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William OF Faulkner

A CRITICAL

INTERPRETATION BY OLGA W. VICKERY

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4: THE DIMENSIONS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

As I Lay Dying

As *I Lay Dying* possesses basically the same structure as *The Sound and the Fury* but in a more complex form. Instead of four main sections, three of which are dominated by the consciousness of a single character, there are some sixty short sections apportioned among fifteen characters. Each of these brief chapters describes some part either of the funeral preparations or of the procession itself, even as it explores and defines the mind of the observer from whose point of view the action is described. Accordingly, the clear sweep of the narrative is paralleled by a developing psychological drama of whose tensions and compulsions the characters themselves are only half-aware. The need to co-operate during the journey merely disguises the essential isolation of each of the Bundrens and postpones the inevitable conflict between them. For the Bundrens, no less than the Compsons, are living each in a private world whose nature is gauged in relation to Addie and to the actual events of the journey to Jefferson. The larger frame of reference, provided in *The Sound and the Fury* by the impersonal, third person narration of the fourth section, is here conveyed dramatically through eight different characters who comment on some aspect of the funeral in which they themselves are not immediately involved. Their diverse reactions to and judgments of the Bundrens chart the range of social responses, passing from friendliness to indifference to outraged indignation.

As in *The Sound and the Fury*, each private world manifests a fixed and distinctive way of reacting to and ordering experience.

Words, action, and contemplation constitute the possible modes of response, while sensation, reason, and intuition form the levels of consciousness. All of these combine to establish a total relationship between the individual and his experience; for certain of the characters in *As I Lay Dying*, however, this relationship is fragmented and distorted. Anse, for example, is always the bystander, contemplating events and reducing the richness of experience to a few threadbare clichés. In contrast, Darl, the most complex of the characters, owes his complexity and his madness to the fact that he encompasses all possible modes of response and awareness without being able to effect their integration. It is Cash, the oldest brother, who ultimately achieves maturity and understanding by integrating these modes into one distinctively human response which fuses words and action, reason and intuition. In short, the Bundren family provides a locus for the exploration of the human psyche in all its complexity without in the least impairing the immediate reality of character and action.

The different levels of consciousness are rendered by Faulkner through variations in style ranging from the dialect of actual speech to the intricate imagery and poetic rhythms of the unconscious. When the characters are engaged in conversation or concerned with concrete objects, the vocabulary used is limited and repetitious and the style is realistic and colloquial. These same qualities, though to a lesser extent, characterize the expression of conscious thought, for whatever a person is aware of, he articulates in his habitual way, which in a number of instances involves a groping for words. There is, however, some loss of immediacy and vividness since on this level language strives to achieve the impersonal order and clarity of reason rather than the concreteness of sensation. With the unconscious or intuitive, the personal element is at once restored and transcended. Making its appeal to emotion and imagination, the language of the unconscious relies heavily on symbols with their power to evoke rather than to define reality. Thus, Faulkner is able to indicate the particular combination of sensation, reason, and intuition possessed by each of his characters as well as their range of awareness through a subtle manipulation of language and style.

Quite naturally, the three modes of response to experience—words, action, and contemplation—are implemented not by the style but by the series of events with which the characters are confronted. Each of the Bundrens is concerned with Addie's death and with her funeral, events which are by no means iden-

tical. As Doctor Peabody suggests, the former is a personal and private matter: "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—and that of the minds of the ones who suffer the bereavement." (368) Thus, it is Addie not as a mother, corpse, or promise but as an element in the blood of her children who dominates and shapes their complex psychological reactions. 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. 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.

In contrast to her death, her funeral is a public affair, participated in and, indeed, supervised by the neighbors as well as the family. On this level she is simply the corpse which must be disposed of in accordance with a long established ritual of interment. While the neighbors prepare themselves to comfort the bereaved, the Bundrens are expected to assume the traditional role of mourners, a role which carries with it unspoken rules of propriety and decorum. Only Anse, for whom Addie never existed as an individual, finds such a role congenial. His face tragic and composed, he easily makes the proper responses to condolences and recites his litany of grief, though somewhat marred by his irrepressible egotism. There is even a sense in which Anse thoroughly enjoys the situation since as chief mourner he is, for once in his life, a person of importance. It is not, however, that simple for Addie's sons, who find that the conventions of mourning and burial can neither channel nor contain their grief. Thus, Cora Tull, the self-appointed champion and arbiter of propriety, finds that each of them fails, at some point, to behave in a fitting manner.

Because the agonizing journey to Jefferson does fulfill the promise to Addie, because it does reunite her in death with her family, some critics have seen in it an inspiring gesture of humanity or a heroic act of traditional morality. In reality, however, the journey from beginning to end is a travesty of the ritual of interment. Any ritual, as Addie herself suggests, can become a travesty, even though it has been ordained and sanctioned in its fixed order from the beginning of time. Since there is no virtue attached simply to the meticulous repetition of its words and

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gestures, it is the individual who must give meaning and life to ritual by recognizing its symbolic function. But the spirit which should give meaning to Addie's funeral is either absent, as in Anse and Dewey Dell, or in conflict with it, as in Cash and Darl. As this becomes clear, the series of catastrophes that befall the Bundrens becomes a source of macabre humor, for it is only when the ritual is disengaged from its symbolic function that the comic aspect becomes apparent.

Awareness of the difference between empty and significant ritual, framed in terms of the word and the act, dominates Addie Bundren's dying thoughts. She concludes that any experience—love, marriage, motherhood, bereavement—can be either an intensely felt reality or a mere conventional form of speech and behavior. The ritual of the word attempts to impose an order and a significance on experience, while the ritual of the act allows them to emerge from it. While Anse talks about his trials and his grief, Cash, Darl, and Jewel, each in his own way, express the meaning of love and bereavement through their actions which frequently come in conflict with accepted and acceptable forms of behavior. This contrast, sustained throughout the funeral journey, is a confirmation of Addie's perception of "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." (465) Words need not, however, be empty providing they are grounded in non-verbal experience. It is when this condition is not met that they tend to be separated from and ultimately to replace the act. There are, as Addie realizes, both "the words [that] are the deeds, and the other words that are not deeds, that are just the gaps in peoples' lacks." (466)

Addie and Anse themselves represent the two polar opposites of action and words which must be meshed if their relationship is to be meaningful. The word by itself leads to a paralysis of the ability to feel and act; the act by itself results in excessive and uncontrolled responses to various stimuli both internal and external. Addie and Anse, however, are not able to effect this fusion of word and act. 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.

The birth of Cash confirms her feeling that words are irrelevant and that only physical experience has reality and significance. Through the act of giving birth she becomes part of the endless cycle of creation and destruction, discovering that, for the first time, her "aloneness had been violated and then made whole again by the violation." (464) Yet accepting Cash as the sign of her own passionate involvement in experience implies a total rejection of Anse who is now father as well as husband in name only. Because Addie accepts the fact that she and Anse live in different worlds, her second child, Darl, comes as the ultimate and unforgivable outrage. Addie, however, quickly disowns the thought of Anse as the deliberate agent of her betrayal; they have both been "tricked by words older than Anse or love." (464) Precisely what these words are is not clear, but what they signify for Addie is quite apparent. Primarily, she realizes that the ritual of the word does have its repercussions in the world of experience, and on this basis she is able to distinguish between the empty words of Anse and the words which are deeds.

Her sudden and brief affair with Whitfield constitutes Addie's attempt to explore this new relationship between words and acts, for it encompasses even as it differentiates between two quite distinct conceptions of sin. As a word, sin is the opposite of virtue and leads inevitably to damnation. It is this aspect which Addie stresses when she thinks of sin as garments which she and Whitfield wear in the face of the world and which they remove "in order to shape and coerce the terrible blood to the forlorn echo of the dead word high in the air." (466) But as an act, sin may be a step toward salvation. Accordingly, Whitfield becomes "the instrument ordained by God who created the sin, to sanctify that sin He had created." (466) The adultery thus becomes a moral act, not, of course, in the sense of "good" or "virtuous," but in the sense that it re-establishes the reality of moral conduct and of the relationship between God and man. This reality is neither linguistic nor factual in character; instead, it consists of the possible, the hypothetical, the conceivable, all, in short, that follows from the capacity for unrestricted choice. Significantly, Addie sees in Jewel, the child of her sin, a sign of grace: "He is my cross and he will be my salvation. He will save me from the water and from the fire. Even though I have laid down my life, he will save me." (460) Through sin Addie seeks to find and enact her own humanity, and if her solution seems extreme, so is her provocation. For the alternative, as she sees it, is the moral

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myopia of those who live by words "because people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too." (468)

After her desperate effort to explore and encompass the potentialities of life in one intensely felt act, she is ready to set her house in order. She consciously and deliberately gives Anse Dewey Dell to "negative" Jewel and Vardaman to replace him. Yet in a deep and profound sense, Anse can never claim or share in the lives of any of his children and this gives her a final moment of exhilarated realization: "My 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." (467) Through her, life itself has effected its own continuance and in that process the mother-child relationship has its roots. Two of the children, however, are hers in an additional sense, for she has chosen them for a relationship that is personal as well as maternal. There is an unspoken understanding between herself and Cash. The same understanding, though no longer peaceful, exists between her and Jewel. In both cases the relationship is simple and direct, uninterrupted by conventional expressions of familial sentiments.

The circumstances of the birth of her children establish the level of their awareness of Addie and the mode of their response to and participation in her burial. Through an unconscious identification with her, they faithfully reproduce, though in varying degree, her very moods as well as her attitude to the external world. Jewel comes closest to recreating one aspect of her character, while Dewey Dell and Vardaman, the children reserved for Anse, seem least directly involved with her as a person. The structure of *As I Lay Dying* in which the progression is centrifugal as well as linear implements this pattern. Centrifugally, each section establishes the relationship between Addie and the character whose thoughts and observations are being recorded. Linearly, each section contributes to the sequence of actions and events which constitutes the plot. Furthermore, the separation of word and deed which Addie had recounted is dramatized in the journey to Jefferson. Anse undertakes a moral pilgrimage but solely on the verbal level. Inarticulate except when he is cursing, it is Jewel who rushes into action each time there is a new barrier to be overcome or a new catastrophe to be countered. The rest of the family move between these two extremes.

Because Anse lives by words alone, Addie has no influence over him except when she ironically exacts a promise which is a

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Anse give his word, which leads to tragedy.
word but which will compel him to act. All that saves him from equating the deed with the word and the intention with the achievement of it is his own desire for new teeth and Jewel's savage determination to perform the promised act. At the first sign of difficulty he falls back on his inexhaustible stock of moral platitudes to isolate himself effectively from the horrors of the journey, to avoid any exertion on his part, and to maneuver others into acting for him. Incapable of formulating any plan or initiating any action, he depends on his sons to overcome each new obstacle. If they fail, there are always the neighbors to come to his rescue. Certainly the neighbors can do nothing but help when confronted by his covert pleas couched in the language of forbearance: "I ain't asking you to risk your mule. It ain't your dead; I am not blaming you." (436) His words create an image of himself as the meek and magnanimous victim forgiving a cruel and heartless world. To refuse him help after this is to admit the validity of his remarks and therefore, by implication, their own hardness. They see through his verbal camouflage, but since it is based on emotional and moral clichés to which the response is predetermined, they are helpless before it.

From the beginning the distance between what Anse says and what he does is ironically and humorously emphasized. The irony is, however, most apparent in the scene of Addie's burial. Having had his promise to her fulfilled for him, he makes a short funeral oration. His words and his sentiments as he expresses his grief, though a trifle marred by self-pity, are appropriate to the occasion and to his role as chief mourner: "The somebody you was young with and you grewed old in her and she grewed old in you, seeing the old coming on and it was the one somebody you could hear say it don't matter and know it was the truth outen the hard world and all a man's grief and trials. You all don't know." (511) But it is simply a verbal sincerity, unrelated to the act and therefore to the kind of truth that arises out of and touches the heart directly and immediately. Lacking these, his words, like his expression, constitute "a monstrous burlesque of all bereavement." (394) The lament for Addie is followed by his unwillingness to buy a shovel for digging her grave; and even before her body has been placed in it, he has found a new wife to reassure him in his old age. These ironic incongruities are profoundly in keeping with Anse's character. Cushioned by words and conventional sentiments against the harsh impact of

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reality, he is the only one of the Bundrens completely unchanged by Addie's death or by the funeral journey. The horrors which drive Darl into insanity and leave their mark on the others pass him by so that he avoids agony and insight alike.

In contrast to his father, Cash undergoes certain very clear and definite changes as a result of Addie's death and funeral. Apparently reflecting Addie's rejection of words at the time of his birth, Cash begins by being silent, absorbed in his work, and curiously remote from the tensions and violence of the rest of the family. It is only after something concrete has been accomplished that he speaks. As a carpenter, Cash is concerned with working with his hands and building well; as Addie's son, he uses those hands and that skill to express what she means to him. Thus, the construction of the coffin becomes an act of love, understood as such by Addie, in which emotion tempered by reason is manifested in a concrete form. The sense of proportion which guides his hands also distinguishes his behavior and makes him the inevitable peacemaker in the family. Yet admirable as these characteristics are, Cash is, at the outset, a curiously stiff and one-sided figure. By devoting all his energy to and expressing his emotions through his work, he leaves no room for the cultivation of imaginative or linguistic potentialities. If Anse represents words without action, Cash is action in search of a word. Accordingly, a whole realm of human awareness and response is closed to him.

Cash does, however, develop a more comprehensive understanding of himself and his world. His exclusive preoccupation with concrete tangible objects yields to a more flexible, imaginative vision. The violence he suffers is, if not the cause, then the means of this profound transformation. The twice broken leg and the pain which he accepts without protest, as Addie had accepted the violence of his birth, pave the way for the extension of his range of awareness and for his increased sensitivity both to events and to people. The process is accelerated by the fact that his traditional mode of response, constructive action, is suddenly denied him. Lying helplessly on the coffin, his leg encased in cement and jarred by every turn of the wheel, he is forced to seek new forms of expression.

The increasing range of Cash's awareness is suggested by his growing sympathy with Darl. Facing the flooded river, they "look at one another with long probing looks, looks that plunge unprompted through one another's eyes and into the ultimate secret place." (439) In that moment crossing the river becomes more

than a problem of finding ways and means; Cash begins to realize that the prolonged journey is, in effect, destroying the significance it should affirm. During their stay at the Gillespies', Cash and Darl once more share the same revulsion and repudiation of the family's obsession with fulfilling the letter of the promise to Addie. Although it is Darl who sets fire to the barn, Cash accepts the responsibility as his own because he is the elder and because he too had contemplated the same violent act. Accepting this responsibility is one more step in his recognition of the complexity of those moral and emotional qualities which inhere in men's actions. Accordingly, he alone comprehends that the judgment of Darl's attempt to destroy the coffin and of Jewel's grim efforts to save it must depend upon whether the body is viewed realistically or symbolically. Darl's action issues from his conviction that the corpse has long since become an offense to God and man, Jewel's from the equally strong emotional conviction that the coffin contains his mother. Combined with his own firm foundation in action and the concrete details of his trade, this increase of sensitivity and imaginative perception makes Cash the one character in the novel who achieves his full humanity in which reason and intuition, words and action merge into a single though complex response.

Darl, the second son and the most complicated of the Bundrens, faithfully reflects and dramatizes Addie's attitude at the time of his birth. She had believed, a belief later qualified, that reality lay only in physical experience and that the word and the act were polar opposites. Feeling Darl to be an outrage, she had denied him a place in her affections and in her world. Consequently, Darl's is a world of consciousness exclusively, and this, of course, renders his connection with the external world increasingly precarious and insecure. He exists in a kind of limbo where the firm, defining shape of objects and of people is continually dissolving. Only by a painful process of reasoning can he establish the physical existence of himself, his mother, and the loaded wagon: "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." (396) This attempt to define objective reality is an index of Darl's separation from it.

But the same absence of defining and limiting outline permits Darl to penetrate the minds of others and to intuit those secret thoughts of which they themselves are scarcely aware. Twice,

while he himself is absent, he apprehends the actions of Cash, Anse, and Dewey Dell as they cluster around the dying Addie and describes them with startling vividness. And at every moment he is able to expose, with merciless accuracy, the secret thoughts and motives of others. He knows that Jewel is the son of Addie's sin, a fact with which he repeatedly taunts the latter by asking, "Who is your father, Jewel?" More important, he knows that the horse Jewel caresses and curses is a surrogate for Addie. Similarly, he is aware of Dewey Dell's pregnancy. In both cases his knowledge forces them to face certain facts about themselves and their world. Unwilling to do so, Jewel relieves his mounting frustration in the violence of curses, while Dewey Dell finds temporary release in a fantasy of murder. Both join in the vicious physical attack on Darl when they arrive in Jefferson. Addie's rejection of him is thus repeated: with the exception of Vardaman, who is too young to know what is happening, each of the Bundrens contributes to the decision to send Darl to Jackson. As Cash's final, unacrimonious assessment suggests, the rejection is inevitable: "This world is not his world; this life his life." (532)

As Darl loses contact with the external world and with objective reality, his resemblance to Vardaman becomes more pronounced. When the wagon reaches the Gillespies', their sections are juxtaposed five times. The two of them have reached an understanding which is beyond logic and reason. Just before the fire their attitudes toward Addie become identical: as Vardaman states in one scene and Darl repeats in the next, Addie is stirring in her coffin. Darl's own intention becomes clear as he informs Vardaman that she is asking God "to hide her away from the sight of man. . . . So she can lay down her life." (495) Their shared delusion suggests that for both of them the world of fantasy has become as real as the concrete facts which we call reality.

Yet Darl's delusion is grounded in the conviction that the funeral has become an unbearable travesty of filial piety. Addie's imagined but not unreasonable request prompts him to abandon his usual role as spectator. Thought and action are fused, though in a particularly violent way. Depending on one's point of view, his action becomes a sign either of a deranged mind or of an acute moral sensibility, an ambiguity recognized by Cash who reflects: "Sometimes I ain't so sho who's got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and when he ain't. Sometimes I think it

ain't none of us pure crazy and ain't none of us pure sane until the balance of us talks him that-away." (510) Action, the basis of individual moral conduct, is subject to social judgments and these are implemented through language. Hence, though Cash understands and is sympathetic to Darl's gesture of protest, he is forced to conclude that society's judgment is the only possible one.

Although Jewel is the most closely connected with Addie and the most active during the journey, only one section is devoted to his stream of consciousness. The reason for this is that his world is least accessible to public scrutiny since it consists of a welter of emotions, centering on Addie, which cannot be communicated. These emotions are not subjected to the control of reason but are translated immediately into actions which, unlike Cash's carefully planned moves, are the products of spontaneous reflexes. Whether the results of such actions are destructive or constructive in any given instance is a matter of chance. Thus, his is the blame for perpetuating the horrors of the journey and his the credit for forcing it to a successful conclusion. It is significant that when the stimulus to action is removed, when Addie's corpse is buried and Darl committed to an insane asylum, Jewel's fury subsides except for brief spasms of irritation caused by some word or gesture of Anse's.

Because Jewel is himself largely unconscious of his own motives and emotional compulsions, it is Darl who expresses them. As Darl keeps reiterating, Jewel has no father. Addie, then, becomes the sole center of his emotional life. There is, however, no way in which Jewel's violent feelings can be channelled into socially acceptable rituals. Seeing, as usual, only the surface meaning of actions, Cora Tull mistakes his despair for indifference. But when Jewel's own thoughts are revealed, they are seen to be devoted entirely to Addie. He imagines the two of them defiantly and violently isolated from the world and its interference. Most of Jewel's subsequent actions are, in effect, attempts to make this fantasy a reality and so to claim exclusive possession of Addie. Dewey Dell, Vardaman, and Anse, he simply ignores; but each time he meets Cash it is to override the latter's caution with his own impetuous activity. As for the neighbors, they are kept at a distance by his coldness and his deliberate insults. Even the genuinely helpful and sympathetic Tull is repulsed. Only Darl cannot be excluded from his private world and he is finally eliminated by being sent to Jackson.

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This process of exclusion merely intensifies Jewel's emotional attachment to Addie without providing a release for it. The latter he finds in the wild horse which he tames and on which he can lavish his love and inflict his hatred. Because the horse is actually his possession, he can and does isolate himself and it from all contact with others. No one except himself is permitted to feed, care for, or even touch it. In a sense, the horse perpetuates Addie's emotional relationship with Jewel. Because of this identification, Jewel insists on bringing the horse with him despite Anse's protests and Darl's oblique taunts. And when he finally sells it to pay for a new team, the full intensity of his feeling reverts to Addie. This explains why he is almost prevented by his concern for the horse from rescuing Addie's coffin out of the river, whereas during the fire all his energies are directed solely toward saving it.

In sharp contrast to Jewel, Dewey Dell seems the least concerned with Addie's death and funeral. Addie, however, had revealed the same impersonal and unemotional attitude toward Dewey Dell when she stated that she had given Dewey Dell to Anse in order to "negative" Jewel. In a way, Dewey Dell has no need of Addie because she herself is recreating Addie's past and discovering that pregnancy is both a state of mind and a physical fact, both a word and an action. But unlike Addie, she is determined, if possible, to effect their separation. Thus, she will not name her condition even to herself because to do so would be to transfer her pregnancy from her private world of awareness to the public world of fact.

Yet it is only by admitting the physical reality of her pregnancy and by making it, at least to some extent, public that she can do anything to terminate it. The problem is focussed for her by the presence of Peabody. By destroying the physical evidence of her pregnancy, Peabody would become a witness to its reality, a reality which would be perpetuated in his consciousness. She avoids telling Peabody, but Darl, unfortunately, already knows. Her desire to destroy Darl and with him his knowledge is first expressed in fantasy: "I rose and took the knife from the streaming fish still hissing and I killed Darl." (423) This is followed by her savage physical attack on him and by her determination to have him sent to Jackson. Darl's departure does not, of course, solve anything for Dewey Dell, but it does postpone the need for immediate decision and action. Because there is no one present who knows of her pregnancy, she can act, for the time being, as

if it did not exist. As she sits on the wagon, placidly munching a banana, her mind relapses into its normal state, that of the minimal level of conscious thought.

The limitations of Vardaman's mind are of a different order; they are those of the youngest child, who is bewildered by a phenomenon completely new to him. Out of the various sensations that he experiences and the facts that he observes while Addie is dying, he attempts to define for himself the meaning of death. He can do this only by constructing analogies to what he already knows or remembers. But because Vardaman is limited largely to sensations, he is not able to pass from the concrete to the general and abstract. What begins as an analogy ends as an identification. Addie and the fish are linked by death and therefore, according to his own particular logic, what happens to one happens to the other: "Then it wasn't and she was, and now it is and she wasn't. And tomorrow it will be cooked and et and she will be him and pa and Cash and Dewey Dell and there won't be anything in the box and so she can breathe." (386) Eventually the dead fish and the dead mother fuse into a single thought: "My mother is a fish." Knowing that he himself is the cause and instrument of the fish's death, Vardaman seeks to find the agent responsible for Addie's death. Selecting Doctor Peabody, he gains his revenge by mistreating the doctor's horses.

Still arguing from analogy, Vardaman remembers the lack of air in the corn crib and assumes that his mother, now confined in the coffin, must feel a similar lack. Drilling holes in the coffin thus becomes a reasonable and humane act, an expression of his concern for his mother. Though certain of Vardaman's acts seem to border on the insane, he himself is not. He is a child, sensitive and even intelligent, who is exposed to a tremendous shock. And in meeting it, he has neither precedent nor advice to guide him. It is, therefore, almost inevitable that he should arrive at a distorted conception of death and that his actions, having their source in that concept, should appear grotesque and incongruous. Certainly Vardaman suffers from a delusion but an understandable one since it permits him to dissociate his mother from the horrors of physical death and decay: "*My mother is not in the box. My mother does not smell like that. My mother is a fish.*" (483)

Through the interaction of the characters the complexity of the central situation is evoked, and through an understanding of those complexities, the motivation and hence the credibility

of the characters is established. At the end, we see them in terms of their relationship to Addie and to each other, "sitting bolt upright in [their] nakedness, staring at one another and saying 'Now is the truth.'" (433) The private world of each of the Bundrens has been exposed, partly by their own actions and partly by Darl's constant probing. With his departure and the burial of Addie's corpse, the period of tension ends. The new wife, the gramophone, the memory of the toy trains, and the bananas do not replace Addie, but they do indicate a shift in the family's focus of consciousness. It is through the inception of such new patterns that the characters seek to avoid too close, protracted, and painful a scrutiny of the meaning of life and death.

Addie's death and her funeral are construed in terms of the family's varied levels and modes of consciousness, but they also possess a wider frame of reference, for the actions of the Bundrens project both death and funeral into the public world. It is in this capacity of responding to the Bundrens and their funeral procession that Faulkner introduces his eight reverberators. Mosely and MacGowan reveal two contrasting attitudes to Dewey Dell's pregnancy. The former responds to her request for pills with self-righteous moral indignation; the latter unhesitatingly takes advantage of what he conceives to be an essentially comic situation. Between them they indicate the range of possible social reactions to and judgments of her condition. Quite obviously, neither Mosely nor MacGowan is concerned with Dewey Dell as a person; they respond only to the fact that she is clearly somewhat stupid, pregnant, and unmarried.

In Samson, Armstid, and Tull, the purely social and moral judgment is tempered by personal knowledge of the Bundrens. They are, in fact, themselves implicated to some extent in the funeral. There is a kind of humorous despair in their frustrating knowledge that Anse has and will continue to take advantage of their neighborliness. Tull, for example, remarks: "Like most folks around here, I done help him so much already I can't quit now." (360) Each of these men describes a stage in the journey to Jefferson in terms of his contribution to it. Significantly, as individuals, they are appalled by the horrifying physical aspects of Addie's decaying body; but as neighbors, they feel obligated to offer their help in continuing the journey. With the burning of Gillespie's barn, however, the limits of neighborliness are reached.

In contrast to the three men, Cora Tull and Whitfield see the Bundrens solely in terms of their own ethical systems. It is fitting, therefore, that Addie's soliloquy, with its emphasis on the separation of the word and the act, should be flanked by their moralizing and empty rhetoric. Fearing that he will be forced at last to face Anse, Whitfield is intent upon finding the right words for framing his confession. Yet the moment he learns that Addie has not betrayed their secret, all thoughts of confession leave his mind. He is once more free to act as if he had never violated the moral code of his community since the public world is still unaware of his guilt. As for the sin against God, a verbal apology is sufficient: "He will accept the will for the deed, Who knew that when I framed the words of my confession it was to Anse I spoke them, even though he was not there." (469) Confession, repentance, and even penance are carried out in his mind, thereby obviating any necessity of embracing them in an act. Anse's own formula of verbal evasion is thus, ironically, turned against him.

Whitfield's account of his relationship with Addie is rendered wholly in terms of ethical and religious clichés from which all human passion and meaning has been carefully deleted. Similarly, everything about Addie, her family, and her death is but another moral lesson to be interpreted by Cora Tull as she elbows her way to heaven. Having learned her ethics by rote, Cora has no difficulty in affixing praise and blame or in predicting salvation or damnation for all whom she meets. Though she consigns Addie and her family to the latter category, she is consistently and determinedly helpful. Her help, however, is offered in the name of duty not love, and it is meant, whether she realizes it or not, to be one more step in establishing her own virtue and her own right to salvation. Kindness such as Cora's is essentially selfish, debasing both the giver and the recipient and destroying the possibility of any personal relationship between them. In her eyes even family ties are moral rather than emotional. As a result, Cora is totally unaware, in any real sense, of those agonizing and exalting human experiences which stand outside her rigid system of ethics, resisting and disrupting its smooth simplification of existence.

Of all the characters who observe and comment on the actions of the Bundrens, Doctor Peabody is the most judicious. Although Tull's remarks often contain shrewd assessments of specific events, it is Peabody who grasps their broader significance. His

insight is the result of long and varied experience with people compelled to face the realities of pain, suffering, and death. Thus, when he makes separate evaluations of life, love, and death, his statements serve as a general guide for interpreting the actions of the family. His is the compassionate but detached vision of the country doctor-cum-philosopher. Yet when he is suddenly confronted with the Bundrens in Jefferson, he loses his philosophic objectivity. Overwhelmed by the massing of concrete horrors and sensations, he reacts with bitter indignation.

While acting as reverberator for the actions of the Bundrens, these eight characters offer release from the tension through humorous or ironic remarks. Because only the actions of the Bundrens and not their thoughts and emotions are perceived, they become grotesques. What is horror and pain for the family becomes farce for those who are not themselves involved and who merely observe with the physical eye. For the Bundrens, the journey seethes with unresolved tensions; for the townspeople of Mottson, it is only a ridiculous or macabre spectacle. This intermingling of humor and horror, which is part of the very texture of *As I Lay Dying*, issues out of the Bundrens' conviction that their actions are eminently reasonable and out of the spectators' conviction that the Bundrens and their coffin have long since passed beyond the realm of reason, logic, or even commonsense. The juxtaposition of the two views gives rise to a complicated and ambivalent feeling of hilarity and despair. Confronted with the irrational, the rational mind finds itself bewildered and uneasy, indignant and outraged, or simply wryly amused. As the funeral journey is prolonged, all these attitudes are exhibited. The interplay of seriousness which reaches toward tragedy and of humor which is practically farce is part of the complete success of *As I Lay Dying*. In a sense, it reinforces the theme of the separation of words and acts by insisting on at least these two modes of response to the same set of characters and events. At the same time, it precludes any easy generalizations about the funeral journey itself. Any event or series of events elicits various and, at times, contradictory responses. The meaning of an experience as distinct from a word exists in the consciousness of the individual observer. Accordingly, it is only when one becomes conscious of the mingling of humor and pathos, of the relation of the Bundrens to Addie, and of the observers to the action that the full complexity of *As I Lay Dying* is plumbed and Faulkner's easy mastery of it recognized.