural metaphor in *As I Lay Dying* is a journey through life to death and through death to life" (62). The family carries Addie's body to Jefferson to be buried, and then Anse Bundren finds life once again through new, wooden teeth and a new Mrs. Bundren.

Darl Bundren, the second eldest son, tells of his family's story and their journey to Jefferson through nineteen of the fifty-nine sections of the first person narrations. His voice is the most distinct, original, and remembered. He also exhibits signs of clairvoyance as he explains in specific detail his mother's death while being many miles away from the actual moment it occurs. His vocabulary and language spark many questions by others around him, as well as within the reader. If this family is so poor and destitute, only knowing the dialect of pitiable, Southern, whites, how does Darl fit into the equation? Is he believable enough to narrate so much of the Bundren's story? Did Faulkner push the envelope when creating Darl, attributing to him a thought-provoking internal discourse and a self-reflecting mind vastly different from his family so that he couldn't possibly be related to the rest of the Bundrens? All these questions are still asked amongst critics to this day as they investigate the language, the role, and the position Faulkner placed Darl Bundren within *As I Lay Dying*.

There is much more ease to reading and exploring the journey of the Bundrens compared to the Compsons. They all chronologically move forward through time as each family member and friend narrates the present. Rarely do the family members or friends revert back to the past in narrations. Both stories tell of the inner-workings of families as they try to grow to fill the void their matriarchs leave. The Compsons never had a capable mother to start with as Caroline Compson cares only about her family's name and status within the white, aristocratic South. Addie Bundren's role as a mother contained much more love and affection towards her children, as well as self-reflection and a hope for independence. Olga W. Vickerey writes, "Centrifugally, each section establishes the relationship between Addie and the character whose thoughts and observations are being recorded" (55). A destitute, husband, Addie's companion, Anse Bundren, is more like Caroline Compson than he is akin to Jason, Sr. Anse's constant voicing that he cannot do hard labor and physically contribute to his family quickly shows the reader that Anse is simply lazy and relies heavily on his able-bodied children. Without them, he would have nothing, which is why he deeply fears losing Darl in the end.

Through language and consciousness of thought, both novels search to tell a story of the inner-workings of each one's minds and internal struggles. Darl, like Benjy, is given a role within the story to create a foundation, a framework for his family members and other characters to reveal their true motives and moral fiber while on their journey. But unlike Benjy, Darl is able to speak and use his voice through external discourse. He judges and finds understanding and meaning through his language in order to cope with his mother's death. As one who is entrusted with speaking and knowing more than others, Darl searches for meaning within himself and is found wanting more than what his life

currently has to offer. His self-reflection, sparked from the loss of his mother, pushes him to re-evaluate his true self, his purpose and what he feels deeply about—a lack of love from his mother and an “Othering” done by her and the rest of his family. Faulkner builds a lot of the framework of the story on Darl’s disability—the awareness his mind and senses have acquired through the knowledge of his mother’s affair and bastard child, his brother, Jewel, as well as her death and what that has forced his mind to question—all in order to use Darl’s position within his family to better lay the framework of their inner-workings as a family.

In order to understand Darl, we are given his internal discourse. Other pieces to the puzzle come in the form of other people’s perspectives of Darl, and those are just as important to note. Like Benjy’s introduction, Darl shows no initial signs of disability or abnormal idiosyncrasies. And just like Benjy’s, Darl’s description of his surroundings and of others dazzle the reader to beautifully picture, with exactness, each setting through Darl’s eyes. Not only does Darl astound his reader with beautiful descriptions of the scenes around him, he describes his siblings and others with exquisite detail, as well as attributing elegance to their form. He opens his family’s story thinking within his mind of the form and movements of his brother Jewel as they walk in a field together:

Still staring straight ahead, his pale eyes like wood set into his wooden face, he crosses the floor in four strides with the rigid gravity of a cigar store Indian dressed in patched overalls and endued with the life from the hips down, and steps in a single stride through the opposite window and into the path again just as I come around the corner. (Faulkner 4)

There is an overwhelming amount of meticulousness as Darl breaks down Jewel’s body for the reader. From his wooden-like mouth, to his hips and the strides in his path,

Jewel's body is dissected with exactitude, which in turn arouses questions in the reader as to the reason behind Darl's fierce curiosity and obsession with his brother. Does he speak of other characters this way, with such detail?

Darl's explanations of his brother's actions express to the reader that his narrations focus heavily on Jewel and his life. Although unbeknownst to the reader at the beginning of the story, Darl's perceptiveness concludes that there is something different about Jewel—something that makes him Addie's favorite child. This becomes an overwhelming thought that Darl obsesses over, but more than that is the understanding and realization the reader gets in knowing that Darl's narrations lay the framework for the Bundrens. He does not speak of the past too much, but when he does it brings together the framework that is the Bundrens. Darl becomes the detective, and the reader begins to see the unraveling of his sibling's supposed pure objectives in taking their mother to Jefferson. What's more revealing in Darl's narrations in comparison to Benjy's is that Darl delves deep into his inner-self, searching for answers and purpose behind his existence. Darl feels with his whole body, and it is heavily apparent in his descriptions of people, nature and the moments around him. Like Benjy, Darl sees so much, but others around him cannot understand his constant voyeurism and reflective thoughts about things. Both men within their respective stories, laid out by Faulkner, are forced into a position of voyeur and storyteller, but Faulkner reveals that Darl takes it a little deeper. Unlike Benjy, Darl's ability to use his voice and external discourse throughout the journey with himself and his family pushes him to reevaluate his life and what he finds true meaning in.

## Chapter Nine: The Beginning—Addie's Death

It is immediately apparent that Darl opens the novel with superlative diction as he effortlessly describes, via his internal discourse, the scene around him. The reader also hears of Addie's death and funeral from other individuals close to the family. Cora Tull, a friend of Addie's, as well as her husband, Vernon Tull, see into the lives of the Bundrens and comment internally on the situation at hand. Relying heavily on her piousness and faith in God, Cora believes herself to be the epitome of a strong, faithful, Christian woman. As Cora stands by Addie's side, assisting her in any way possible, she describes the Bundren matriarch in her last hours:

The quilt is drawn up to her chin, hot as it is, with only her two hands and her face outside. She is propped on the pillow, with her head raised so she can see out the window, and we can hear him every time he takes up the adze or saw. (Faulkner 8)

Cora gives a bleak yet accurate picture of her dying friend. She continues, "If we were deaf we could almost watch her face and hear him, see him. Her face is wasted away so that the bones draw just under the skin in white lines...But the eternal and the everlasting salvation and grace is not upon her" (8). As close of a companion as Cora may seem to Addie, her sketch of her dying friend feels less than forgiving. There is harshness and dreariness to her depiction of her friend, and she believes for some reason Addie is not destined to have her name in the good Lord's book.

Not only is Cora starkly honest about her friend's condition, she is more concerned with other things, as are the other women in the room. William J. Handy says that within the scene that Cora is visiting Addie, "Cora is a spectator at Addie's bedside from curiosity more than sympathy" (440). There is an inquisitiveness within Cora, a desire to know more and to act like the strong friend and comforter she hopes others see in her. Within this first section, Cora sits in the room with Kate and Eula discussing cakes that Cora sometimes makes for sale. There is a cloud of superficial air within the room as Cora thinks back and forth between the profile of her dying friend and the cakes she wasn't able to sell today:

'She ought to take those cakes when she same as gave her word,' Kate says. The Lord can see into the heart. If it is His will that some folks has different ideas of honesty from other folks, it is not my place to question His decree. 'I reckon she never had any use for them,' I say. They turned out real well, too. (Faulkner 8)

Cora then slips back into her somber, internal discourse, describing her friend's slow death.

From Cora's thoughts, the reader sees a certain visual of Addie. Handy writes, "We do not see Addie in them; we see Addie as Cora sees her" (441). There is a judgment passed from Cora that elevates her pious self above Addie. She justifies everything through her Judeo-Christian God as she uses religion as her way to judge others. Handy continues as he makes a convincingly strong point as to what the ladies in the room represent:

Like the buzzards that will circle the coffin throughout its long journey, the ladies of the sick-room are at once a presence which is both ludicrous and ominous—comic in what they suggest of gossipy, dissembling



women, but tragically ominous in what they suggest of man's relationship to his fellow man. (441)

These women's intentions seem much less heart-felt as they muse about cakes and selling them to others, because at those moments, the reader can see into the true heart of each of them. There is selfishness to each of them as they hover around Addie like the soon-to-be buzzards that will circle her body along the journey—it adds more merit to the title that death is oftentimes surrounded by selfishness and disgrace.

Darl continues his discourse, flowing in and out of the entire story, heavily focusing on Addie and Jewel. But not only does Darl describe his families' actions and musings, he vividly expresses to the reader the setting around him. It becomes apparent that he is quite connected to and finds serenity in nature, just like Benjy Compson. Darl thinks to himself:

When I was a boy I first learned how much better water tastes when it has set a while in a cedar bucket. Warmish-cool, with a faint taste like the hot July wind in cedar trees smells. It has set at least six hours, and be drunk from a gourd. Water should never be drunk from metal. (Faulkner 10-11)

Not only does Darl beautifully describe the setting, he is immersed in it, finding refuge within nature. Darl continues to explain Jewel's movements as Jewel shows his own obsession for his violent horse. There is a stunning exactness yet terrifying particularity to Darl's accounts of his brother, Jewel.

Jewel is only given one narratorial section in the entire novel, and it is a stark contrast to his voyeuristic brother's. There is an annoyance, a tension, an irritation within Jewel's narration. He looks upon Cash's sawing outside of Addie's window with disgust and repugnance. He thinks to himself that Cash has always been eager to please his

mother and is striving to do so with a perfect coffin for her body. He thinks of his brother, “It’s like when he was a little boy and she says if she had some fertilizer she would try to raise some flowers and he taken the bread pan and brought it back from the barn full of dung” (Faulkner 14). He can see that Cash always wanted his mother’s approval. Jewel continues:

And now them others sitting there, like buzzards. Waiting, fanning themselves. Because I said If you wouldn’t keep on sawing and nailing at it until a man cant sleep even and her hands laying on the quilt like two of them roots dug up and tried to wash and you couldn’t get them clean. I can see the fan and Dewey Dell’s arm. I said if you’d just let her alone. (Faulkner 15)

When Jewel says to himself, “just let her alone,” this is the first instance within his narration that the reader can see his care and concern for Addie. He sees all the commotion going on as she slips away. He can see that everyone’s motivations are not centered on what she would want. Cash saws away at the box to create a perfect enclosure for his mother’s body. The women and his sister, Dewey Dell, continue to circle around her bed with fans and chatter. His irritation is understandable, as he does not wish to be involved in the unnecessary chaos of it all.

As the narration continues, it jumps back to Darl and he sets the foundation for Anse Bundren, the parasitic husband and father who resembles Caroline Compson of *The Sound and the Fury*. Like Benjy, Darl gives the facts and truth to everything, but he also provides his honest opinion about it as well. With such detail, one wouldn’t question his honesty, and his family members reinforce the truth in his musings to himself. He says of his father:

The shirt across pa's hump is faded lighter than the rest of it. There is no sweat stain on his shirt. I have never seen a sweat stain on his shirt. 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. (Faulkner 17)

There is an honest picture set out before the reader of Darl's father, his shiftlessness and his constant parasitic nature as he thinks hard work will actually kill him. Although Anse is keeping this promise to take Addie to "her people" in Jefferson, there is still no actual love, compassion or sacredness within their marriage. Darl observes of Pa saying of the doctor coming to the house:

If he was to come tomorrow and tell her the time was nigh, she wouldn't wait. I know her. Wagon or no wagon, she wouldn't wait. Then she'd be upset, and I wouldn't upset her for the living world. With that family burying-ground in Jefferson and them of her blood waiting for her there, she'll be impatient. I promised my word me and the boys would get her there quick as mules could walk it, so she could rest quiet. (Faulkner 19)

At first, Anse tries to express to his friend Tull that he is a noble husband, keeping the promise of his wife to be buried in a certain place, a journey he must take with his family. He tries to express to anyone listening that he would sacrifice whatever it may be to fulfill this wish of hers. But this moment brings about an important question as to why Addie feels she must be buried in Jefferson with her original family? Why does she think of her mother, father and siblings as "her people" and not her own husband and children? Why does she wish to be buried away from her own home, away from her children?

As the novel continues, it becomes perceptible that Addie and Anse do not possess a strong, typically loving marriage. Cora notices, as well as others, that Addie does not feel she belongs with the rest of the Bundrens. Cora continues within another of her narrations:

Why, for the last three weeks I have been coming over every time I could, coming sometimes when I shouldn't have, neglecting my own family and duties so that somebody would be with her in her last moments and she would not have to face the Great Unknown without one familiar face to give her courage. (Faulkner 22)

Cora rambles on to herself, believing that she is Addie's savior in her last hours, standing by her side as the only face Cora thinks Addie would want to see. Cora continues her internal discourse with reflecting that she only hopes the same is done for her when she faces death one day. She feels an abundance of thankfulness and appreciation for her family that she believes truly loves her.

Cora continues on with another opinion of Addie, this one feeling much more candid as it becomes apparent later in the novel:

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. (Faulkner 23)

This section of Cora's hits the reader hard with a new realization that even she detests the entirety of the Bundrens, but her viewpoint of Addie due to their strong friendship is key in understanding the Bundrens from outside of their circle. Cora sees from just outside of the Bundrens the life Addie lived. She says earlier in the narratorial, "A Bundren through and through, loving nobody, caring for nothing except how to get something with the least amount of work" (Faulkner 22). Although this can definitely be said of Anse Bundren, it does not represent the children individually. But this judgment on the Bundrens does ring true, because Anse has instilled in his family that they must do whatever to get what they want, but make sure to do the least amount of work to get it.

This is the man who also believes he would die if he sweats. Cora's judgment on the Bundrens gives the reader a vivid picture of the Bundrens as Anse represents them in contrast to Addie.

Olga Vickery hits on many important points within *As I Lay Dying*, one of them being Addie's family's failure to take on the role of proper mourners. Vickery speaks of the bereavement that must and is usually expected to come along with the death and funeral of a loved one, "In contrast to her death, her funeral is a public affair, participated in and, indeed, supervised by the neighbors as well as the family" (52). Vickery speaks of the journey and how neighbors throughout Yoknapatawpha County can see the Bundrens haul Addie's body on the wagon to Jefferson. Vickery continues, "On this level she is simply the corpse which must be disposed of in accordance with a long established ritual of internment" (52). Vickery discusses the obvious feelings death and funerals bring about, as they should be sacred and full of bereavement and mourning. The Bundren's, especially Anse, struggle to show honest pain for the loss of their matriarch. That can be seen in all the children, and it is at the core of Darl's madness. Disregarding the sacredness that should accompany a death and funeral, Anse takes advantage of Addie's promise and journey to Jefferson. Vickery writes, "Anse undertakes a moral pilgrimage, but solely on the verbal level" (55). He plays the role of mourning husband well, putting on a façade for others that he is grief-stricken over his wife's passing. And although Cora can be seen as concerned with the superficial aspects and her selfish motives, she still does present the truth behind Anse's actions and words.

## **Chapter 10: Delving Into Darl's Mind and His Motives**

As can be seen via the title, Addie's life and death, her past actions and sins, her desires and wishes, are the nucleus of this narration. Her desire to be buried with her blood starts this journey to Jefferson for the entire Bundren clan. As the narration is moved along chronologically by family members and individuals around them, the reader sees each child grieve the loss of their mother in his or her own way. And as stated earlier that although Cora is more concerned with her image than other things, she sees, unlike others, that Darl is someone special. But what type of special is he? Just as other family members have ulterior motives behind going to Jefferson, the reader begins to see one in Darl. He hinges on his father's love of money by propositioning him to allow him and Jewel to depart to Tull's, deliver something, make three dollars and be back in time before mother passes. Anse, of course, agrees, and, although this is Darl's idea and he knows his mother will most likely pass before he is back with Jewel, he continues and leaves with his brother for the job. This is the first instance the reader can see of Darl having selfish, ulterior motives. As the narration continues, it becomes evident that Darl's sections focus on Jewel, as well as Addie. There is a fascination, a curiosity behind Addie and Jewel's relationship.

Although not apparent at first and becoming evident when one reads further into the Bundren journey, Darl is full of envy and anger towards his mother's relationship

with Jewel. Through his later narrations, the reader can see his curiosity in their relationship. He loves his mother dearly, but the reader can eventually see that she shows more affection towards Jewel. Darl, knowing that his mother will pass soon, wishes to pull Jewel out of the room during those last moments. He sees the opportunity to create a distance between Jewel and their mother by proposing to do this job for Tull. Before Anse agrees and sends Darl and Jewel off to try and make three dollars delivering something for Vernon Tull, he tells his boys to make sure they are back by sundown so as to not miss their mother's last breath. Tull assures Anse, Darl and Jewel that they will be back before Addie passes.

But Darl can sense she is closer to death than what Anse and Tull think. He can see more than others, as he is the voyeur of the family. He is the one who proposes to his father this job given to them by Tull, and that takes precedence over his love for his mother. Darl's anger and envy towards his mother's relationship with Jewel takes priority over his love for her, and he decides to create space between Jewel and Addie instead of being by her side during her final hours. It becomes apparent when Darl says, in his third narration, to his father, "'We'll need that three dollars then, sure,' I say... 'You'd better make up your mind soon, so we can get there and get a load on before dark,' I say" (17). There is hurriedness in Darl's voice as he hopes his father will take the bait to have his boys go off and make three dollars. Anse does agree, but the reader must think, what if Darl is wrong and she doesn't pass while they are gone. Dewey Dell, the only sister, confirms Darl's perceptiveness.

Darl's interaction with his sister, although small, hits the reader right between the eyes and confirms Darl's instincts and perceptive mind. Dewey Dell can see that he sees all and interprets quietly to himself. The only sister to the boys, Dewey Dell opens her first narration by speaking about her first time meeting with a young boy named Lafe in the past. Lafe, a neighbor boy, helps out the Bundrens just like most of the neighbors do. She speaks of helping out around their house and land and how her brothers are all preoccupied with their own doings. When she gets to Darl, she thinks of his lack of help around the land because of his over-thinking of everything, caught in his mind constantly. "And I did not think that Darl would, that sits at the supper table with his eyes gone further than the food and the lamp, full of the land dug out of his skill and the holes filled with distance beyond the land" (26-27). Dewey Dell does not think of Darl as someone who is lazy and uninvolved, but there is factuality to her perception of him as he sits and reflects almost too much about things.

Dewey Dell's predicament and her ulterior motive to go to Jefferson is revealed in her first narration as she thinks to herself that Darl's perceptiveness has allowed him to discover her secret:

And so it was because I could not help it. It was then, and then 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. (Faulkner 27)

Darl's silent voyeurism and clairvoyance is what others see in him. He speaks with his eyes, and others around him know that he knows their secrets. He can see that she had an



affair with Lefe and is now secretly pregnant with his child. Her ulterior motive to go to Jefferson is to get an abortion. Her thoughts then return to the present and she sees Darl standing in Addie's doorway. She asks him what he wants. As he stands there, he replies, "She is going to die." "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" (28). Darl knows Addie will pass within the next twenty-four hours, and as he stands at her doorway, he says goodbye to her with his eyes. Dewey Dell can see this, but questions why he's taking Jewel. Her curiosity suggests to the reader that maybe Darl doesn't need his brother's physical help in doing this job that he suggested to undertake while their mother lies dying in her bed.

Even though Cora sees there is something special about Darl, she, as well as everyone else, is blinded to his motives. He does not speak much throughout the novel, and the reader only gets to know him more by his internal discourse and by other's commentary on him and his actions. Before Jewel and Darl leave for the job to make the three dollars, Cora sees Darl stand in his mother's doorway, knowing that this will be the last time he sees his mother alive. She sees that there is still a love he has for his mother:

Except Darl. It was the sweetest thing I ever saw. Sometimes I lose faith in human nature for a time; I am assailed by doubt. But always the Lord restores my faith and reveals to me His bounteous love for His creatures. Not Jewel, the one she had always cherished, not him. He was after that three extra dollars. 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. (Faulkner 24)

Cora points out to the reader that people do marginalize Darl by calling him “queer, lazy and pottering about,” but she surprisingly comes to his aid. She sees in his eyes that he heavily mourns his mother’s soon-to-be death. Although she hears the judgments of others, she reaches her own conclusion about Darl, seeing that there is a grounded love within him. She peers through her Christian lenses to see a quiet son who shows his love through his eyes.

Cora continues her narration, explaining that she sees the beauty of humanity again in Darl as he stands at the door of his mother’s room, eyes full of sadness and pain, angered by his father agreeing to send him and Jewel away to make money. Cora knows that Darl knows he may not see his mother again after he leaves this room. As she stated earlier, she believes her faith in humanity is restored again as she sees Darl stare at his mother slowly passing away, hoping to be by her side when her last breath is taken. Cora sees the love in his eyes and just as her faith is restored in humanity, so is the reader’s in Cora, for the moment. We see the humanity in her as she observes and recognizes the beautiful connection between Darl and his mother. Although pain, anger and envy reside within Darl and his actions, he still wrestles with the fact of leaving his mother before her last breaths. He still feels a strong love for her, because she still is his mother and has shown him love throughout his life. He just knows of the stronger love and connection between Jewel and his mother, and knowing that, he searches for more understanding after she passes. That search begins his decent into strong self-introspection and ultimately his decent into madness as perceived by others.

Although it can be seen that the Bundrens are going through the actions of watching Addie die, bringing in the doctor beforehand, creating a beautiful, hand-made coffin, fulfilling her wish to haul her body and bury it in Jefferson, there is no cohesive honesty to the situation at all—those actions reveal themselves to be just motions. Vickery’s critique continues:

In reality, however, the journey from beginning to end is a travesty of the ritual of interment. Since there is no virtue attached simply to the meticulous repetition of its words and gestures, it is the individual who must give meaning and life to ritual by recognizing its symbolic function. (52-53)

Darl eventually realizes this and takes action at the end of their journey, feeling like no one but himself cares to actually fulfill her last wish and focus on that alone. Vickery notes that all of the catastrophic acts that occur along the journey to bury Addie in her hometown reveal the entire odyssey to contain an element of “macabre humor,” and that only becomes apparent “when the ritual is disengaged from its symbolic function” (53).

Peabody, the extremely overweight doctor who was sent for by Anse, comes into the picture, thinking of the travesty that is the death and burial of Addie. Similar to Anse, he is lazy and selfish thinking, “When Anse finally sent for me on his own accord, I said, ‘He has wore her out at last.’ And I said a damn good thing, and at first I would not go because there might be something I could do and I would have to haul her back, by God” (Faulkner 41). He does present the stark and unforgiving reality of the slow death of Addie. It is easy to judge Peabody and view him as a selfish, lazy, old man, but glimmers of truth come from his internal and external discourse. His opening to his narration says externally, “He has wore her out at last.” Peabody can see that Anse takes advantage of

his wife and her work ethic, wearing her down caring for all their children and the home. But another glimmer of truth comes from his mind as he speaks of the travesty that is the death and bereavement of Addie:

She has been dead these ten days. I suppose it's having been a part of Anse for so long that she cannot even make that change, if change it be. I can remember how when I was young I believed death to be a phenomenon of the body; now I know it to be merely a function of the mind—that of the minds of the ones who suffer the bereavement. (43-44)

Although Addie has not physically died just yet, Peabody can see that she is mentally gone, barely hanging on to this physical world. He can see that Anse has worn her down to nothing, and she lies there in bed, a bag of bones, barely breathing. He can see that everyone is preoccupied in creating some type of area around them to attend to Addie in his or her own way. He sees that Addie is not being attended to in the way she wants. Vickerey hits the nail on the head when she says it is all a “travesty of the ritual of interment.”

All of these motions everyone seems to go through are seen through Darl's eyes, and he knows that Dewey Dell desires the abortion, that Anse cannot wait to get new teeth in Jefferson, that Jewel is always angry and obsessed with his violent horse, that Cora cackles on with the other ladies about their days, and that Cash seems more preoccupied with creating the perfect coffin. He sees the truth in everyone, and that pains him. He cannot understand why everyone is not grieving the loss of their mother, their wife and their friend. Faulkner adds an even stronger aspect to Darl's narratorial skills, the gift of clairvoyance, and his imaginings are quite an accurate portrayal of his family. While Darl and Jewel are off trying to make three dollars, he imagines the scene of his

mother's death at their home. He imagines Dr. Peabody sitting there telling Anse it is time. He sees his sister fanning his mother in the unbearable heat, non-stop for ten days; and the youngest child, Vardaman, staring at his mother's bed-ridden, boney body, sunken away into the pillows and sheets, not knowing what to say. Darl thinks of Cash, and as Addie sits up one last time and yells out the window for Cash, he sees his older brother come to his mother's side, stare at her heavily, while ignoring his father's ramblings, knowing that once she passes, the person he loved so much to please will leave a gaping hole in his life.

Darl's imagining of his mother's death and the scene around her are confirmed when Dr. Peabody retells of the scene happening just as Darl narrated it. This moment adds a lot of weight to the role bestowed upon Darl by Faulkner. His mind is extraordinary, but he is still motivated by his envious feelings for Jewel and Addie's relationship. Darl ultimately chooses to hurt his brother more than stay by his mother's side while she takes her last breath. He is more motivated by attacking Jewel and sabotaging his last possible moment with their mother and her favorite son. The reader begins to see the pain that has afflicted Darl from finding out about his mother's secret love for his brother, Jewel. The reader can see that this connection between Addie and Jewel is what pains him most, and it is what starts him down the long road into self-reflective, existential thought, questioning his entire being.

Vickery convincingly states about the Bundren children, "Their motivation lies within her life, for she is the source of the tension and latent violence which each of them feels within himself and expresses in his contacts with the rest of the family" (52).

Vickery accurately describes what death really is—a time for the bereaved to react, in their own ways, to the loss of someone and how that person fits into each of their lives. Vickery continues, “Obsessed by their own relationships to Addie, they can resolve that tension only when they have come to terms with her as a person and with what she signifies in their own consciousness” (52). Addie means something different to every one of her children, her husband and her friends, and once each of them realizes what she signified to them, they can resolve the pain within themselves.

Death changes the bereaved dramatically, and Darl shows himself to be the one heavily impacted by his mother’s death to the point that it causes him to reexamine his entire life, his entire being. Handy states of Darl’s fixation with his brother Jewel, “The reason for Darl’s obsession with his brother is not presented for some hundred pages, but, until the reader becomes acquainted with it, Darl remains an inexplicable figure” (445). Handy is correct in his analysis as Darl can be quite misunderstood and seen as the odd one of the family, the detective always searching for answers and meaning within things. It soon becomes evident to the reader that Darl reflects on the moment when he learned that Jewel, then fifteen years old, was the product of an affair Addie had with Minister Whitfield. His curiosity about Addie’s strong love and affection for Jewel reveals itself to the reader to be rooted in infidelity and her venturing out from the life of the Bundrens. When Darl’s intense fascination with his brother is finally revealed to the reader, it can be seen that “all of his feelings have become centered by now on his deep resentment of Jewel—the objectification of his grief and incompleteness” (Handy 445). Jewel’s importance eventually becomes clear to the reader, and a sadness and pain hits as the reader can see that Darl feels betrayed and displaced, without a mother who truly loved

him—she cared only for his bastard brother and her escapade that brought him into this world.

Darl feels that his mother's love for him, the reciprocation and lack there of, has finally revealed the obstacle he has always wondered about—the special love she has for Jewel due to his birth originating from an affair. He sees that she has always cared for Jewel in a different, particular way that Darl always desired to know and feel for himself. “Love, too, becomes a force, measurable only because of its absence” (Handy 445). Connection is what Darl desires as well as lacks with his mother and within the family. That too was what Addie desired within her life as she felt there was a huge absence of it with Anse and her children. Jewel became the exception as she ventured out from her sheltered home, found adventure and felt the taste of passionate love with Whitfield.

The initial moment within one of Darl's narrations when the reader can see his self-reflective mind observe and question his position within his world comes during Darl's observations of his brother, Cash, finishing the coffin in the rain. Within the entire narration of seven pages, Darl does not use his external voice once as he observes Cash and Tull trying to finish the wooden coffin in the rain. He even observes Anse speaking about him, although he is not in the present situation. He is observing, but Anse, Tull and Cash cannot see him. Anse says, “‘I dont know what you'll do,’ he says. ‘Darl taken his coat with him’” (77). The men are trying to get raincoats to shelter the lantern and keep each of them dry. This is either a moment of clairvoyance or observation from afar, and Darl's entire narration consists of the doings of others around him. He speaks of his brother Cash, “Some time toward dawn the rain ceases. But it is not yet day when Cash

drives the last nail and stands stiffly up and looks down at the finished coffin, the others watching him. In the lantern light his face is calm; musing” (79). Darl sees the details in the moment, but he is not present. He could be looking from afar, but no one knows.

As Darl finishes speaking about his brother Cash and his finishing the coffin, wiping his tools and putting them away, there is a calmness to the scene, a peace that the hard work Cash put into this beautifully, handmade, wooden coffin has finally paid off. Darl does not show indignation at all towards his brother Cash. He perceives him and his doings, but there has never been a jealous feeling towards his eldest brother. As Darl finishes this narration, he begins to delve into deep thought about his being and what that is starting to mean to him:

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 dont know what I am. I dont 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. Beyond the unlampd wall I can hear the rain shaping the wagon that is ours, the load that is no longer theirs that felled and sawed it nor yet theirs that bought it and which is not ours either, lie on our wagon though it does, since only the wind and the rain shape it only to Jewel and me, that are not asleep. And since sleep is is-not and rain and wind are *was*, it is not. Yet the wagon *is*, because when the wagon is *was*, Addie Bundren will not be. And Jewel *is*, so Addie Bundren must be. And then I must be, or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room. And so if I am not emptied yet, I am *is*. (80-81)

This is the first instance of Darl questioning his foundation of life and where he stands within this family and in their world. There is a noticeable feeling of being stuck in between something, not having a footing in one area or the other. Darl feels lost and unstable, not able to find grounding in his family. He does not know if he “is” or “was,”



and he speaks of his brother Jewel knowing that he “is,” because he does not question or care to question his existence. This is the first instance the reader can see into Darl’s mind the strong instability he is facing as he watches and sees the work and doings of others around him.

Darl’s questioning brings up the questions of foundation and family, where he belongs. He questions his reality and begins to fall into his mind of self-reflection with an unknowable future. Taylor Hagood’s analysis, in *Faulkner, Writer of Dis-Ability*, of Faulkner’s disabled characters looks at and compares Benjy Compson, Ike Snopes and Darl Bundren. He compares Ike Snopes and Benjy Compson to more literal “idiots” within Faulkner’s narratives, as they deal more with cognitive disabilities. He makes a strong point about Darl, “It is important to note that Darl’s eyes are the agents that reveal his being different. The thing they convey is merely the opposite of Benjy and Ike—he sees too much where they appear to see, or at least comprehend, too little” (117). Although I disagree with his assessment of Darl’s eyes conveying the opposite of Benjy and Ike, because their disabilities, at least Benjy’s, conveys different perceptions via his internal discourse, Darl’s eyes are what convey his disability. He sees too much, and in that, he interprets all that he sees. His interpretations preoccupy his mind constantly, as he is always curious, wanting to know more about everyone. But is knowing more a good thing?

As the Bundrens begin their long journey to Jefferson, it can be seen that all the children take on different roles along the odyssey as they individually mourn the death of their mother in their own way. Cash finds solace and shelter within his woodworking and

the use of his tools. Darl can notice that he tried to perfect his mother's coffin because he couldn't face the horror of actually losing her. He sees Jewel become obsessed with his horse, and although stubborn and extremely violent, the horse becomes a pseudo-mother for Jewel. He takes care of and uses the time he spends with his horse to interrupt the actual pain of knowing his mother is gone and that she suffered tremendously. Those feelings of Jewel are justified when the reader returns to his voice and understands his pain when he thinks to himself:

It would just be me and her on a high hill and me rolling the rocks down the hill at their faces and teeth and all by God until she was quiet and not that goddamn adze going One lick less. One lick less and we could be quiet. (Faulkner 15)

The true pain which fuels Jewel's anger is his frustration with everyone surrounding his mother, with their own prerogatives and interests while she lies there. He sees the women, his family and everyone around him as obstacles keeping him from his mother and their strong, special bond.

## Chapter Eleven: The Bundren Journey

As the family continues on their journey on their small wagon with Addie's body in the coffin and Jewel behind them on his horse, they all encounter "macabre-like," ludicrous hindrances along the voyage. There is quite a dark humor to it all, and the bizarre, ridiculousness of it becomes apparent. Set back by rain and thunderstorms, the flooding of the bridge they must cross, the flipping of the wagon, the loss of the coffin in the river, Cash breaking his leg again as he, Darl and Jewel struggle to recover everything that fell out, including their mother's body in the coffin, the family continues to push on while each of them battle within their minds for their own closure of Addie's death, as well as fulfilling their ulterior motives. What is important with all that happens to the Bundrens is that Faulkner's writing concerns itself more with the inner awareness of each individual. Because each section of this novel is broken up in first-person narrations, Faulkner shows the reader that the words and actions drastically differ amongst each character. Handy says of it all:

The Darl of the event is not the Darl of consciousness, for the former is presented primarily through the eyes of others. Similarly with each of the other characters—their existence as participants in a journey is generically different from their existence as living, experiencing beings. (Handy 437)

*As I Lay Dying* is a novel full of words, both internal and external, but the inner-experience of each character can sometimes vastly contrast their outer being.

Just like Benjy's, Darl's internal discourse is quite the opposite of his external discourse. Benjy, "stricken innocent by God," as Faulkner has said, cannot verbally tell his family and others around him just how much he misses his sister. His inner-vocabulary and diction are drastically unlike his external discourse due to his disability. Darl's mind creates a world for him to think of, understand and feel that is unabashedly different and more comfortable than if he expresses things externally. Handy again says of Darl, "the reader's comprehension moves from the Darl of action and event to the Darl of inner-consciousness. The paradoxical quality of the real Darl resides finally in the tension between the two different aspects of human experience" (438). This is where the noticeable change and idea of reincarnation of Benjy into Darl comes into play. Darl is able to use his actual voice with others around him, but it is a very small portion of his being. He is also able to understand self-reflection and judgment, because, unlike Benjy, his brain is more developed in those aspects to connect things internally, via introspection, than just viscerally. Darl's mind, not being inhibited by a lack of certain developments that Benjy struggles with, is able to realize his displacement and the lack of a mother or foundation in his life.

Delving deeper into self-reflection, Darl's seventh narration, although quite short, does come to the narrator showing his true demeanor towards his brother, Jewel. After Darl thinks to himself of the scene within the house of Addie passing, but before Darl and Jewel return to the house and see for themselves that she has past, Darl starts to poke at Jewel and his concerns for his horse. He opens the narration, "'It's not your horse that's dead, Jewel,' I say. He sits erect on the seat, leaning a little forward, wooden-backed" (Faulkner 94). Within Darl's mind, he constantly refers to Jewel as "wooden-like." There

is stiffness to him, as if he thinks he must be strong throughout this entire ordeal. Jewel's only narration does show that his stiffness and anger are just a façade to mask his extreme pain in knowing that she is dead. But Darl does not see this. He sees a man who only cares for his horse and no one else.

Darl continues to push Jewel to say something or feel something, but there is a spitefulness behind it all. “‘See them?’ I say. High above the house, against the quick thick sky, they hang in narrowing circles. From here they are no more than specks, implacable, patient, portentous. ‘But it’s not your horse that’s dead’” (Faulkner 94). Darl knows that Jewel and his mother had a special bond, but he can see his brother has been much more preoccupied with taking care of his violent horse. He sarcastically, in other words, tells his brother “Don’t worry, your horse is probably fine. Mom is just dead.” Jewel lashes out, “‘Goddamn you,’ he says. ‘Goddamn you.’” (95). Jewel can see that his brother is pushing him to react and that he and everyone else can see that Jewel has been too preoccupied with the horse. Darl continues, “I cannot love my mother because I have no mother. Jewel’s mother is a horse. Motionless, the tall buzzards hang in soaring circles, the clouds giving them an illusion of retrograde” (95). Darl says the words, ‘I do not have a mother’ for the first time, and at this moment he is not referring to his mother passing away. He is realizing that he is motherless and has been for a long time. He also understands that Jewel uses his horse as his pseudo-mother, but not even Darl has anything or anyone to fill that void. He is now starting to feel that void.

The youngest child of the Bundrens, Vardaman, comes into the picture eventually and shows that he is preoccupied with a fish. The reader can see the idiocy pervade from

within him, but, as the journey continues, he starts to offer more clarity. Darl is one of the only family members who interacts with Vardaman on an honest level. As Darl thinks to himself that Jewel has his horse as his mother, Vardaman thinks to himself that this fish he found is his mother:

But my mother is a fish. Vernon seen it. He was there.

‘Jewel’s mother is a horse,’ Darl said.

‘Then mine can be a fish, cant it, Darl?’ I said.

Jewel is my brother.

‘Then mine will have to be a horse, too,’ I said.

‘Why?’ Darl said. ‘If pa is your pa, why does your ma have to a be a horse just because Jewel’s is?’

‘Why does it?’ I said. ‘Why does it, Darl?’

Darl is my brother.

‘Then what is your ma, Darl?’ I said.

‘I haven’t got ere one,’ Darl said. ‘Because if I had one, it is *was*. And if it is *was*, it cant be *is*. Can it?’

‘No,’ I said.

‘Then I am not,’ Darl said. ‘Am I?’

‘No,’ I said.

I am. Darl is my brother.

‘But you *are*, Darl,’ I said.

‘I know it,’ Darl said. ‘That’s why I am not *is*. *Are* is too many for one woman to foal.’” (Faulkner 101)

This interaction with Vardaman, as the family starts on their journey to Jefferson, is quite important to note, because it is the first time Darl speaks externally to someone else about

his conclusions of being without a mother and questioning his existence. The reader can see that Vardaman trusts what Darl says as truth, and it can be seen that Darl is honest with his little brother. Vardaman believes that Darl does exist and does have a place in this world. This place is not known to Darl though, and as the journey continues, he becomes consumed with these thoughts, slipping in and out of reality.

As the journey gets underway, but before the family reaches the flooded bridge, Anse thinks to himself about his boys, specifically Darl and Jewel. This narration by Anse reveals Darl's first instance of laughing on the journey. This laughing will conclude his time with his family in the end. Anse and his family are all on the wagon with Addie in her coffin, but Jewel didn't want to initially take the journey. He eventually comes up on horse back, passing his family a bit, concluding that he will take the journey with them, just on his own horse. Anse thinks to himself, "but 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" (Faulkner 105). Darl laughing is quite important to note, because his internal struggle, his self-reflection and his conclusion that he has no mother and is not sure if he is or was begins to come out through laughing. He sees the absurdity of it all—the way his family has dealt with her entire death, his lazy father full of words and no actions, his wooden-like brother Jewel initially not wanting to come to bury his own mother, but then riding up on horse back. There is a ridiculous element to it all and Darl sees that. But Anse continues that this behavior of his has been this way before:

How many times I told him it's doing such things as that that makes folks talk about him. I dont know. I says I got some regard for what folks say

about my flesh and blood even if you haven't, even if I have raised such a durn passel of boys, and when you fixes it so folks can say such about you, it's a reflection on your ma, I says, not me: I am a man and I can stand it; it's on your womenfolks, your ma and sister that you should care for, and I turned and looked back at him and him setting there, laughing. (105-106)

In typical Anse fashion, whatever is wrong with his family, he blames someone else, this being his wife and daughter. But there is something important to note and that is when he says that he has already told Darl many times that when he does things like his laughing, it gets people to say things about him. Anse is embarrassed and shocked by Darl's laughing while he sits next to his mother's coffin on the way to bury her in Jefferson. It is an odd action, but, whatever Anse is referring to in the past that Darl has done, this moment becomes clearer to the reader. Faulkner continues with the journey, and through Darl's narrations, we can see into his heart and understand that he feels there is no sacredness with the journey, with the hauling her body onto the wagon, with his brother deciding to come on the journey. This first instance of Darl laughing starts the reader on the journey of questioning whether Darl is going crazy or not.

Darl laughing at the absurdity of it all starts to become justified as neighbors other than Tull and Cora start to comment on the Bundren's odyssey. Samson, a neighbor, sees that the sun has set as they pass his house. He can tell they are destitute, and even though he does not want to get into their business, he kindly offers them a place to stay and a meal from his wife. Before he does offer them a place to stay, he sits on his porch with his friends MacCallum and Quick, asking each other who they are and wondering what they are doing. They recognize them as the Bundrens and tell Quick to holler at them to stop because the main bridge to town is flooded. Samson recounts the scene:



He come back with them. ‘They’re going to Jefferson,’ he says. ‘The bridge at Tull’s is gone, too.’ Like we didn’t know it, and his face looked funny, around his nostrils, but they just sat there, Bundren and the girl, and the chap on the seat, and Cash and the second one, the one folks talk about, on a plank across the tail-gate. (Faulkner 113)

Even Samson and his friends, although they help, they still know that the Bundrens are an odd bunch. His commentary on Darl being “the one folks talk about” is quite important to note, because it shows that Darl’s behavior of seeing too much, observing too much, knowing too much and reacting to it all has come out through odd behaviors in the past. His odd behaviors have even been seen and judged by neighbors and friends in the past, which points to Darl’s mannerisms being something long established within him.

Samson makes a strong point as he continues his narration while housing the Bundrens along their journey. He can see the travesty that is their traveling with their mother’s body, showing a lack of respect for her as she begins to rot in the box:

Because 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. But they wouldn’t do it. (Faulkner 116)

Samson sees that their mother’s body and the promise they are keeping to bury her in Jefferson, a town some forty-miles away, is beginning to turn into a disrespectful act. There is no ritual in respecting her body anymore, because she is no longer Addie to them; she is a promise to get a body to another town.

The one person to truly come to Darl’s aid throughout the journey and in the end is his eldest brother, Cash. Although a man of little words and internal discourse and

reflection, Darl's twelfth narration shows of a moment between he and Cash, while they are start to traverse the river, figuring out how to cross:

Cash and I sit in the wagon; Jewel sits the horse at the off rear wheel. The horse is trembling, its eye rolling wild and baby-blue in its long pink face, its breathing stertorous like groaning. He sits erect, poised, looking quietly and steadily and quickly this way and that. His face calm, a little pale, alert. Cash's face is also gravely composed; he 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. When we speak our voices are quiet, detached. (Faulkner 142)

This moment between Cash and Darl, although small, speaks volumes to the reader as Darl, with his eyes as "agents" connects with his brother. They both can see the ridiculousness and absurdity of it all that Darl speaks of the moment in the third person, looking at them from afar as they retreat to a place so far from this travesty. He feels he and Cash are connecting honestly, without judgment or shame, and they both feel that there is such disrespect to this entire journey.

## **Chapter Twelve: Addie Bundren**

The reader sees Darl's true displacement by Addie when her only section within the novel is revealed and her thoughts on marriage, her children, her past and her desires, whether they be imagined by Faulkner, thought of from her coffin or reflections on the past while she was alive, are starkly revealed and set free. This section is discovered far into the novel and deep within the journey as the family has struggled with the rising waters covering a bridge they must cross. Before Addie's section is revealed, the family takes on the flooded river and bridge as Cash and Darl on the wagon and Jewel on his horse cross the stream with the mules and Addie's body. While Dewey Dell, Vardaman and Anse cross the bridge on foot, as it will not hold the wagon and Addie's body, Cash and his brothers try to steady their mother on the wagon as they cross the treacherous waters down from their family. The water forces a log to hit the wagon and tip it over, taking Addie's coffin and body down stream as well as Cash, his tools and all the mules. The mules have all drowned, and Darl and Jewel try desperately to recover their mother's coffin and Cash. Eventually they are able to get Addie, as well as pull the aquatically challenged Cash out with a newly, broken leg. Tull was watching the Bundrens during the ordeal and even he assists in helping them by looking for and recovering Cash's tools.

Before Addie's section is presented to the reader, Cora's last narration is given and she reveals her time with Addie when they discussed Whitfield. Cora discusses God,

sin and judgment as she introduces Minister Whitfield to the reader. Unbeknownst to Cora, Addie almost let's slip her affair with Whitfield that produced Jewel. Cora believes Addie must offer up her sins, whatever they may be, to the Lord and praise his name, because only he can judge man. Cora believes Darl is touched by God, although he is considered "queer by mortals" (Faulkner 168). Cora tells Addie that she thinks her only sin is loving Jewel too much and Darl not enough. Addie calls Jewel her punishment for her sin, as well as "her cross and salvation" (168). Even though Addie feels regret for her affair with Whitfield, she knew what it meant for her—a moment of freedom from her current life with Anse and the rest of her children. Jewel is a constant reminder of something outside of her confined life and she protects and loves him more than her other children as he represents her only moment of freedom.

Addie's section is delivered to the reader as she delves right into her life, before Anse, as a teacher, expressing her thoughts on marriage with him, her children and her reason for wanting to be buried in Jefferson. She speaks of the time when she was a teacher, "In the afternoon when school was out and the last one had left with his little dirty snuffling nose, instead of going home I would go down the hill to the spring where I could be quiet and hate them" (Faulkner 169). The reader can immediately feel her distaste for children's selfish antics. She continues, "It would be quiet there then, with the water bubbling up and away and the sun slanting quiet in the trees and the quiet smelling of damp and rotting leaves and new earth" (169). Addie uses the word "quiet" three times just in that one sentence, and it becomes apparent that she desires peace and silence especially after her long days in school with the children. The reader can feel her love for independence.

Addie continues and thinks back to a time when her father expressed his nihilistic views on life. She remembers, “I could just remember how my father used to say that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time” (169). Reading Addie’s reflection back on her past when she was younger and still unmarried, listening to her father’s delusional nihilism, it becomes apparent where her basis for finding comfort in settling or comfort in complacency came from. She goes on:

And when I would have to look at them day after day, each with his and her secret and selfish thought, and blood strange to each other blood and strange to mine, and think that this seemed to be the only way I could get ready to stay dead, I would hate my father for having ever planted me. I would look forward to the times when they faulted, so I could whip them. When the switch fell I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it was my blood that ran, and I would think with each blow of the switch: Now you are aware of me! Now I am something in your secret and selfish life, who have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever. (169-170)

Addie’s feelings towards the children she taught are full of frustration, hate and the desire to whip them when they faulted. As an unmarried woman before Anse, she could have fallen into the role of a traditional young woman searching for a suitor to make her a housewife, or she could take up a job and find some type of independence. Teaching for her was that independence, and it becomes obvious that she is comfortable with her single, independent life. She speaks of her school children’s blood and it being strange from hers and each of their blood being strange to each other. Her thinking back to her school-teaching days evokes questions about blood and children being of her blood or not. There is an interest she has hit upon about children and what they mean in her life.

Her internal discourse continues as she progresses through her life chronologically to meeting Anse next as he would “pass the school house three of four

times before [she] learned that he was driving four miles out of his way to do it” (Faulkner 170). She speaks to him first, asking about his lack of haircut and how he should have some “womenfolks” to do that. Anse answers back about wanting to speak with her about that and wanting her to be his wife. Although he speaks of having no family or people, he does offer her a new home on little property. She remembers “taking” Anse and the life he offered. She thinks back to the beginning of her marriage and her first child, Cash. “So I took Anse. And when I knew that I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it” (171). Addie begins to settle into her life and realizes the type of shiftless, selfish husband Anse is, but she decides to find some happiness in having children. Cash gave her a counter option to her terrible living.

Addie’s narration reveals it’s denouement when she continues into her thoughts and memories and speaks of words and actions. She continues on with her remembrance of having children:

That was when I learned that words are no good; that words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at. When he was born I knew that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn’t care whether there was a word for it or not. I knew that fear was invented by someone that had never had the fear; pride, who never had the pride. I knew that it had been, not that they had dirty noses, but that we had had to use one another by words like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging and twisting and never touching, and that only through the blows of the switch could my blood and their blood flow as one stream. I knew that it had been, not that my aloneness had to be violated over and over each day, but that it had never been violated until Cash came. Not even by Anse in the nights. (171-172)

Addie appreciates her alone time, but she understands that with words, especially from Anse as he is the one person in her life who uses words without actions, there is a lack of

meaning or feeling behind them. Cash interrupted her life and aloneness, but there isn't a pain she feels with Cash being there. The reader can see there is a lack of honest, true love between Anse and Addie. She was a filler in Anse's life to take on the homemaker role. He does not touch her affectionately at night, but they nevertheless produce children. Words for Addie are just sounds and shapes, finding no basis or foundation within her. She wishes to feel things with her body and heart, especially when words are not spoken.

Addie speaks of love and that word. She sees that words are empty and meaningless, because she can still feel the love she has between Cash even without words.

He had a word, too. Love, he called it. But I had been used to words for a long time. I knew that that word was like the others: just a shape to fill a lack; that when the right time came, you wouldn't need a word for that anymore than for pride or fear. (172)

Addie wishes for the time to come where she can look into Anse's eyes or anyone's and just feel the connection and the love between them without words. She goes on, "Cash did not need to say it to me nor I to him, and I would say, Let Anse use it, if he wants to. So that it was Anse or love; love or Anse; it didn't matter" (172). Addie continues to express her dislike and distrust for words, because she has seen what they become with Anse. Vickerey continues in her analysis of the Bundrens by touching on Addie's narration and her frustration with words, "Addie and Anse themselves represent the two polar opposites of action and words which must be meshed if their relationship is to be meaningful. Addie and Anse, however, are not able to effect this fusion of word and act" (53). Vickerey concludes that Anse represents words and Addie action, but they both

must come together with their actions and words in order to find any type of connection within their relationship.

Vickerey delves deeper into her analysis of words and actions within *As I Lay Dying* as she describes Addie's and Anse's relationship in its entirety:

Because they are 'husband' and 'wife,' Anse feels no need to establish a personal relationship which would give significance to those words and to the ritual of marriage. He is completely blind to Addie's intense desire for life and to her conviction that language is a grotesque tautology which prevents any real communication. (53)

Addie and Anse's polar opposite roles of actions and words are at the crux of everything within the lives of the Bundrens. Addie's desire to find fulfillment and life beyond her own with Anse represents her want for connection, because it is lacking in her life with him and their children. That desire rooted within her since childhood, as either a negation to her father's viewpoint on life "the reason for living is to get ready to stay dead a long time" or her own individual need, springs forth via her affair with Whitfield and produces Jewel, Addie's precious child who is "her cross and her salvation." She understands what she had done was wrong, but Jewel represents to her the only real living she has experienced since marrying Anse. Her small and only narratorial section signifies the lack of voice or words used by her within the life of the Bundrens. Anse's repetitive, selfish voice plagues the pages of the Bundrens as he constantly positions himself as victim within whatever situation he can fit into.

There is a polarity between words and actions within *As I Lay Dying*, and the Bundrens only way to find connection is to bring those two lines together. Addie represents action while Anse represents words. Both their roles within their family of



actions and words lay the framework for their children's lives and the outcome for each of them at the end of the journey to Jefferson. Although Addie does attribute her loneliness being violated to Cash when he came along, she also believes she is made whole again by that very act:

I would think that even while I lay with him in the dark and Cash asleep in the cradle within the swing of my hand. I would think that if he were to wake and cry, I would suckle him, too. Anse or love: it didn't matter. My aloneness had been violated and then made whole again by the violation... (Faulkner 172).

Addie realizes that Cash interrupts her life, but his existence allows her to finally find connection and love with another human being. He makes her whole again.

Addie's reason for wanting to go back to Jefferson and realizing her aloneness and peace is violated again in the form of Darl. She continues in her discourse, "Then I found that I had Darl. At first I would not believe it. Then I believed that I would kill Anse" (Faulkner 172). Her second child, Darl, feels like Anse used words again to deceive Addie and pretend there was a connection between them. All he really wanted was more children to do the work he wishes not to do. Anse wants others to carry him through life i.e. his children and wife. She continues:

It was a though he had tricked me, hidden within a word like within a paper screen and struck me in the back through it. But then I realised that I had been tricked by words older than Anse or love, and that the same word had tricked Anse too, and that my revenge would be that he would never know I was taking revenge. (172-173)

Addie realizes more and more that the words for love and connection are twisted and misused in order for someone to trick another for his or her own gain. Addie sees no

meaning behind words, because they have never stood for what they are supposed to be. She has never felt love when the word was used.

Addie believes that when Darl came along, she felt that even though she knew words were empty and meaningless, they again tricked her through Anse when her second son came along. There was no connection in what Anse told her when he laid with her to produce Darl, but, most likely, deep down, she continued to hope for it. When Darl came along, she realized there would never be connection between her and Anse, and her father was right in saying living is about getting ready to be dead for a long time. She started to feel that sensation of being dead when Darl arrived. She continues, “And when Darl was born I asked Anse to promise to take me back to Jefferson when I died, because I knew that father had been right, even when he couldn’t have known he was right anymore than I could have known I was wrong” (Faulkner 173). To Addie, Darl represents the last time she hoped to feel connection, but, through Darl, her final hope for connection was beaten down, and she realized she wanted nothing more to do with her life as a Bundren. That sparked her desire to return to the only place she felt any significant connection, which is her birthplace, her childhood town: Jefferson.

When Addie remembers telling Anse, after only having two children with him, that she wishes to be buried in her hometown of Jefferson, his response negates her wish and pushes her into his hold of producing and attending to his wants and needs for the rest of her life. He responds to her wish, “‘Nonsense,’ Anse said; ‘you and me aint nigh done chapping yet, with just two’” (Faulkner 173). In this small quotation from Anse himself, it becomes perceptibly evident that Anse only sees Addie as the mother of his current and

future children, the producer of his future, as can be seen when he uses his children to stay alive and generate any type of living. Addie becomes trapped in the loveless marriage of meaningless words, but she stays with him, most likely feeling compelled to not leave her children, the only ones who give her any type of connection. Addie speaking of her children as violation to her aloneness signifies her lack of desire to have children, but she does state that Cash violated that, but then made it whole again. She understands the life-changing experience one encounters when becoming a mother. She sees that connection with Cash and understands that bond needs no words to continue.

Faulkner writes a story of love and how it is communicated or not. Floyd Watkins writes of Faulkner's objective:

Faulkner is concerned primarily with the character's ability or inability to communicate love in language. In general those characters who use the words of love are those who have not loved. And those who do not talk of love usually have had profound experiences. (185)

Watkins hits the nail on the head in his summation of all of Faulkner's stories, but especially with the Bundrens. Their narratorial sections consist of their internal discourse more than their external with their loved ones. They struggle to connect with each other and that becomes their ultimate downfall. Addie brought Darl into the Bundren's loveless marriage and lack of connection. He was doomed from the beginning to find any type of connection or feeling, but he still searched for it. Addie's affair with Whitfield was her only attempt at connection, and although she knows the sin behind it and calls Jewel her cross to bear, she also knows that he is a constant reminder of the only connection she has had since her marriage to Anse and the birth of Cash. She displaces Darl and fails in connecting with him.

Addie's mistrust in words is again reaffirmed as she remembers Cora telling her that she is not a true mother:

And so when Cora Tull would tell me I was not a true mother, I would think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it, so that after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle from one to the other; and that sin and love and fear are just sounds that people who never sinned nor loved nor feared have for what they never had and cannot have until they forgot the words. (Faulkner 173-174)

Cora is a constant throughout everyone's lives, using words like Godly, judgment, salvation and sin, reminding everyone who she speaks to that those words are sounds she and people use to name something they have not experienced or understand. Those words Cora speaks of are the Christian foundation she wears on her sleeve, a constant throughout, as a pious, Godly woman, but Addie can see through her empty words. She can see what the truth is: her lack of connection with Anse and life caused her to die a long time ago. Linda W. Wagner comments on Cora and the non-Bundren people:

Just as he has in *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner early sets up the lines of love within the family, but he complicates the picture this time with the views of the neighbors, of the society that would realistically have had powerful influence in this kind of situation. (75)

Unlike the Compsons, the Bundrens receive commentary from others around them like Tull, Cora and the neighbors. They represent the values of society at the time in their small town and compare and contrast against the values of the Bundrens. Cora represents the devout Christian woman pushing God into every aspect and conversation in her life, as well as others.

Cora reinforces in Addie the duty she must take on, just as other women like her have to, of the mother and housewife of her home. Cora emphasizes to Addie that she owes it to her children and Anse to be the strong, loving mother and wife she is meant and asked to be by God. Addie continues her thoughts about what she should and shouldn't do as a mother and wife, delving into her conclusion on Anse: "And then he died. He did not know he was dead" (Faulkner 174). In those two sentences, she shows that she does not completely blame Anse for his empty words, because that is what he was conditioned to do as a husband and father. Going back to Addie's sentence, "But then I realised that I had been tricked by words older than Anse or love, and that the same word had tricked Anse too..." she knows that long before Anse, words like "love" were invented to "fill a lack" of that feeling. Anse, subconsciously, was conditioned his entire life, just like everyone around him, to use those words to avoid acting the actual feeling behind those words. He takes advantage of those words and shows that there will never be action behind them.

Addie's section continues on to describing her affair with Whitfield, and the reader can see the connection she feels with him, in nature, lying together in the woods in secret and connecting without words. After the affair was over, Addie becomes enlightened and realizes her "children were of me alone, of the wild blood boiling along the earth, of me and of all that lived; of none and of all" (Faulkner 175). She concludes that her children were of her alone, and they did not come of Anse. As she says of her "wild blood boiling," those words describe her passionate spirit in stark contrast to Anse, a shiftless man not knowing he is already dead. Addie delves deep into self-reflection and

understands that words older than Anse and herself have tricked many people and were created to do just that. Anse just fell into that life of using words without actions.

Addie concludes her narration telling the reader that Jewel was the product of her affair. As she says this, she reverts back to her father's statement of living to be dead a long time, and, with that, she falls back into the role she is supposed to accept: the wife and mother. Jewel and Cash keep her from ultimately leaving her family. Those two children disrupted her aloneness, and then completed her. She found sin, as well as salvation in Jewel, and disruption and then wholeness in Cash. She thinks back and gives some of her final thoughts, "I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I robbed him of. And now he has three children that are his and not mine. And then I could get ready to die" (176). Once she realizes that her only true children metaphorically are Cash and Jewel, she begins to feel dead for the rest of her life. After the affair, Addie accepts her situation for what it is and settles into the role of mother and wife to start, as her father says, the rest of her life of being dead.

Darl is brought into a world containing a drastic polarity between words and actions. The reader sees more of Darl's mind and thoughts than what Darl actually says externally. His external discourse is radically different than his internal one. He spends more time as a voyeur reflecting on what he sees: the real and the interpreted. Tull notices this and expands upon it:

He is looking at me. He dont 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. (Faulkner 125)

Tull can observe that Darl surveys and collects facts and information on everything and everyone, desiring to understand and know more. He knows of his father's lack of connection with his mother, his mother's lack of love for him like she loves Jewel and the absurdity of the journey they are on. Tull can see this strong, self-reflective side of Darl, knowing that he sees and knows all.

Darl's internal language brings the reader into his heart, and those actions, such as taking Jewel away from his mother or "offering silent repudiation to his sister's dilemma" (Handy 438), allows the reader to become open-minded and tolerant of his deeds. His motives are revealed, as are the motives of the rest of the Bundrens and friends, and his actions become understandable and empathized with. Handy makes a strong and poignant analysis:

Faulkner's portrayal of such a character as Darl changes our most fundamental ideas about character and characterization. We are no longer so concerned with the unfolding of events, with the question, 'Then what happen?' as we are with the presentation of being, with the question, 'What is man's real experience?' (Handy 438)

Just as Faulkner shows in *The Sound and the Fury*, time and chronology is not what matters most. Man's experiences, the unspoken feelings that overtake one's soul, flesh and blood is what is remembered and re-experienced for years to come.

### **Chapter Thirteen: The Unraveling of Darl**

Darl's most controversial act comes at the very end of the Bundren's journey when he burns down the Gillespie's barn. The family has pulled whatever they can from the river, including Addie's now molding body, and they've pushed on to finish what they've started. Anse displays his true self via his actions at the end of their journey. He sells Jewel's horse, takes Cash's money he was going to use to buy a graphophone, uses some of his money intended for his new, false teeth, and mortgages some of his farming equipment for a deal for a team of mules for the rest of their journey. He realizes that his ultimate desires will only be fulfilled when he is able to bury his wife's body in Jefferson. He does whatever he can with whatever he can to get that done. His character has shown to be that of a selfish, shiftless man who only cares to fulfill his own goals. Although he rarely takes actions, if any at all, the treacherous incident crossing the river and the losing of his team of mules thrusts him to take charge. That taking charge comes with the obvious act of taking advantage of his children, because he has never relied only upon himself to change a situation. There is no sacredness to Addie's burial anymore. She is eight days dead and rotting away in a wet coffin. Her children have just recovered her body and all of them have been traumatized by the incident.

The family continues to travel towards Jefferson, passing the town of Mottson where they picked up the team of mules from a man name Armstid, as well as cement to



create a splint for Cash's broken leg. They approach a farm owned by the Gillespies, and as the sun sets and night falls upon them, they approach the farm to ask for a bucket of water. Darl mixes the cement and sets Cash's leg in the splints by pouring the cement over it. He complains of the heat and pain, but says he can make it until tomorrow. There is a calmness about Cash. The family approaches the Gillespie's home and asks if they can sleep on the porch or under the apple tree where they have put Addie's coffin. The Gillespies agree and they have also offered to allow the Bundrens to move Addie's coffin into the barn. Once the scene is set here, the "unraveling" of Darl as the reader knows him begins.

Although the death of Addie and discovery of her affair that produced Jewel started this "unraveling" of Darl, which can also be seen as a self-reflective and enlightening, it can be seen that the precise beginning of his decision to burn down a barn starts with him asking Jewel through external discourse who his real father is. Darl starts his sixteenth of nineteen sections with, "'Jewel,' I say, 'whose son are you?'" (Faulkner 212). Darl then goes on to describe a breeze coming up from the barn and the family's decision to move Addie under the apple tree. He and Vardaman believe Addie is murmuring to them as they put their ears to her coffin. He continues,

'Your mother was a horse, but who was your father, Jewel?'

'You goddamn lying son of a bitch.'

'Dont call me that,' I say.

'You goddamn lying son of a bitch.'

'Dont you call me that, Jewel'" (213).

Darl pushes his brother to name his true father not even aware if Jewel actually knows that his biological father is not Anse. He claims that Jewel's mother is a horse, metaphorically, referring to Jewel's violent horse that Anse sold for a team of mules. Darl consistently referred to Jewel's mother throughout the novel as a horse. Jewel was so concerned with protecting it and tending to it in order to avoid feeling the pain of his mother's loss.

Darl continues on as Cash speaks of how hot it is and the pain in his leg. That is when Darl approaches the Gillespie's front door and asks for some water to pour on their brother's broken leg so that he may feel some relief until they find a doctor once they reach Jefferson. They agree and the narration then turns to the innocent and mindless Vardaman, the youngest child. Darl takes Vardaman to listen to his mother. Darl begins to pull away from reality as he tells his younger brother to do like him and put his ear to his mother's coffin and listen to her speak. Young Vardaman finishes his section with "I saw something that Dewey Dell told me not to tell nobody" (Faulkner 217). This last line before Darl's next section of describing the barn burning down entices the reader with intrigue as to what and who Vardaman is protecting.

Darl's seventeenth section tells of the barn burning down and the catastrophic setting in front of him, with the reader see everything from within Darl's mind. He speaks only a few words externally, but his exquisite descriptions of the barn engulfing in flames forces the reader to forget what a horrible thing is happening. He starts the narration within his mind, describing his brother, Jewel:

Against the dark doorway he seems to materialise out of darkness, lean as a race horse in his underclothes in the beginning of the glare. He leaps to the ground with on his face an expression of furious unbelief. He has seen me without even turning his head or his eyes in which the glare swims like two small torches. 'Come on,' he says, leaping down the slope toward the barn. For an instant longer he runs silver in the moonlight, then he springs out like a flat figure cut leanly from tin against an abrupt and soundless explosion as the whole loft of the barn takes fire at once, as though it had been stuffed with powder. 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. Behind me pa and Gillespie and Mack and Dewey Dell and Vardaman emerge from the house. (218-219)

He continues the narration of the scene, showing his family frantically trying to get their mother's coffin out before the fire touches it. The boys all help with getting Gillespie's animals out as well as their own mules. Darl does not reveal to the reader or his family that he is responsible for the burning of Gillespie's barn. The family gets every animal and their mother out without harm being done. Darl's entire journey with his family, full of words within his mind, with some external remarks, and barely any actions, culminates in this final act.

The reader is given Cash's narration, his second to last, and one is taken aback when he reveals that Darl was responsible for the fire. The reader starts to put things into perspective as Cash thinks to himself:

It wasn't nothing else to do. It was either send him to Jackson, or have Gillespie sue us, because he knowed some way that Darl set fire to it. I don't know how he knowed, but he did. Vardaman seen him do it, but he swore he never told nobody but Dewey Dell and that she told him not to tell nobody. (Faulkner 232)

Nothing in Darl's previous narration alludes to feeling any guilt or shame, or claiming any responsibility for the fire. Darl's description of the scene from his previous narration

shows a man with a sound mind, running the scene through his mind, helping his brother, father and Gillespie get the animals out. But he never spoke of trying to get his mother out. Jewel man-handles her coffin and gets her out just in time before her body starts to burn. Vardaman delves into his side of things right after Darl's account of the scene and he shows his brother, Darl, lying on top of their mother's coffin, crying profusely. Vardaman comforts him, but the reader now knows what has happened. Questions begin to arise as to why Darl did this?

After the family leaves Gillespies and arrive into town, Darl narrates his family arriving in the main street with Addie's body and some African-Americans comment on the stench coming from the coffin. Jewel reacts and a white man thinks he is being accused as Jewel yells out "Son of a bitch." There begins to be an argument and the men almost go to blows, but Darl stands in for his brother and calms the scene down. Although Cash doesn't reveal to the reader until the next section that Darl was the one responsible for burning down the barn, Darl's mannerisms and demeanor portray a man undisturbed by his recent, outrageously shocking act. He goes about his day arriving into town, and Vardaman plays the role of impatient little brother repeatedly asking how much longer until they are there. Darl calmly and happily answers Vardaman that they are almost over the hill and into the main town. There is such composure and a feeling of serenity apparent in Darl's behavior that it is easy to understand and jump to the conclusion that he has descended into madness.

Cash jumps in to narrate the next scene as things take a turn for the dramatic and unexpected. This is the first time the reader really sees into the heart of Cash as he

expresses much more in this narration than in previous ones. He reveals that the family has agreed to send Darl to Jackson so that Gillespie will not sue them for burning his barn. They feel that that is the only way to get out of the situation as best as possible, but are they doing this for the good of Darl or to get out of a possible financial burden? The latter seems more likely, but Cash's narration begins to show empathy towards Darl. He starts explaining to Jewel and his father that they should wait before having Darl taken away so he can be there to see Addie put in the ground. Jewel and Anse argue back and forth on the idea, both of them concluding there is nothing else that can be done to salvage the situation—Darl must be declared insane and sent to Jackson.

As the novel has progressed, this is the first time we really see Cash put into words his strong connection with his brother Darl. Cash, a man of few words, is a lot like Addie. Speaks less and does more. Darl can be seen as quite opposite of Addie—his entire life is full of words and soliloquies about situations and people. The reader has not seen as much action from Darl either until the barn burning. But Cash starts coming to Darl's aid, showing sympathy towards the entire situation. "A fellow that's going to spend the rest of his life locked up, he ought to be let to have what pleasure he can have before he goes" (Faulkner 233). He knows he will never see Darl again and his brother will be lost within an asylum far away. He wants to give Darl the pleasure of seeing their mother finally put to rest.

Darl, given this quite articulate internal discourse, his position within the novel and one of voyeur, has finally acted out his true feelings. From Cora to Tull's interpretations, as well as Dewey Dell's, Vardaman's, Cash's and Jewel's, everyone has

commented within the story of how “different” or “odd” Darl is. Some of them have come to his aid to attest that he sees more and understands things better than others. Some have worried that one more incident will surely show strangers that he must be sent to Jackson. Others have felt that he has “gotten inside of them” and judged their inner-being most of all. Faulkner presents the reader with this man who’s been given a quite exquisite, articulate internal discourse. We see a man who see’s too much and knows too much. But what conclusions can be made of him after one reads of his indiscretion of burning another man’s barn? What judgments are made of him after this incident? Is Faulkner giving us a character who walks the fine line between genius and insanity? Or is there more to be said of his mind, as well as his position within the story?

Without touching on the life of William Faulkner, questions arise as to what Faulkner is trying to communicate with Darl? He shows a man who reveals extreme jealousy for his bastard brother’s relationship with their mother. He articulates scenes and other’s actions, their bodily forms, their mannerisms so well that the reader forgets why he’s doing it and to what extent his role of voyeur is being used throughout the novel. With prose like Darl’s, it’s quite understandable to get caught up in the moment of each scene he narrates. The reader forgets to step back and ask, “Why does he navigate the reader through the Bundern’s story more than other characters do? Why are we hearing his voice more than others? What makes him so special to give the reader the foundation of the Bundrens?” These questions usually don’t immediately arise within the reader, because Darl’s internal discourse is so mesmerizing. But one must step back and see what Faulkner is really doing.

This thesis does in fact believe Darl burns the Gillespie's barn due to his final judgment on the hauling of his mother's body to Jefferson being obviously ridiculously disrespectful. He, as well as the family and neighboring people, could smell the stench of her rotting body, and he knows he must finally put her to rest. But this belief is nothing new to the literary community. What does need to be addressed is what Faulkner is trying to communicate, or better yet, what is trying to be communicated to the reader via Darl's voice and his position within the novel, regardless of bringing in Faulkner's possible intentions. Cash, his quiet, older brother, begins to explain to the reader:

Sometimes I aint so sho who's got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and aint none of us pure sane until the balance of us talks him that-a-way. It's like it aint so much what a fellow does, but it's the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it. (Faulkner 233)

Cash's conclusions on the violent act and his brother's mind speak volumes as he articulates, what could be concluded, as a general consensus among a lot of readers. Was Darl really that crazy in burning down the barn to finally put his mother to rest?

When Cash starts to relate a general "man" to Darl, he connects things to himself and his "insane" brother:

But I thought more than once before we crossed the river and after, how it would be God's blessing if He did take her outen our hands and get shut of her in some clean way, and it seemed to me that when Jewel worked so to get her outen the river, he was going against God in a way, and then Darl seen that it looked like one of us would have to do something, I can almost believe he done right in a way. (Faulkner 223)

There is a dominant feeling of universality within Cash's internal discourse about his brother. He understands why his brother did what he did. There is empathy and acceptance in Cash's thoughts, as he knows his brother was acting out of respect for their

mother, something no one else has done. Cash created a beautiful coffin, because he knew actions speak louder than words to Addie, and burying his head in his work allowed him to not think about the loss of his mother. He knew he lost her, as Peabody said, ten days before she past. Sitting there in her bed, barely alive, he aimed to construct a final, departing gift for her to rest in.

Cash's concluding thoughts on Darl bring the humanity back to Darl and his "odd" behavior. Cash whittles it down to the foundation of his act, and the reader finds trouble in feeling anger towards Darl. What is being expressed here from Cash? Darl's voice, his body and his role within the family is being used by the writer, not attributing that to Faulkner but just a general "writer," to perform a function within the novel. Inserting disability within a story disrupts things altogether. An action being judged as "not normal" or "odd," or someone's behavior being concluded as "strange" opens a whole slew of questions as to what the novel is trying to express about Darl and man's relationship to fellow man, especially a "disabled" one. Darl's separation from reality and "normalcy," and his strong decent into "madness" culminates Faulkner's use of Darl as his device. He is a tool, like Benjy, to create the foundation of the Bundren family, a culminating viewpoint on who each individual is. Darl is our eyes and his eyes are also the "agent that reveals his being different" (Hagood 119).

If one focuses and relies heavily on Cash's judgments in the end, it starts to bring about questions, as he said, of who is man to say what is "crazy" and what isn't. Without delving too much into medical humanities, Faulkner presents multiple things within *As I Lay Dying*: The relationship man has to his fellow man; man's internal discourse reveals



much more about one's actions; action and words continue to pervade within families as they are polar opposites; and what does man think of as "normal," as well as the definition of insane." In the last sentence, the word "man" is used generally as an overall consensus, relating more to "what does society" or the "majority of folks" (Faulkner 233) as Cash says it, think(s) of words like "normal," "odd," "madness," and "insane"?

Although the Americans with Disabilities Act wasn't created until 1990, it states that:

An individual with a disability is defined by the ADA as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment. ([www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov))

Disability is defined by a consensus of people as someone who is not able-bodied. If something such as a cognitive disability or mental illness permits someone to not perform a major life activity, such as feeding oneself, then the government terms that person as "disabled." If a person has a history of impairment, even though they may not be currently termed as "disabled," they are still considered and believed to be disabled. But what if Faulkner is presenting to us a man stricken with grief and heartache due to the loss of his matriarch, that that loss triggered an enlightenment within this man? What if Darl found true enlightenment via catharsis, and that provoked him to cremate his mother and allow for closure?

But what is valued more, enlightenment or connection with man? If it can be agreed upon that Darl does find enlightenment throughout the journey, but is sent to Jackson's insane asylum, what is it that he has gained and lost due to his actions? What

does man value more, true enlightenment and clarification of everything within one's life or the acceptance from fellow man? This story presents those two things as polar opposites, and just like actions and words, man's acceptance on one line and true enlightenment on the other, grows farther and farther apart until man cannot straddle both lines anymore. Because of Darl's action, although he may have not found complete closure, because her body didn't actually burn in the barn, his family labels him "insane". His action of destroying another man's hard work, his livelihood, pushed his fellow man to look past the intentions and only see the result. But Faulkner brings the reader into Darl's internal discourse, as well as others, to see the reasoning behind Darl's actions. We see his pain and desire to let his mother truly rest in peace. Others have reverberated his feelings of the ridiculousness of their journey, that there is no sacredness to it at all.

Cash's section most reveals what he and other's think about Darl—that he understands his intentions, and that even he thought that one of them might do something, and that others only see the end result of his internal crisis. Cash's section reveals that he sees both sides of the story—that Darl was trying to find relief in burning down the barn where his mother's body lies, but he also sees that his brother destroyed someone else's life via this action. Instead of fellow man asking Darl why he did such a thing and investing in trying to find out, a conclusion is drawn too quickly and he is labeled "disabled." His family, including Cash, all thinks he would be better in Jackson for the rest of his life. Cash sees that there is a conundrum with man saying what is sane or insane. He really questions, "Who has the right to say what is "normal" or "disabled?"

But the action of burning down someone's barn disrupted the normalcy of everyday life. Darl's role within the narration serves to disrupt what man terms as "normalcy," and Faulkner hinges on that. He shows man not accepting his fellow man, and displacing someone to be without any type of normalcy ever again. With Darl, unlike Benjy, he could easily be considered able-bodied, because he can perform everyday life activities, such as caring for himself. But the writing reveals that man fears the disabled and wishes to extract disability from within his society. But why fear it? Seems like an obvious question, as Jewel says, "Catch him and tie him up. Goddamn it, do you want to wait until he sets fire to the godddamn wagon?" (233). Does there contain a bit of fear because man can still find some connections with other men deemed "disabled"? Is there real fear that the normalcy and insanity or disability are not polar opposites, that they are more similar and closer together than the overall writing presents? Cash sees that Darl was and is able-bodied and he acted out of pain and grief. He sees the humanity in his brother and the action itself. Does man fear disability because he can see the disabled man in himself?

The writing presented Darl, via his internal discourse alone, as quite articulate, serving as this voyeur to the family, delivering prose along the journey that would never be attributed to a disabled man. But the other side of things, man's judgment of fellow man's actions, the Bundrens and friends and neighbors judgment of Darl, balance out the scale of understanding. Darl is one person in his head and another, quite different person to everyone else. This writing reveals that disability has universality to it among all men; that there is more of a connection between the disabled and able-bodied, because the able-bodied are the ones creating the distance between the two. The able-bodied create

any conclusion of man, and thus create the distance between sanity and insanity. *As I Lay Dying* shows that that separation is an illusion, and that man contains within himself both an able-bodied and a disabled body. That line between sanity and insanity is much thinner than one thinks, and *As I Lay Dying* shows that to be true. But the internal discourse of man allows for fellow man to find understanding in things. Without the Bundren's internal discourses presented to the reader, one can make very different conclusions of each character. Hagood makes another terrific point about Darl's mind, "Totally unpredictable, Darl more than any other character keeps the reader questioning where the line between normal and abnormal is drawn—and that is saying something for a novel full of characters that do so" (120).

But in another light, Darl seems to be a puppet to Faulkner's ventriloquism. His prose causes the reader to get lost in their beauty as he presents each character with their exact descriptive portrait. Faulkner hinges on Darl's eyes and his "all seeing" capability to lay the foundation that is the Bundrens. He is said to see and know too much, and it can be concluded that that part of him forced him to finally act out violently for relief. But Faulkner depended on that "disability" or "odd" side of him to create the foundation. Just as Benjy presents the past to the reader through his formidable memory, Darl's seeing and knowing too much, what causes him to be committed by his fellow man, lays the framework of his family, the inner-workings of everyone and their secrets. His narration depends on his disability.

Just as Cash empathizes his brother's pain and desire to want their mother to finally find closure, as well as himself, but he also shows the other side of the story, the

results which came about from burning the barn. The conclusion the Bundrens make on the barn burning is that Darl must have been crazy, because who would burn another man's barn down. Cash shows that the result of the action cannot be overlooked, no matter what was gained or hoped to be gained by the act. Cash brings the reader back down to earth as he thinks:

But I dont reckon nothing excuses setting fire to a man's barn and endangering his stock and destroying his property. That's how I reckon a man is crazy. That's how he cant see eye to eye with other folks. And I reckon they aint nothing else to do with him but what the most folks say is right. (Faulkner 233-234)

Cash concludes that man does not care what happened in the beginning or middle, but what came about from it all, the end result.

Cash takes over Darl's role as speaker for the Bundrens. He continues his second to last narration with laying out the scene when Darl is unexpectedly detained by two men, forced into handcuffs and taken to Jackson. Darl struggles and looks at Cash with fear, "I thought you would have told me. I never thought you wouldn't have" (237). The reader can feel Cash's remorse in agreeing to send him to Jackson for the rest of his life. As Jewel yells out, "Kill him. Kill the son of a bitch" (238), Cash thinks to himself:

It was so bad. It was bad. A fellow cant get away from a shoddy job. He cant do it. I tried to tell him, but he just said, 'I thought you'd a told me. It's not that I,' he, said, then he begun to laugh. The other fellow pulled Jewel off of him and he sat there on the ground, laughing. (238)

Cash tries to explain to Darl that he must be separated from society, because his fellow man fears him, and his violent act must be paid for by serving out the rest of his life in an

asylum. He can see that Darl is in his most vulnerable state, as he (Darl) can understand that what he did was wrong and he fears being punished for it.

Cash continues to reverberate man's conclusive thoughts on Darl—that he is dangerous and should be separated from society in an institution. He cannot voice his thoughts that he understands why Darl did what he did, because that would force him into Darl's realm. That realm consists of unknowable things, but Cash finds similarities with his "insane" brother. Man commits Darl because he represents a type of possibility for man. Darl, within the writing, represents a mirror to his family and his fellow man, as what they could be. Disability and the definition of "odd" or "queer" are riddled with the unknown. Man fears what he does not know and what he cannot control, so man creates space between him and the unknown. The terming of "disability," especially during Faulkner's time (early 1900's), was done out of fear and the desire to create space. Eugenics came about and certain men believed they could perfect society by breeding "properly" with certain people to prevent feeble-minded idiots. Darl is not considered an idiot like Benjy, but he is sent to the same asylum Benjy is threatened to go by Jason and Luster. Concerning disabled individuals, especially in the U.S. South, castration was a legal option that allowed "able-bodied" people to find some relief if they could castrate the idiots so as to prevent that same disability to continue through generations. They also did this to prevent a disabled individual from sexual harming another person, like in the case of Benjy Compson.

But eugenics and labels aside, Darl's mind is presented as a tool within the novel, as well as an everlasting character to show man's connection and honest interactions with

his fellow man when drastic actions or events occur. Things such as death or the destruction of property can evoke fear, anger, pain, self-reflection and ideas of the unknown. Darl questions a lot of his life due to his mother neglecting him and showing more love towards Jewel and Cash, the two she considered her true children. Because he observes and sees too much, he knows too much, and therefore feels too much. His voyeuristic skills in see and interpreting create his descent into madness. Anse and others said Darl has been “odd” for some time, and that all started when he realized the basis for his mother and brother’s relationship—that Jewel signified freedom and true love for Addie. Darl’s realization of this, coupled with his poetic and analytical internal discourse, caused him to internalize too much. Eventually the words within his mind needed to escape and they came out in the form of destruction and laughter.

Cash understands why Darl burned down the barn, but he misses the reason for Darl’s laughing. Some critics have attributed it to Darl seeing the absurdity in the journey of hauling his mother’s rotten body to Jefferson, as everyone around him felt their ulterior motives were more important than fully grieving for their mother. What comes out of Darl, his laughter, is ultimately his pain and conclusive understanding that this entire journey, his entire life, is so ridiculous and outrageously absurd, consisting of no true connection or love with anyone in his life. He tries to finally connect with his mother by giving her a respectful and proper burial, focusing only on her and the void she will now be leaving in his life. Darl’s laughter truly comes from a pain within him. His laughter is really his metaphorical tears, and just as the fool within King Lear is also his jester, relaying to Lear the frank truth about things, so is Darl, a clown to all, crying through the mask of laughter. His laughter, at its core, is really the tears of a clown or

fool, misunderstood, but speaking the stark truth that others do not want to hear. Darl took action to show that truth. Cash does not understand it though,

‘Better,’ he said. He begun to laugh again. ‘Better,’ he said. He couldn’t hardly say it for laughing. He sat on the ground and us watching him, laughing and laughing. It was bad. It was bad so. I be durn if I could see anything to laugh at. Because there just aint nothing justifies the deliberate destruction of what a man has built with his own sweat and stored the fruit of his sweat into. (Faulkner 238)

He does not see that Darl’s laughter is really the tears and pain within him springing forth, as it was bottled for so long. He cannot bare it anymore and his body reacts to it all, through drastic action and laughter. Cash stops trying to understand and concludes that there is nothing to laugh about. He falls onto the other line of things, agreeing with the majority that Darl has gone crazy and he must be taken out of society.

In the twenty-first century, the ADA was created, not to separate the “disabled” from the able-bodied, but to give more rights and bring together both sides of the line. During Faulkner’s time, disability was the negation of able-bodied, and the majority of “normal” men and women decided to rid man of that as much as possible, or at least create a lot of space between the two. In the twenty-first century, at least in the U.S., the ADA was created to bring both sides together and destroy the line. In this day and age, disabled men and women have more of a voice and wish to show fellow man that there are more similarities between each other than one might think. Disabled individuals, in the U.S., as well as able-bodied people, are striving more and more to break down the barrier between the two sides and look at things from only one side, finding a connection between each other. Man wishes to not have sides anymore, but Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* shows the stark truth that less than a hundred years ago, men were castrated,



committed to asylums and misunderstood due to an abnormality. That being said, when one man intentionally hurts his fellow man, a certain line is crossed and certain conclusions can and are justly made to institutionalize a person. But certain individuals, like Darl, as Faulkner shows, are feared by men because he is a metaphorical mirror of what man can be.

Faulkner starts to conclude the Bundrens journey and Cash makes a final remark in his second to last narration that leaves the reader with a curiosity about where he stands on his brother's detainment:

But I aint so sho that ere a man has a 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 the insane doings of that man with the same horror and the same astonishment. (238)

The last word, "astonishment" can mean either disbelief or awe or wonderment. Cash could be explaining that man looks at another man's actions as insane with a feeling of horror and wonderment. He explains that man is curious about man's insane actions, because, with all truth laid forth, those actions are not so unfamiliar to fellow man.

Darl did act alone and he is solely responsible for burning down Gillespie's barn, but many things lead up to his action that can and should take partial responsibility for his unlawful attack. Although the consensus is that Darl has become insane, even others can see that his family, especially parents, have some blame to share upon their shoulders. Peabody, the family doctor, attests to this and sees Cash in town at Jefferson as he examines his broken leg covered in cement. He is speaking to Cash and says, "God Almighty, why didn't Anse carry you to the nearest sawmill and stick your leg in the

saw? That would have cured it. Then you all could have stuck his head into the saw and cured the whole family..." (Faulkner 240). Peabody is speaking to Cash hyperbolically as he cannot believe he and his family agreed to pour cement on his broken leg to split it. Peabody sees the absurdity of it all, but blames the family's misfortunes on the shiftless, lazy Anse. Although a misogynistic, lazy old man himself, Peabody still sees the selfish, lazy, and victim-like behavior of Anse.

Vardaman speaks for the last time in his final narration when he repeats to himself, "*Darl is my brother. My brother is going to Jackson*" (250). He repeats this multiple times over multiple pages, as if he is trying to explain to himself the gravity of the situation, like it's not exactly sinking in just yet. He is making the connection between his brother and Jackson, that he is losing his brother to that place and that he will not have him in his life anymore. He says again, "*My brother is Darl. He went to Jackson on the train. He didn't go on the train to go crazy. He went crazy in our wagon. Darl!*" (251). Vardaman, although an unreliable narrator, because of his youth and, what could be considered his feeble-mindedness, does speak of truth from his heart. Diction like this from Vardaman is presumed to be the main reason for Kartiganer's model. As was stated previously at the beginning, he pairs Benjy and Vardaman together because of their feeble-mindedness. Syntax like this proves his model to be valid, but he still does not touch on the entirety of each novel and both Benjy's and Darl's roles within them.

Before the journey and life of the Bundren's is concluded by the new voice for the family, Cash, Darl's last narration is presented to the reader and it feels less genuine and honest than his previous ones. Since Darl's actions and recent mannerisms present a

conundrum to the reader as whether he is crazy or not, Faulkner gives Darl one last narratorial section and confirms everything. Darl speaks of himself in the third person, as if floating from above, watching over himself on the train being taken to Jackson, laughing hysterically. Hagood makes a strong point about his final discourse:

It could be seen as bothersome that Faulkner inserted Darl's final monologue—his strange laughter and his referring to himself in the third-person seem to cast him as actually having a breakdown. He seems to be performing the role of an insane person [...] perhaps a more rational sort of monologue showing that everyone is wrong about him would have seemed a little less cheap. (122)

Hagood, once again, hits the nail on the head and attests to this thesis' analysis that Darl's final monologue seems out of character. Faulkner could have left Darl's final words at Cash's penultimate monologue. Faulkner made the choice to bring the reader back down to stark reality showing that Darl's mannerisms and actions proved everyone's suspicion that he is indeed insane and not safe to be in society with his fellow man. Faulkner lets the consensus, the majorities win in committing Darl, and the enlightenment, whether it was attained or not by Darl or by the reader, is forgotten about. The reader is left with seeing man's true nature—creating distance between the unknown due to fear.

The Bundrens are concluded with Anse introducing his children to the new "Mrs. Bundren" and buying his new, wooden teeth. The reader is left in shock and awe, seeing the worse fear happening—the selfish Anse gets what he wants. Cash's final monologue reveals this and all are left wanting more, wanting closure. Faulkner presents the stark truth that reality doesn't always offer closure and happy endings do not come to everyone. Darl is sent away to Jackson, laughing on the train, as his body expels all the pent up jealousy, anger, pain and grief.

## **Chapter Fourteen: Conclusion—Benjy and Darl**

Benjy Compson and Darl Bundren are similar in many ways. Although Kartiganer and other critics may not find similarities between these two men, this thesis finds them to be a strong pairing. Benjy Compson, a feeble-minded idiot, is used as Faulkner's puppet to his ventriloquist ventures. Benjy sees all, and since the Compsons live in the past, Benjy is the perfect one, nay the only one, to best lay the framework of the Compsons: their past, their present and their crumbling, almost non-existent future. But what differs from Benjy and his all-seeing, voyeuristic capabilities, in comparison to Darl, is Benjy is mute and unable to create judgments or conclusions of things. He cannot give his opinion of things. The reader sees through his eyes the family that is self-destructive, but he does not offer his opinion on it. He only feels with his body and knows things through his senses. Although quite articulate, we still do not hear Benjy's judgment on things and people around him.

Darl, even more articulate than Benjy, is just as much, if not more, of a voyeur. Through his curious, but jealous mind, he wishes to see and know more, find out the little secrets of his family. But this curiosity, this all-seeing gift, creates space between him and everyone else. He sees all, and as his eyes are agents to his capabilities and disability, he begins to know too much. The event of the death of his mother pushes his entire family into a limbo where they all struggle to figure out what to do and where to go to

next. Their matriarch has left them, and they each try to cope with the ever-present void. What Darl offers the reader that Benjy cannot is his judgment, his opinion, his take on everything he sees. He does lay the framework for the Bundrens, telling the reader who is who and what secrets they are hiding. He does not have the cognitive disability like Benjy, so he is able to connect things, make conclusions and voice his very truthful opinion.

Disability overflows throughout both novels as multiple characters can be labeled “disabled.” Not only is Benjy Compson easily labeled as “disabled,” but also his eldest brother, Quentin can be termed thus. He, like Darl Bundren, is confined to his mind, scared to express his true thoughts and feelings about his sister’s sexuality and promiscuity. He ultimately kills himself due to his guilt for the thoughts he is having about his sister. A majority could easily label Quentin as “insane” or “unstable” due to his final act of ending his life. Anse Bundren could very easily also fall into the category of “disabled.” He truly believes he will die if he sweats. He carries himself as if he’s disabled, and he uses his idea that he’ll die if he sweats to force everyone in his life to take care of him in any way. Cash could even been labeled as “disabled.” His meticulous mind causes him to work tirelessly to complete his mother’s coffin in his own way. The way he creates everything on a bevel, he could be seen as having perfectionism issues. This causes him to work overtime in the rain, depriving him of warm, dry shelter, food, water and rest. He saws away, day and night, to create this casket for Addie to finally rest in, and the sound of his saw permeates throughout the entire beginning of the novel.

Multiple characters in both novels can be labeled as “disabled,” but both Benjy Compson and Darl Bundren have a stronger connection, a bond that only they can share. But it should be noted that they are not the only ones who stand out as being “odd” or “queer,” because, even though one is sent to Jackson and the other is castrated and constantly threatened with being sent to Jackson, there are other multiple characters who can easily be labeled as “disabled.” Benjy Compson is unable to construct conclusions or judgments about things. He cannot find connection between the hand that feeds him and the spoon coming towards his mouth. All he sees is that he is being fed by something. Darl does not have this impairment. He is fully able-bodied, but due to his actions, he is pulled away from his family and punished for his doings for the rest of his life in a padded room. What connects both of these men is their articulate internal discourse, their all-seeing perspective, their first-person narration laying the framework for each of their families, and the depth Faulkner gives their character. As stated previously, they do not fit any mold man gives them, because their internal struggle, that discourse given to the reader, shows that their disability pushes each of them to find enlightenment through pain and displacement.

Benjy Compson was created to disrupt things via his disability, but also, his underlying role, was to lay the foundation that is the Compsons. He recalls the past with exactitude, preciseness and meticulousness that it easily becomes apparent that his family’s past and explaining that history is one of his main roles to play within the novel. He does disrupt the novel and his family, in the sense that he is inserted to bring about frustration and a rethinking of what “normal” is and how man’s fellow man reacts to something and someone different. But he still cannot communicate externally to his

family members and others on the property. He cannot show his loved ones the mind he reveals to the reader. That is where Darl comes in. He becomes an extension of Benjy, a rebirth and transformation of the feeble-minded, man-child. Darl Bundren sees all and makes conclusions about things. He can connect that his sister is acting strange right after a possible interaction with Lavee, concluding that she must be pregnant. He can see that there is a special relationship between his mother and brother, Jewel. He sees and eventually finds out that his brother is not his father's son, that his mother had an affair with another man, producing Jewel. With that mind and a lack of cognitive disability, unlike Benjy, the reader can see that Faulkner endowed him with more abilities than Benjy.

Faulkner started with a voyeur, a mind that soaked up all it saw and spat it out back to the reader, telling the lives of his family and their downfall. Then he took that foundation and gave it more—Darl saw all, soaked it up, spat it back out to the reader, but this time there was more interpretation and reflection. He had more of a voice, internally and externally. He saw more, connected more and gave the reader certain conclusions about things. But his seeing more also led to his downfall, because, as the cliché saying goes, "Ignorance is bliss." Although simple and cliché, it really can be applied to Benjy Compson. Due to his cognitive disability, he wasn't able to understand certain things, and with that, he was immune to feel certain things. His ignorance, because of his feeble mind, protected him from certain things around him. He could viscerally feel the loss of his sister, that there was a void in his life. But when something else caught his attention, a flower or a jimson weed, his feeble mind was easily distracted from his previous heartache. He recalls these memories via external triggers, not due to

him thinking about his past or reminiscing about what once was. Everything is temporary or momentary for him. Nothing permanently weighs down his mind.

Darl, born into a world that immediately displaced him due his mother hating their father for tricking her with words, seems doomed from the beginning. His “doomed” future comes from the fact that his mother does not feel like he is a true child of hers, and thus he will always search for that lack of connection, that feeling and emotion he sees between his mother and brother, Jewel. His mind that constantly sees and searches, wanting to know more, leads to him acting unusual. Due to his family and their own preoccupations, no one seems to care to ask Darl why he did what he did or offer him help to save his future instead of committing him to Jackson. His family saves their own lives collectively by sending Darl to Jackson instead of being sued by Gillespie. Both men, Darl Bundren and Benjy Compson, although gifted with extraordinary minds, are displaced because of it. Their internal discourse manifests differently externally and creates space between them and others. Although they both search for connection between themselves and their family members, both wanting their strong mother figure to connect with them, their minds via their actions disrupt the “normalcy” within their societies. Their actions hurt others via physical attacks on a school girl being misinterpreted or burning down another man’s barn, each one of these voyeurs are misunderstood and not given the time or space to ever connect with their mother figures.

Faulkner presents many things to the reader within both of these novels, but what one can take from this thesis is that disability within literature does many things. It can disrupt the “normalcy” within each community; it can allow space for fellow man to



show his true colors within that disrupted environment; it can also be taken advantage of to lay the framework for a novel—the past, the present, the inner-workings of everyone; it can also bring to light the continued prejudice by man; and it can also create enlightenment and understanding. Faulkner realized that disability within a story could evoke feelings, bring about questions and create enlightenment for characters, as well as the reader. He shows that man's true nature lies within his mind. Handy says, "He is writing out of a conviction that what is most real in human experience is the kind of inner world man inhabits" (451). Both of these men, given the gifts of beautiful, articulate minds and voyeuristic qualities are forever displaced, as they are never accepted by their society or by their own families. Disability, within these two novels and most likely within more of Faulkner's work, shows the selfishness of man and his egotistical mind.

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