

As I Lay Dying



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

William Faulkner was born New Albany Mississippi to father Murry Falkner and Maud Butler, and was one of four children (William Faulkner himself changed his surname to Faulkner in 1918. One story, perhaps apocryphal, says that a typewriter merely misprinted his name and Faulkner decided to stick with the change). The family relocated to Oxford Mississippi when Faulkner was only five due to Murry Falkner's professional troubles in New Albany, despite the family's southern-aristocratic background. Faulkner remained in Oxford, with brief stints living in Paris and New York, for the rest of his life.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Although most famously considered part of the modernist literary movement, Faulkner is also known as a writer who was a part of the Southern Renaissance. The Southern Renaissance is lesser known, but was tremendously important to those who wrote in the American South in the 1920s and 1930s – and who focused much of their subject matter on the South. Among these writers are Faulkner, of course, along with Flannery O'Connor, Allen Tate, Tennessee Williams and Robert Penn Warren, among others.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *As I Lay Dying*
- **When Written:** 1930
- **Where Written:** Faulkner famously wrote *As I Lay Dying* in a six-week period of time while working at a local power-plant in Mississippi.
- **When Published:** 1930
- **Literary Period:** Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* is a representative work of literary modernism, a movement which established itself in the early 20th century. The havoc of World War I caused an impulse in society, demoralized by war, to challenge society's very foundations and to uproot tradition. Thus there was a movement in the realm of literature to challenge the traditional values of literature – straightforward plot, omniscient narration, linear sense of time, among others. Faulkner demonstrates modernism's appreciation of all kinds of linguistic and formal experimentation, and perpetuation of new and innovative stylistic techniques. Other famous writers who participated most visibly in the modernist aesthetic include James Joyce, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and Gertrude Stein.
- **Genre:** Novel

- **Setting:** Mississippi in the early 20th century. Specifically, Faulkner introduces the fictional Mississippi region of Yoknapatawpha County in *As I Lay Dying*, which he continues to refer to in later novels. Faulkner said that Yoknapatawpha is merely a fictionalized version of Lafayette County, Mississippi, from which he hailed.
- **Climax:** Because *As I Lay Dying* breaks from a purely linear presentation of plot, it is difficult to pin-point the exact climax of the action. That said, the climax of the novel arguably occurs when Darl sets fire to Gillepsie's barn, having told Vardaman earlier in the day that Addie had requested removing herself from the sight of man. Given Darl's rationalization, this action is one that brings the question of heroism to the foreground of the novel, and also is ultimately the cause for the Bundrens' unexpected need to force the possibly-insane Darl to go to an asylum in Jackson.
- **Antagonist:** Because of the multiplicity of narrators in the novel, it is not possible to identify a single antagonist. It is possible to see a character like Cora Tull in opposition to the Bundrens, as she frequently expresses distaste for the family's actions – specifically Jewel's cold-heartedness. It is also possible to see Jewel and Darl as antagonists to one another, with Jewel believing whole-heartedly in action over words, and Darl prizing language and thought above all else. From a reader's perspective, though, it is likely that Anse is the most easily disagreeable character in the novel, representing a man of pure selfishness, even in his parental role.
- **Point of View:** The novel unfolds in fifty-nine sections, told from fifteen different narrators. The Bundren family members are the most common narrators, though Faulkner includes the points of view of people like Peabody the doctor, Tull the neighbor, Armstid the nearby farmer, to offer perspective on the Bundrens' actions. Darl and Vardaman are the most prominent narrators, while characters like Jewel and Addie each only narrate one section.



PLOT SUMMARY

The novel begins with Addie Bundren, wife to Anse Bundren and mother of their children, on her deathbed. The rest of the family waits around for Addie's impending death and vaguely discuss their eventual plans to cart their mother's corpse forty or so miles to the town of Jefferson, where she has requested to be buried alongside her family. The oldest son, a level-headed carpenter named Cash Bundren, spends the days preceding Addie's death outside her window, dutifully constructing a **coffin**. This gesture upsets Jewel, who thinks the rest of his family is vindictively rushing Addie to her death. Despite initial reservations from Anse, who believes Addie is going to die any minute, Darl and Jewel leave home to run an

errand for their neighbor Vernon Tull. Anse's fear comes true, and Addie dies just after the two leave. After Addie's death, Anse orders his children to make preparations – Cash to finish the coffin and Dewey Dell to prepare the **fish** that the six-year-old Vardaman caught earlier that day. Vardaman cannot help but confuse his mother and the fish, as he understands that the fish is no longer alive, and hence explains Addie's death through comparison. Yet Vardaman still does not have a full grasp of the material realities of death, and worries that his mother won't be able to breathe nailed into her coffin. In the night Vardaman drills holes in Addie's coffin in an attempt to provide her with air. Inadvertently in the process, Vardaman bores holes in the face of Addie's corpse. As the family members mourn and make preparations for their journey to Jefferson, Dewey Dell finds herself distracted by her potential need for an abortion, as she fears her recent intercourse with a farmer named Lefe got her pregnant.

Darl and Jewel return after the funeral service has already been held. Darl notices buzzards over the Bundrens' home. With Darl and Jewel back home, the family begins to make preparations to leave for Jefferson. Anse repeatedly explains to himself, to the family, and to others, that they are traveling so far to fulfill Addie's wish, though he also excitedly thinks about the fact that he will be able to buy a new pair of false teeth in town. As they prepare to leave, Cash obsesses over the fact that the coffin he so carefully built is unbalanced on the wagon, but the other family members ignore his meticulous request to balance it. Instead, Jewel charges in and carries the coffin onto the wagon by himself. Afterward, Jewel saddles up on his beloved **horse** and insists that he will follow the Bundrens as they ride in the wagon. Darl is angered by Jewel's decision, and thinks to himself about how Jewel secretly worked each night to buy himself the horse, and how Addie supported it, making the other children do Jewel's chores for him as he worked.

The Bundrens set off on their journey and stay with a local farmer named Samson and his family. Samson tells the Bundrens that the bridge that they plan to use to get over the river has been submerged from recent rains, and that they should re-route their journey. The Bundrens attempt to cross the river at a ford, but as they try to cross a log comes down the river on the current and knocks the coffin off the wagon, breaks Cash's leg, drowns the Bundrens' team of mules, and throws Cash's prized collection of **tools** into the water. Jewel, with help from the Bundrens' on-looking neighbor Vernon Tull, retrieves the coffin from the flood and dives down into the river to rescue Cash's box of tools.

The narrative is interrupted most overtly in the fortieth section, narrated by Addie – either at an earlier point in time or from her position as a corpse. In this section, Addie muses on her mistrust of language, her lack of passion for Anse, her wariness and sense of regret over having had children, and her

extramarital affair with the local minister Whitfield.

Meanwhile, back on the journey, Cash faints from the pain of his newly broken leg but does not make a peep. Jewel brings Cash a horse-physician to set Cash's leg in splints, claiming that horses and humans are quite alike. Cash's stoicism becomes almost absurd, as the family continues to ride for days in their decrepit wagon in the heat, marked by the stench of Addie's corpse. The family decides to spend the night at the home of another local farmer named Armstid. There, Anse rides off on Jewel's horse to purchase a new team of mules; Anse ends up giving a mortgage on some farm machinery, some of Cash's savings, some of his own savings (for new teeth) – and finally, Jewel's horse. Jewel is shocked but permits his father's actions nonetheless.

The Bundrens eventually reach the town of Mottson, where Jewel immediately gets in an altercation with a local resident about the putrid odor coming from the wagon. Darl calms everyone down and the family continues on its way. In town, Dewey Dell goes to the pharmacy to buy an abortion drug, but Moseley, the town pharmacist, tells her to get a marriage license instead. Before leaving Mottson, Darl mixes cement to create a cast for Cash's leg, though the cast only ends up making things worse. The Bundrens are challenged by the Mottson town marshal, who complains about the stench of Addie's corpse and advises Cash to see a doctor.

That night, the family reaches yet another local farm owned by a farmer called Gillepsie. After telling Vardaman that Addie has spoken to them of her desire to flee from human sight, Darl burns down Gillepsie's barn in order to burn Addie's coffin and put an end to the Bundrens' farcically hellish quest to bring her to Jefferson. Vardaman sees Darl's actions but Dewey Dell advises him to keep it a secret. As the barn is furiously ablaze, Jewel rushes in to rescue Gillepsie's cattle and other animals – and most importantly, to retrieve Addie's coffin from the fire.

Finally, the Bundren family reaches Jefferson. Anse goes into a house to borrow two spades with which to bury Addie. The family is later confronted by Gillepsie, who knows somehow that Darl was responsible for burning down his barn. In order to avoid being sued, the Bundrens claim Darl to be insane, and ship him off to an institution in Jefferson. Dewey Dell tries her hand once again at getting an abortion drug, but the pharmacy clerk forces her to have sex with him and gives her some medicine that she is sure is fake. The family prepares to leave Jefferson, though Anse keeps claiming to be busy with various things, delaying them. Finally, on the last pages of the novel, Anse, now smiling with his new false teeth, introduces his children to the new "Mrs. Bundren," the woman who lent him the spades just days before.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Darl Bundren – Darl Bundren is the second son of Anse and Addie Bundren. Darl narrates the greatest number of sections in the novel and is often considered to be its surrogate author figure. Not only is Darl the character who best expresses himself using language, but he also appears to have powers of clairvoyance – specifically, he can describe Addie’s death scene from afar and he somehow, inexplicably, knows about Dewey Dell’s pregnancy. Darl detaches himself from the rest of the family because of his strange wisdom, and is the only character to express explicit contempt for the Bundrens’ journey. Darl is eventually claimed to be insane by the Bundrens, after he burns down Gillepsie’s barn in an attempt to put a stop to the journey to Jefferson. Whether or not he is insane is never entirely clear.

Jewel – Jewel is the bastard son of Addie and Whitfield, the local minister. Jewel is the novel’s most evasive character, as he appears consistently in other narrators’ chapters but only narrates one chapter himself. Jewel is often described by Darl as looking “wooden,” a description that captures his stubborn sense of independence and drive, separate from the rest of the Bundren clan.

Cash Bundren – Cash Bundren is the oldest son of Anse and Addie. Cash’s most notable quality is his capacity for self-sacrifice. After enduring the pain of a broken leg in a cement cast, Cash characteristically says, “It never bothered me much.” Furthermore, Cash ceaselessly spends the days preceding Addie’s death making her coffin, demonstrating his pragmatic attention to detail and his very particular way of expressing affection.

Dewey Dell Bundren – Dewey Dell is the second-to-youngest Bundren child, and the only daughter of Anse and Addie. Dewey Dell does not narrate many sections throughout the novel, though she is arguably one of the most tragic characters in the book: she is impregnated by the farmhand Lafe, who then leaves her with nothing more than ten dollars for an abortion. Later, she is cheated by a drug store clerk into having sex with him and then is given what she is sure (correctly) is fake medicine. Just pages later, Anse takes her abortion money to buy his teeth, leaving Dewey Dell with next to nothing at the end of the novel.

Vardaman Bundren – Vardaman, at six years old, is the youngest Bundren child. He narrates a great number of sections in the novel, engaging in similar existential questions to his brother Darl throughout his narrations. Famously, Vardaman remarks, “My mother is a fish,” relating the death of the fish he caught for dinner to the death of his mother.

Anse Bundren – Anse Bundren is the husband of Addie and the father of the Bundren children. Described by Darl as a man who “tells people that if he sweats he will die,” Anse is one of the

most selfish and unsympathetic characters in the novel. He explains the journey to Jefferson as a promise to Addie, but ends up replacing her at the novel’s end, introducing his children to a new “Mrs. Bundren.”

Addie Bundren – Addie is the wife of Anse and the mother of Darl, Jewel, Cash, Dewey Dell and Vardaman. She had an affair with the minister Whitfield, which produced Jewel. Although her death catalyzes the novel’s action, she hardly appears as a character in the novel and only narrates one section. Addie’s most salient characteristics are her coldness toward Anse, dislike of having children, and her disdain for words (and her appreciation for action), perhaps explaining why she favored her action-focused son Jewel rather than the language-oriented Darl.

Lafe – Lafe works as a farmer on the Bundrens’ plot, and is the father of Dewey Dell’s unborn child. He never appears in the novel physically, but is mentioned incessantly by Dewey Dell. Lafe gives Dewey Dell ten dollars, which he claims will get her an abortion, in an apparent effort to cut himself off from her.

Whitfield – Whitfield is the local minister with whom Addie has an affair, and is the father of Jewel. He plans to confess to Anse about the affair before Addie’s death, but upon finding out that she has already died without telling anyone, he decides not to, perceiving her death as a gift from God.

Snopes – Snopes is the local farmer from whom Anse gets a new team of mules midway through the novel. Anse trades Snopes some of Cash’s savings, some of his own money that he has been saving for a set of new teeth, and finally Jewel’s horse – all to get himself a new team of mules, rather than simply borrowing Armstid’s team of mules, Armstid he generously offered.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Vernon Tull – Vernon Tull is the Bundrens’ neighbor, who is often a bystander on their action – both helping them in their antics and quietly criticizing their behavior – often with his wife Cora.

Cora Tull – Cora Tull is Vernon Tull’s wife and a devout Christian. She frequently spouts her religious beliefs, and contrasts herself against Addie Bundren, who she sees as impious and a reprehensible example as a mother. Despite these judgments, Cora stays by Addie’s bed-side until her death.

Kate and Eula Tull – Kate and Eula Tull are the two daughters of Vernon and Cora Tull. They appear in the novel as additional perspectives counter to those of the Bundren family members, highlighting the Bundren’s strangeness in conversation with their parents.

Peabody – Peabody is the Bundrens’ family doctor. He is appalled by Anse’s negligence as a father when he sees Cash’s

cemented leg toward the end of the novel, and cannot believe that Cash would not complain about such a terrible treatment for his condition.

Samson – Samson is the first local farmer with whom the Bundrens seek shelter on their journey. Samson permits the Bundrens to stay with him, but criticizes them silently, believing their bad situation to be a sign of God’s judgment on them for their rudeness.

Rachel – Rachel is Samson’s wife. She severely criticizes the Bundrens’ decision to go to Jefferson and berates her husband for allowing the strange family to stay in their home.

Armstid – Armstid is another local farmer who hosts the Bundrens on their journey. He offers another counter-perspective to the Bundren points of view, though unlike many of the other non-Bundren narrators, Armstid does not overtly criticize the Bundrens, and exhibits extreme generosity to them during their stay at his home.

Quick – Quick is a local farmer who sits on the Bundrens’ porch during Addie’s funeral, talking to Armstid about why the Bundrens are going all the way to Jefferson to bury Addie.

Gillepsie – Gillepsie is the farmer who owns the barn that Darl burns down. Gillepsie eventually threatens to sue the Bundrens for the damage, though they claim Darl to be insane and send him to an asylum in an effort to avoid the cost of a lawsuit.

Moseley – Moseley is the pharmacist in Mottson who tells Dewey Dell to get a marriage license rather than expect to find an abortion drug in his store.

MacGowan – MacGowan is the pharmacy clerk in Jefferson who tricks Dewey Dell into thinking he is a doctor, taking advantage of her sexually rather than providing her with the abortion drug she thinks she is getting.

literature – such as Odysseus’ journey home to Ithaca in [The Odyssey](#). While heroism is prized by all as a value unto itself in a Classical work like [The Odyssey](#), Faulkner’s novel explores and calls into question the meaning of heroic action.

Almost all of the Bundren family members have secret, self-interested desires for wanting to go to Jefferson, indicating that the stated goal of familial duty to Addie isn’t the goal of their journey at all. Anse Bundren may rationalize the journey to others by declaring that Addie’s “mind is set on it,” but his real reason is that he wants to buy a new set of false teeth in town and to pick up a new wife, a replacement for Addie. The potentially pregnant and abortion-seeking Dewey Dell anticipates going to Jefferson’s pharmacy. Vardaman dreams of a train set in the Jefferson toy-store window. Even the saintly Cash discusses his desire to purchase a gramophone in town.

Yet still, the Bundrens fulfill Addie’s desire to be buried in Jefferson under the guise of heroic and familial duty, ultimately rendering the very idea of heroism pointless or self-defeating. This pointlessness is shown most overtly by Darl in his apparently “heroic” gesture of burning Gillepsie’s barn down to stop what he perceives as the family’s ridiculous journey, an act that is countered by Jewel in his competing heroic act of saving Addie’s **coffin** from the fire. As *I Lay Dying* calls into question the value of heroism by showing how the Bundrens’ “heroic” journey is actually committed in service of the family’s competing self-interests, suggesting that all such heroic actions are evident as heroic only from the outside.



MORTALITY AND THE NATURE OF EXISTENCE

As *I Lay Dying* is not only about mortality insofar as it concerns Addie Bundren’s death. More deeply, the novel explores the theme of mortality by showing each of Addie’s family members, loved ones, and other acquaintances offer unique responses to her death, attempting to make sense of the nature of existence. In doing so, these characters realize deeper and more universal things about existence and the transience of human experience. Reflecting on his mother’s death, the cynical Darl remarks, “It takes two people to make you, one people to die. That’s how the world is going to end.” The guilt-ridden Dewey Dell more sentimentally reflects on the fact that she was distracted by personal issues during the time in which her mother died: “I heard that my mother is dead. I wish I had time to let her die. I wish I had time to wish I had.” Vardaman’s initial reaction to his mother’s death is to drill holes in her **coffin** so she can breathe. As a six-year-old, not yet fully aware of what death means, Vardaman is initially in denial: he thinks that because Addie’s physical body still exists, she must still exist and therefore need air in order to keep existing.

These questions – relating to the meaning of life and death – appear most important to Darl and Vardaman. Both characters



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



SELF-INTEREST VERSUS HEROIC DUTY

At the most basic level, *As I Lay Dying* is a novel about the Bundrens and their family quest to fulfill the wish of their deceased wife and mother Addie

Bundren to be buried beside her family members in Jefferson, Mississippi. The Bundrens successfully lug Addie’s foul-smelling corpse countless miles in the Mississippi heat, and even battle flood and fire along the way. Seen in this way, their journey appears heroic, recalling motifs of traditional “quest”

are less concerned with the pragmatic aspects of life and are focused more on these philosophical questions. This is the case for Vardaman because he is only six. By contrast, Darl is the novel's most cerebral character—in some ways he is the most sane member of the family, seeing their quest for the idiotic and destructive undertaking that it is. At the same time, he seems unstable, and may or may not be insane.



FAMILY, BIRTH, AND DEATH

Just as *As I Lay Dying* calls into question traditional ideas about the meaning of heroism, the novel also complicates the idea of family. In the beginning of the novel, it appears perhaps that the Bundren family is a united front, together facing the tragic death of their beloved wife and mother. However, as the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that what is driving the Bundren journey to deliver Addie to Jefferson is *not* pure dedication to the wishes of Addie, but to a sense of familial obligation. Furthermore, this sense of familial obligation is inextricably tied up with rivalries among siblings, competing self-interests, and out-and-out deceptive dynamics between family members. The novel's interest in destabilizing the romantic notion of family is most palpable in the Addie section, in which the Bundrens' "beloved mother" explains both her own feelings of resentment toward her family and her infidelity. Addie reveals that her favorite son is the product of an affair, and it is for this reason that he is her favorite – he is only part-Bundren.

The novel does not stop with complicating the idea of family in general, but also works to complicate even the origin of family – birth – which is traditionally depicted as a moment of pure joy and creation. Addie admits that the birth of her first son, Cash, felt like an intrusion of her solitude, and each of her other children seemed the product of some sin (an affair) or obligation (making up for said affair). Addie's lack of excitement about childbirth is then echoed by Dewey Dell, who focuses on the fact that while birth may be the product of the same action shared between men and women, only women are stuck with the obligation. In this way, the novel connects the idea of birth to the idea of death – the birth of a baby is the death of a woman's independent life.

Finally, the last sentence of the novel, when Anse invites his children to "Meet Mrs. Bundren," functions as a strange post-script to the novel. At the end of the novel, Anse reveals that the trip to Jefferson was not about fulfilling Addie's desire, but perhaps about his own desire to replace her. This shocking final scene suggests that family is just a bunch of roles – and that the roles are more important than the actual people who fill them.



RELIGION AND FAITH

The theme of religion and faith appears in *As I Lay Dying* in various contexts – from plot points and the

thing characters do and say, to the way Biblical imagery and motifs are invoked in order to compare events in the novel to religious events. Given that the novel calls into question the traditional ideals of heroism and familial duty, these comparisons often make ironic the religious theme in question. For instance, Darl defends his attempt to burn down Gillepsie's barn (and Addie's **coffin**) as a religiously motivated decision to cremate Addie's body according to the will of God, yet he really just wants to put the journey to a stop. When thinking about Cora Tull, Addie directly reflects on her neighbor's blind faith in God, dismissing the naivety of Cora's religious practices: "I would think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless...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 forget the words."

Cash is perhaps the novel's most Christ-like figure: a carpenter, Cash also embodies the virtues of kindness and charity, and positions himself as a martyr in the context of the family. Yet his stoicism reaches a ridiculous degree when he never once complains about the fact that his broken leg is treated with a cast made of sand and cement. The absurdity of Cash's stoicism calls into question why he chooses to embody Christian virtues so whole-heartedly, given that his selflessness does not lead to a sacrifice that is dedicated to a substantive end. While Christ gets resurrected, Cash is not redeemed in any way. His dedication to bringing Addie to Jefferson concludes with the revelation that the family delivered their wife and mother to Jefferson so that they could replace her, not so they could dutifully carry out her wish. In this way, Cash's sacrifice can be seen as a sacrifice to an untrue idea, a promise that is betrayed. The religious motifs throughout *As I Lay Dying* primarily emphasize the disparity between a character's action that is apparently motivated by faith and the more cynical truth, or misunderstanding, underlying the action in question.



LANGUAGE VERSUS ACTION

Faulkner's interest in the disconnect between language and action is clear from the way the novel is told in and of itself: there is a disconnect between the action of the novel – the Bundren's journey to Jefferson – and the way such action unfolds – through individual narrations of the characters involved in and around the journey. *As I Lay Dying* does not tell an objective tale, but is a series of subjective experiences, showing in the very way the novel is told that there is an inherent disconnect between language, how it can tell a story, and action, the story itself.

Almost every character in the novel possesses a different and unique perspective toward the question of language versus action. Most clear, however, is the dichotomy between Darl and Jewel, especially when seen in context of their relationship to Addie Bundren. Out of all the characters in the book, Darl has the greatest gift for using language, made clear by the fact that

his chapters are the most poetic. Darl also happens to be the most rejected son of Addie Bundren. Jewel, by contrast, is Addie's favorite son, and can be seen as a man of action rather than words. For instance, Jewel saves Addie's coffin from the river and also saves Cash's precious box of **tools**. When Darl sets fire to Gillepsie's barn, Jewel saves Gillepsie's animals and then saves Addie's coffin. In Addie's single chapter, narrated posthumously, she expresses her disgust and distrust for words, explaining why she favored Jewel, her only non-Bundren child and, unlike Darl, her child that prized action over language. Words are "just words," in Addie's conception.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE COFFIN

The coffin symbolizes the sense of weight and lack of balance (literally and figuratively) that the Bundrens take on by carting Addie all the way to Jefferson to be buried. Throughout the novel, the coffin also serves to emphasize the absurdity of the Bundrens' journey and the questionable heroism of the family members. For instance, Cash's meticulous construction of the coffin outside Addie's window or Vardaman's drilling of the holes in the coffin after Addie's death both point to a strange mix of devotion on the one hand and inappropriate behavior on the other that characterizes many of the deeds of each character and the Bundrens' journey in general.



JEWEL'S HORSE

Jewel's relationship with his horse symbolizes his willful decision to separate himself from the rest of the Bundren family. Of course, Jewel is not biologically a Bundren child; however, he deliberately emphasizes his desire to detach from the family through cultivating such a strong relationship with the horse. In order to buy the horse initially, Jewel had to work every night, lying to his family with the exception of Addie, who favored Jewel and forced her other children to take over his chores. Darl even remarks sardonically that Jewel's mother is a horse. On the journey to Jefferson itself, Jewel rides ahead on his horse, symbolizing his desire for independence from the Bundren clan. When Anse ultimately trades Jewel's horse in for a new team of mules, it is as though he is trying to strip Jewel of his independence and make him feel a sense of duty to the family.



FISH

The fish Vardaman catches for dinner early in the novel provides him with a meaningful symbol to understand the nature and meaning of death. After Addie's death, Vardaman realizes that the fish, like his mother, is now in a different state of existence than before, leading him to conclude, "My mother is a fish." This connection between Addie and fish emerges once again during the river episode, as Vardaman compares his mother's coffin to the fish in the river. The idea of the dead fish aids Vardaman's process of coping with loss, as he is only able to understand mortality and the idea of existence by looking at the concrete example of a fish, once alive, that he caught and cut up to be cooked for dinner.



TOOLS

Cash's tools are a metaphor for his desire to fix and make things right—particularly regarding those around him. Throughout the novel, Cash does not reveal much about his inner life, but is a man of action, and consistently displays the virtues of charity and mindfulness for others. He tirelessly works (with his prized tools in hand) to finish Addie's coffin before her death in an apparent effort to show his dedication to his mother's legacy. When the log interrupts the Bundrens' river-crossing, Cash's tools are lost in the chaos, setting the family into a frenzy, as even they know how important they are to him. Cash does not express his own needs, never complaining once about his broken leg; however, he does fixate on things like the coffin's lack of balance, wishing for the entire journey that he could fix it.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *As I Lay Dying* published in 1991.

1. Darl Quotes

“Jewel, fifteen feet behind me, looking straight ahead, steps in a single stride through the window. 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 endowed with 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.”

Related Characters: Darl Bundren (speaker), Jewel

Related Themes:



Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

Darl and his brother Jewel are walking through a field on their way home, and here they come across an old cottonhouse. Darl watches as Jewel steps right through it as Darl goes around it. These two motions, straight versus curved, direct versus indirect, can be understood as metaphoric descriptions of the two brothers' quite distinct characters. Jewel is focused on actions and results. If something is in his way, he will plow right through it, never stopping to consider the challenge or to question himself or his actions.


Darl, in turn, takes a more circuitous route. He is inclined to think deeply about the world around him and about his place within it. Even this passage, which comes to us through his perspective, shows a strong sense of the beauty of language on its own, not for what it can do or enact but for the charm of comparisons like Jewel to a cigar store Indian, his eyes to wood. The ability to observe and notice one's lived experience is implied, here, to be individual and even random - the fact that the brothers don't share it suggests that there is little "natural" glue of character or experience holding a family together.

4. Jewel Quotes

“It would just be me and her on a high hill and me rolling the rocks down the hill at their faces, picking them up and throwing them down the hill, faces and teeth and all by God until she was quiet and not that goddamn adze going One lick less. One lick less and we could be quiet.”

Related Characters: Jewel (speaker), Addie Bundren

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

Jewel is angry about Cash's incessant hammering and sawing that can be heard from within the house - Cash is preparing the coffin for the dying Addie. Here, he may not employ the kind of rich, complex language that his brother Darl can make use of, but that certainly doesn't mean that he's incapable of feeling or powerfully describing his feelings. Jewel feels alienated and alone within the Bundren family: the only person he feels a connection with is Addie,

and she is now dying.

While Cash may think he is honoring his mother by making a coffin for her, this has nothing to do with familial duty in Jewel's eyes. In this passage he imagines a heroic final battle involving him and his mother against the rest of the family before Addie dies. This image seems to be derived in some part from mythical or Biblical stories, but Jewel is vague on the specifics: for him, it is enough to imagine a violent fantasy that would allow him to escape from the noise and selfishness that he believes characterizes the other Bundrens.

“Why, for the last three weeks I have been coming over every time I could...Not that I deserve credit for it: I will expect the same for myself. But thank God it will be the faces of my loved kin, for my blood and flesh, for in my husband and children I have been more blessed than most, trials though they have been at times.”

Related Characters: Cora Tull (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis



Cora is expressing skepticism about the forty-mile journey that the rest of the Bundren family is about to undertake in order to bury Addie. Here, though, her thoughts turn to how blessed her own death will be, since she will be surrounded by her beloved family. Yet Cora seems to consider these blessings as something she deserves because of how good and faithful a Christian she has been - even if she quickly claims, if disingenuously, that she doesn't deserve credit for her actions (as doing good without expecting rewards is also a part of the Christian faith she espouses).

Cora is the first to express doubts about the supposed heroics of the Bundren family's odyssey to Jefferson. Ironically, her own humdrum self-interest in congratulating herself for her helpfulness contrasts with the heroic way she imagines her own death - a reminder that the themes explored in the book are not meant to apply to one family or to a certain set of characters alone, but rather are more broadly relevant.

7. Dewey Dell Quotes

“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 that’s why I can talk to him with knowing with hating because he knows.”

Related Characters: Dewey Dell Bundren (speaker), Darl Bundren

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis


Dewey Dell is remembering the difficult moments leading up to sleeping with Lame, including her attempts to get out of it, and now her current worry is that she may be pregnant. Now she has recognized that Darl somehow knows this, even without her telling anyone. The rest of the family also recognizes this ability of Darl's, a kind of omniscience that suggests that Darl is more like an author, one who knows his character's actions because he writes them, rather than like other characters subject to laws beyond their control.

For Dewey Dell, Darl's near-mystical knowledge is a relief, as she is spared the shame and indignity of having to tell him or others what she has gone through. Instead, she can take some solace in simply sharing knowing gazes with him, in search of familial connection that so often is not fulfilled in other ways in this family.

8. Tull Quotes

“Her [Addie's] mind is set on it.”

Related Characters: Anse Bundren (speaker), Addie Bundren

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis


As Tull continues to show patience and generosity in his relationship with the Bundren family, Anse explains their need to leave for Jefferson immediately. "Her mind is set on it" will be repeated several times: it is a kind of mantra by which Anse excuses and justifies the family's actions. The phrase suggests that Anse is acting selflessly and kindly, only following exactly what his wife wants. He suggests that Addie would not stand for things being any other way -

making the journey something undertaken out of duty rather than out of desire. This claim of heroic familial duty will characterize many of the characters' attitudes towards their journey to Jefferson, even as it is questioned by others.

9. Anse Quotes

“I have heard men cuss their luck, and right, for they were sinful men. But I do not say it's a curse on me, because I have done no wrong to be cussed by.”

Related Characters: Anse Bundren (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

As Anse sits on the porch, he meditates on his bad fortune and curses whatever he can think of, from the rain to his own sons. Here, Anse distinguishes himself from other people, who may also curse their luck, but shouldn't, since they are "sinful" and deserve the bad fortune that they have. Anse, rather, claims that he hasn't done anything wrong, so he doesn't deserve his own misfortune: indeed, the fact that he carries on regardless is a sign of his heroic commitment in the face of evil. Anse's notions of his own heroism clash, of course, with the self-interested way in which he evaluates his own life, and with his lack of self-awareness on his limited judgment.

10. Darl Quotes

“It takes two people to make you, and one people to die. That’s how the world is going to end.”

Related Characters: Darl Bundren (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

Darl and Jewel are discussing the impending death of Addie, and Darl, as usual, takes the opportunity to ponder more profound questions about mortality as such. In general, reproduction tends to be considered as a crucial element of family life, as a means to continue one's family line and as a mysterious but joyful cycle of birth that makes up for death.

Darl, however, doesn't see things this way. For him, the fact that birth requires two people, while death requires only one (the very person dying) means that the world tilts inevitably towards death. Death is not redeemed by birth, in his scheme, nor does it have some kind of ultimate meaning that makes it more bearable. Darl retains rather a deeply pessimistic outlook on death, prompted by his own particular family situation but with broader, even metaphysical resonance.

12. Darl Quotes

☝☝ “Jewel’s hat droops limp about his neck...Jewel, I say, she is dead, Jewel. Addie Bundren is dead.”

Related Characters: Darl Bundren (speaker), Jewel, Addie Bundren

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis



Darl's thoughts are shifting forwards and backwards between past and present scenes, between memories and the realities of the present moment, as Addie has just died. One of Darl's tasks is to tell his brother Jewel that their mother has died. This task is significant in part because of just how negligent Anse has been: while his children grapple with the fact of their mother's death, they must simultaneously figure out how to manage things and direct what needs to be done.


At the same time, Darl's repetitive language to Jewel is a somber reminder of how even for someone as eloquent as Darl, certain events (like death) can sometimes exceed language, which can prove ultimately insufficient in encapsulating what has taken place.

13. Vardaman Quotes

☝☝ “I will be where the fish was, and it all cut up into not-fish now.”

Related Characters: Vardaman Bundren (speaker), Vardaman Bundren

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 53



Explanation and Analysis

In his own way, the six-year-old Vardaman is attempting to come to terms with his mother's death based on the language he can use and the references he can understand. Vardaman has caught a certain amount of fish, but now he looks at what he caught in the basket and notices that it has changed irrevocably: what he sees now is "not-fish," *not* the living beings that he handled in the water, but objects lacking animation, lacking life. Vardaman draws a connection, even if he cannot explicitly say so, between this mysterious change from "fish" into "not-fish" and the change undergone by his own mother, from life to death.

15. Vardaman Quotes

☝☝ “It was not here. I was there, looking. I saw. I thought it was her, but it was not. It was not my mother....It was not here because it was laying right yonder in the dirt. And now it’s all chopped up. I chopped it up. It’s laying in the kitchen in the bleeding pan, waiting to be cooked and et.”

Related Characters: Vardaman Bundren (speaker), Addie Bundren

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 66

Explanation and Analysis


Vardaman is thinking about having seen the body of his mother, Addie Bundren, in her coffin. Although he is only a young child, Vardaman has a strong intuition in certain ways about what it means to die: he recognizes, for instance, that although his mother's corpse is recognizable as the body of Addie Bundren, the body is not "his mother" - that is, what makes it "his mother" has disappeared.

Vardaman links this strange disconnect between presence and absence to the first-hand experience that he has with fish, which were once alive, but which become forever something else once he chops them up to be eaten. Although Vardaman's language may seem obscure, this is not because he has advanced theoretical ideas, but because he is attempting, with only the tools available to a six-year-old mind, to grapple with vast questions of life, death, and the border between the two.

17. Darl Quotes

☞ “In a strange room you must empty yourself for sleep. And before you are emptied for sleep, what are you....I don't know what I am. I don't know if I am or am not. Jewel knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know whether he is or not.”

Related Characters: Darl Bundren (speaker), Jewel

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

Darl contrasts his own experience preparing for sleep "in a strange room" with the experience that he assumes Jewel and those like him have - an experience that, for Darl, is simpler and more straightforward than his own. Here, Darl reveals his openness to the great questions of mortality and existence - questions that can often recur as one prepares to sleep. At that border between wakefulness and sleeping (a border that in some ways seems a good deal like the border between life and death) identity and meaning become unclear. At least, they become a source of anxiety for Darl, who not only does not know *who* he is, but also begins to wonder *whether* he "is" or "is not" - and what it means to "be" at all (probably an allusion to Hamlet's famous "to be or not to be" soliloquy).

While Darl is able to make use of a more nuanced and complex (albeit confusing) language than Vardaman, he, like his brother, is preoccupied with such monumental questions. In some ways, Darl seems to envy Jewel, who (to Darl at least) seems not even to concern himself with such questions. This, too, is a way that Darl's character shares so little with Jewel's, in that Jewel prefers to act out his meaning rather than parse out what his life means from afar.


In this famous line of *As I Lay Dying*, Vardaman uses a situation that he is quite familiar with, that of catching, skinning, and eating fish, to a new, unknown situation in which he finds himself (dealing with his mother's death). As we have seen in earlier quotations, Vardaman has already drawn a connection between the fish that were alive when he caught them, and then are limp and still, ready to be cut up and eaten - and his mother, once alive and now silent and still in her coffin. Fish have this property of at one point being lively, at another point being still, and Vardaman can see that his mother too has that quality. As a result, it is not preposterous to say that his mother is a fish: it simply means that if his mother has certain properties, and a fish has the same properties, it could well mean mathematically that his mother is fish. Vardaman doesn't necessarily mean this judgment literally: instead, he is trying to use the definitions that he has at his disposal in order to make sense of where he finds himself.

21. Darl Quotes

☞ “It's not your horse that's dead, Jewel...Jewel's mother is a horse.”

Related Characters: Darl Bundren (speaker), Jewel, Addie Bundren

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis



Darl continues his rivalry with Jewel, contrasting his way of understanding the world to his brother's, even as they both attempt to grapple with Addie's death in different ways. Darl views Jewel's attachment to his horse critically, both because Jewel's attachment to it sets him off from the rest of the family, and because Jewel's focus on the horse embodies such a different, more visceral way of grappling with Addie's death than Darl's language-based, symbolically complex attitude.


Here, Darl connects Jewel's love for Addie to his love for horses, and, using the same transitive property as Vardaman did earlier, links Addie to a horse ("my mother is a fish" becomes "Jewel's mother is a horse"). This potentially pejorative statement has more to do, however, with Darl's own frustrations in trying to assign meaning to his mother's life and death within the context of a family that is so

19. Vardaman Quotes

☞ “My mother is a fish.”

Related Characters: Vardaman Bundren (speaker), Vardaman Bundren

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 84



Explanation and Analysis


internally different and inconsistent.

22. Cash Quotes

☞ “It won’t balance. If they want it to tote and ride on a balance, they will have ...”

Related Characters: Cash Bundren (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 96



Explanation and Analysis


Cash has spent a great deal of time and care hammering and sawing the coffin that will hold Addie’s body. Now, in a short but intense exchange with someone who remains unnamed (but who we will later learn is Jewel), Cash fixates on the coffin’s lack of balance, which will make it more difficult for the family to carry it to Jefferson. Cash’s intense attention to this lack of balance might seem relatively unimportant in the scheme of his mother’s death. Nonetheless, this passage underlines Cash’s own way of coming to terms with his mother’s death, by using all his technical skill in the creation of a physical object that might honor Addie. This material activity may lack verbal explanation or justification, but it is another way of responding to death – even if it is one that other characters, including Jewel, cannot understand.

26. Anse Quotes

☞ “I told him not to bring that horse out of respect for his dead ma, because it wouldn’t look right, him prancing along on a durn circus animal and her wanting us all to be in the wagon...”

Related Characters: Anse Bundren (speaker), Jewel, Addie Bundren

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

Anse is angry that Jewel wants to bring his horse along as the family travels to Jefferson. Here, Anse claims that Jewel is acting out of self-interest, wanting to ride his horse just to



show off, and failing to be somber and serious enough in a way that would honor Addie’s life and death. Anse also argues that Addie would have wanted the entire family to be in the wagon together, making Jewel’s choice even more disrespectful.

Nonetheless, Anse’s arguments are weak at best, disingenuous at worst. We have already seen how Jewel is perhaps the member of the family who was closest to Addie and who feels her loss most profoundly. Anse, meanwhile, has been more preoccupied with himself than with anyone else. His understanding of family duty seems to have much more to do with empty actions, gestures devoid of substance, which look right but fail to mean anything. Anse’s fixation on what Jewel’s horse will *look* like – a “circus animal” – further underlines his interest in appearances more than in actual family obligations and duties, not to mention sincere love and connection.

28. Anse Quotes

☞ “But now I can get them teeth. That will be a comfort. It will.”

Related Characters: Anse Bundren (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

Anse has reassured himself, after learning that floods and a downed bridge will impede the family’s trip to Jefferson, that he is after all a chosen man of God – and that this means that he’ll be able to do what he really wants to in Jefferson after all. We learn, here, that what Anse’s thoughts really turn to regarding Jefferson is not Addie’s burial but rather the opportunity to get a new set of false teeth. Once again we see that his apparent embrace of heroic sacrifice and duty on the part of the family consists of no more than empty gestures. Indeed, his true desire to go to Jefferson is not only more self-interested than what he claims, but the opposite of heroic. The example of false teeth could not stress more strongly how petty and even silly Anse’s own self-avowedly “heroic” goals and motivations are.

30. Dewey Dell Quotes

☞ “I heard that my mother is dead. I wish I had time to let her die. I wish I had time to wish I had.”

Related Characters: Dewey Dell Bundren (speaker), Addie Bundren

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis


As the family approaches the (potentially) aptly named New Hope, Dewey Dell clings to the possibility of a new leaf even as she continues to grapple with her own problems. Here, she admits to herself that Addie has died while Dewey Dell herself was preoccupied with other matters – not necessarily with petty desires like Anse, but with her pregnancy and chances for an abortion, all of which she must hide from her family and from those around her. Dewey Dell expresses regret that she didn't have the "time" to let her mother die, suggesting that death is something that snuck up on her while she wasn't paying attention, something that she hasn't had time to come to terms with or seek to understand. Immediately, however, Dewey Dell acknowledges that she hasn't even had the time to fully have these regrets, busy as she's been with everything else going on her life. Dewey Dell's acknowledgement of the distance between her mother's death and her own feelings and experiences suggests just how disjointed and apart the various experiences of the characters in the novel can be – a lack of unity underlined by the multiple perspectives and voices that make up the narrative.

34. Darl Quotes

☝☝ "Jewel shouts at the horse...He is just above the top of the ford and the horse has a purchase of some sort for it surges forward, shining wetly half out of water...Cash is half turned, the reins running taut from his hand and disappearing into the water, the other hand reached back upon Addie, holding her jammed over against the high side of the wagon."

Related Characters: Darl Bundren (speaker), Jewel, Cash Bundren, Addie Bundren

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 148-149

Explanation and Analysis



Darl describes a scene of chaos and desperation when the family attempts to cross a river, and the wagon pitches as

the horse rears up and through the water. The way Darl describes the scene imbues it with an almost mythical beauty and significance. The family's trip to Jefferson, described skeptically by a number of the characters, becomes more than a pointless journey and suddenly takes on life-and-death implications. Cash's insistence on keeping Addie's coffin afloat reminds us that members of the family do have real feelings for Addie, even as they sometimes coexist with pettier, more self-interested motivations. Still, this one brief surge of heroism as the brothers strive to keep the family together and cross the river contrasts to such an extent with the rest of the voyage as to challenge the idea that the journey is really heroic and significant at all.

40. Addie Quotes

☝☝ "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. That was when I learned that words are no good; that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at."

Related Characters: Addie Bundren (speaker), Cash Bundren, Anse Bundren

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 171

Explanation and Analysis

Speaking either from the grave or in a flashback to the time before her death, Addie reflects on the trajectory of her life since she decided to marry Anse. Here, Addie portrays the act of starting a family, of having children, not as an exciting step or meaningful action but rather as devoid of any greater significance. Indeed, for Addie "motherhood" or "family" are no more than words, words that people think mean something, but in fact only mask the suffering involved in living.

Addie is thus on the side of Jewel in terms of a skepticism towards language: unlike Jewel, however, she does not simply embrace action over language, but critiques one while refusing to align with the other. Addie's pessimism may be intense, but it is rooted in her direct experience of living and in her understanding of the meaninglessness of categories and events by which other people ascribe significance to their lives.

41. Whitfield Quotes

☝ “It was already as though it were done. My soul felt freer, quieter than it had in years....To either side I saw His hand; in my heart I could hear His voice:

‘Courage. I am with thee.’”

Related Characters: Whitfield (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 178

Explanation and Analysis

Before Addie's death, Whitfield was going to go to the Bundrens' home and confess that he had had an affair with her, hoping that by doing so he would be absolved for his sins before she died. Nonetheless, once Addie dies Whitfield decides that, since no one knew about the affair, there was no need to confess. Here, the book implicitly stresses Whitfield's incredible hypocrisy in assuming that he is absolved anyway, since it's "*as though*" he had confessed.

Although Whitfield had claimed to want to confess, even if he had he clearly feels no genuine sorrow or shame for his actions - he thinks of sin as something that can be done away with without any struggle or real change of heart. Whitfield seems to think that he is chosen by God, enjoying a privileged relationship to him despite his morally dubious choices. The book thus shows a potential emptiness at the heart of religious faith in the way that a number of its characters practice religion - viewing it as a set of codes that are no more than ritual and social masquerade rather than really engaging with ethical questions.

46. Darl Quotes

☝ “It feels fine...It's cold. It feels fine...It feels fine”

Related Characters: Cash Bundren (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 208

Explanation and Analysis


Darl is beginning to mix the cement necessary to make a cast for Cash's leg, even though Cash should really be going to the doctor instead. Cash is and has been in great pain, but here as elsewhere, he refuses to show it. His repetition of "it feels fine" only makes us question how fine he really is - Cash seems to be repeating a mantra both to give himself


courage and, to a certain extent, to fulfill a heroic narrative towards which he continues to strive. Nonetheless, the basic, unglamorous, and ultimately meaningless suffering of Cash's broken leg jars uncomfortably with Cash's notion of heroic duty, challenging the idea that there is heroism in the family's journey at all.

49. Vardaman Quotes

☝ “And I saw something Dewey Dell told me not to tell nobody. It is not about pa and it is not about Cash and it is not about Jewel and it is not about Dewey Dell and it is not about me.”

Related Characters: Vardaman Bundren (speaker), Dewey Dell Bundren, Darl Bundren

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 215

Explanation and Analysis

Darl has assured Vardaman, as they walk outside, that he has heard Addie speaking to them from within her coffin: she has told them to remove her from the sight of man. Darl's language seems to be derived from the Bible, and is another reminder of how differently and creatively the characters use faith and religion in pursuit of their own interests and in following their own particular beliefs.


This passage in particular underlines the specific perspective of Vardaman in the family, as the youngest and the child who must rely the most on the knowledge and protection of the others. As if in an example of rote learning from school, Vardaman goes through the list of people *not* involved in what Dewey Dell told him. By doing so he believes that he's still obeying Dewey Dell, but he also reveals his limited understanding as he clings to the words available to him in a confusing and constantly changing context.

50. Darl Quotes

☝ “Then it topples forward, gaining momentum, revealing Jewel and the sparks raining on him too in engendering gusts, so that he appears to be closed in a thin nimbus of fire.”

Related Characters: Darl Bundren (speaker), Jewel

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 222



Explanation and Analysis

In a show of attempted heroism and faithfulness to Addie, Jewel is emerging from the fire with her coffin, firmly positioning himself as Addie's most beloved son once again. Darl, of course, has put this entire series of events into action. And yet even he cannot help but admire Jewel's actions, describing them in his typically lush and powerfully descriptive language. Darl describes Jewel as a kind of Christ figure, sacrificing himself for the good of another - even though his own carefully reasoned judgment has made him conclude that the best thing for everyone would be for the fire to consume everything, and for the coffin to be swallowed up as well. Even while remaining in opposition to his brother, then, Darl is drawn to him, fascinated by the strange familial connections that keep them together despite their differences.

51. Vardaman Quotes

“The barn was still red, but it wasn't a barn now.”

Related Characters: Vardaman Bundren (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 223

Explanation and Analysis

Vardaman is watching the barn burn, and in his characteristically youthful and limited language he uses this event to meditate on the same questions of mortality, existence, and action that he has regarding Addie and regarding fish that he's caught. Vardaman knows that he's looking at the place where the barn until quite recently stood. But the fire is consuming the wood making up the barn: does this then mean that the barn no longer exists? How then might one describe and explain what once was present and now is gone - the process of death and disappearance for humans as well as physical objects? As is usual in Faulkner, the simplest language can speak as powerfully as more complex phrasing.

53. Cash Quotes

“Sometimes I aint so sho who's got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and when he aint...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.”

Related Characters: Cash Bundren (speaker), Darl Bundren

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

The family is deliberating on whether and when to send Darl away to a mental asylum. This gives Cash the opportunity to reflect on what the term "crazy" means at all - a notion that the novel has implicitly and thematically explored, given its interest in the distinction between subjective intention and experience, and the objective world. The novel as a whole raises the question, indeed, as to whether these two things are not indelibly connected; that is, if it's impossible to separate the world outside from how different people experience and interpret it.

For Cash, Darl may be "crazy" in the eyes of the world - according to the "majority of folks" - and yet he's not at all sure that this means that Darl is definitively mad. Cash thinks that it may all depend on who has the "right" to label certain people normal and certain people crazy. While Cash doesn't explicitly meditate on the implications of this notion, they are striking: he has implied that language is enormously powerful in that how someone is labeled, the name assigned to him or her, can determine his or her life.

59. Cash Quotes

“It's Cash and Jewel and Vardaman and Dewey Dell...Meet Mrs. Bundren.”

Related Characters: Anse Bundren (speaker), Cash Bundren, Jewel, Vardaman Bundren, Dewey Dell Bundren

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 261

Explanation and Analysis

These, the last lines of *As I Lay Dying*, return to the profoundly somber and pessimistic tone present throughout the novel, as well as its biting irony. Anse has married the woman whose shovels he had borrowed just

the day before in order to bury Addie. The supposedly "heroic" journey of the family to Jefferson is therefore definitively revealed to be, at least on Anse's part, no more than a chance for him to fulfill his own selfish interests.

At the same time, however, by ending with suggestions of the Bundrens' future with a new family (without Darl, and with a new stepmother), the novel suggests that families can shift, expand, contract, and still survive - even, or especially, when these changes are cause for skepticism and

pessimism more than cause for joy. As we've seen throughout the book, different characters have had different interpretations regarding the meaning of Addie's death and the meaning of their voyage to bury her. While the novel does give Anse the last word literally regarding this meaning, it's not at all clear that his is the last word on the subject in the more metaphorical sense - suggesting instead that ideas such as heroism and the meaning of death and life are fluid, expansive, and open to interpretation.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

1. DARL

Darl and Jewel walk single-file on a large field, heading toward their home. On the way, they encounter an old cottonhouse, which Darl walks around while Jewel "steps in a single stride through the window." Noticing Jewel's determined stare, Darl describes his brother as having "pale eyes like wood."

Darl makes clear his love for language and his observant nature. By pointing out that Jewel walks right through the house, Darl contrasts his brother's action-focused nature against his own tendency to focus on observation and expressions of thought.



Upon reaching the foot of a bluff, Darl notices a wagon with two chairs stacked on it, arranged by the Bundrens' neighbor Vernon Tull. The brothers continue walking to the top of the bluff, where Darl becomes distracted by the sound of Cash's saw. Darl describes Cash's meticulous preparation of the **coffin** for their mother Addie, who is on her deathbed. Darl passes Cash without engaging with him and walks into their house.

Darl similarly emphasizes Cash's uninterrupted attention toward completing Addie's coffin, revealing Cash's inner nature as a careful, pragmatic, and detail oriented craftsman, as well as his role in the family as a man of great charity and self-sacrifice.



2. CORA

Cora Tull delightfully thinks about the cakes she has just made. Cora had been hired to make the cakes, although the woman hiring her decided not to take them or pay her, leading Cora's daughter Kate to feel resentful on her mother's behalf. Cora is not disturbed by the loss of money or her time, rationalizing the situation by saying that "Riches is nothing in the face of the Lord, for He can see into the heart."

Cora offers a perspective from outside of the Bundren family and establishes a counter-perspective to the often dysfunctional family dynamic early on in the novel. In particular, Cora uses language and thought to rationalize her own behavior as pious and to assure herself of her own faith in God.



Cora shifts her attention to Addie, who is lying silently on her deathbed nearby. Looking at Addie's sickly face and eyes, Cora remembers how well her friend used to bake cakes. Cora's other daughter Eula claims that Addie must either be listening to or watching Cash build her **coffin**. Then Darl walks in the door without looking at or talking to any of the women.

Despite her ostensible pious nature, Cora's attention to the Bundren family—exemplified here by her reference to Addie's cakes, Cash's coffin-building, and Darl's silence—speaks to her critical nature and her tendency to make judgments about the family in an effort to contrast their behaviors to those of her and her family.



3. DARL

Anse Bundren and Vernon Tull sit on the Bundrens' back porch as Darl makes his return home. Anse asks Darl where Jewel is; before answering his father, Darl takes a drink and then thinks about the pleasure of drinking water, especially when drunk from wood rather than metal.

Darl's descriptions reveal his poetic sensibility and his aura of detachment from the rest of the world, especially in comparison with his family members. He is able to cut himself off from present interactions and transition into a long string of thoughts, commenting on those around him.



Darl tells Anse that Jewel is down in the barn, where he is attempting to mount his **horse**, which is behaving aggressively and resisting Jewel's command. Jewel finally mounts the horse and rides it down the hill. When he and the horse return to the barn, Jewel playfully curses at the horse and feeds him.

Darl is able to describe Jewel's actions with the horse from afar, showing his characteristically eerie ability to know about situations even if he does not witness them. Furthermore, Darl once again focuses on Jewel's highly physical presence, and underscores Jewel's sense of affection for his horse.



4. JEWEL

Jewel angrily dwells on the question of why Cash feels the need to hammer and saw loudly outside Addie's window, blatantly revealing to her that he is building her **coffin** right outside her deathbed-window. Jewel not only feels angry at Cash for these actions, but also at his other family members for permitting Cash's inappropriate behavior, passively "sitting there, like buzzards." Jewel expresses a fantasy for how he would ideally like to spend Addie's last days: "It would just be me and her on a high hill and me rolling the rocks down the hill at their faces."

In Jewel's only section, he calls attention to his feeling of alienation from the rest of the Bundren family. Jewel criticizes Cash's attempts at showing dedication to Addie by denouncing his coffin-building as inappropriate, and doubts the rest of the family's love for Addie. By contrast, Jewel sees himself as possessing a truer sense of duty to his mother and a desire to act heroically, unlike the underlying selfishness of the Bundren family members.



5. DARL

Darl and Jewel prepare to run an errand for Vernon Tull. Anse cautions the boys against leaving, fearing they will still be away at the time of Addie's death. Darl defends their choice by explaining that the errand will bring them three dollars, and then thinks to himself about how Anse has never sweat a day in his life.

Darl's dismissive attitude toward his father reveals the extent to which even Anse's own children doubt his sense of responsibility and care toward them. However, Darl's interest in the three dollars does show the selfish concerns the Bundrens still have even just before Addie's death. This further complicates the novel's portrayal of family and heroism.



Tull comforts Jewel and Darl by pointing out that Addie has seemed more like herself recently, though Jewel is angered by Tull's interference in the situation. Anse then begins to discuss potential arrangements for carting Addie's **coffin** to Jefferson, but is silenced by Jewel, who expresses anger at the family as a whole for their apparent desire to rush Addie to her death. Anse ultimately resolves to allow Jewel and Darl to leave on their errand—under the condition that they return before sundown.

Tull's role in this scene is characteristic: he offers the Bundrens consistent help and support during their times of need, despite his wholly separate role from their family structure. His generosity in these ways only serves to point out Anse's failures as a father and his frequent use of self-rationalization to justify his selfish thoughts and actions.



6. CORA

Having come to the Bundren household to take care of Addie in her last moments, Cora thinks about Darl's sweet disposition as she watches say goodbye to Addie. In particular, Cora contrasts Darl to Jewel, who she recalls was Addie's most "coddled" child. Yet Cora finds Jewel coldhearted, comparing him to Anse, who she believes is selfish and lazy.

Cora and Tull reflect on the Bundrens' plan to trek forty miles to bury Addie in Jefferson. Cora finds the plan preposterous, while Vernon defends it using Anse's argument—that it was Addie's "own wish." Cora dismisses her husband for listening to Anse and then reflects on how lucky she feels to be an honorable Christian, someone who will die surrounded by the love and respect of her Christian family. Dewey Dell asks Darl what he wants, but Darl does not answer and instead continues to stare at Addie. Cora reasons that his heart must just be "too full for words."

7. DEWEY DELL

As she sits next to Addie on her deathbed, Dewey Dell reflects on the experience harvesting cotton with Lafe, a laborer on the Bundrens' farm. She recalls her confused and confusing memory of how they "picked on down the row" and how she attempted to reason her way out of sleeping with Lafe. The plan was that if her cotton sack were full, they would sleep together and if it weren't, it would be a sign from God that she and Lafe shouldn't have sexual intercourse. Lafe manipulatively filled her sack with cotton such that Dewey Dell claims she "could not help it." Now she fears she is pregnant.

Dewey Dell then has the realization that Darl knows about her experience with Lafe, saying, "He said he knew without the words like he told me that ma is going to die without words!" That is, Dewey Dell intuits Darl's knowledge of her experience through his facial expression, as he has never confirmed it through words. Dewey Dell asks Darl what he wants, showing the same event as represented in the previous chapter, though now from Dewey Dell's perspective. Darl replies that Addie is going to die before he and Jewel return from their errand.

Cora's opinions offer an enlightening alternative perspective to those of the Bundrens. Cora here highlights the dichotomy between language and action that is highly relevant when comparing Darl and Jewel. Thus, Cora foreshadows the question of why Jewel is set apart from the Bundrens, and why he might've been Addie's favorite.



Cora's criticism of the Bundrens' plan to go to Jefferson and her remarks on her own purity of faith show how successful Cora is at using language to elevate herself—in this case, as an honorable Christian unlike any of the Bundrens. Cora calls into question whether the Bundrens' journey is truly the fulfillment of a "sacred promise," in the words of Anse, and offers another way of seeing the journey—as absurd and impractical.



Dewey Dell's frantic recollection shows how distracted she is by private matters, despite dutifully sitting on her mother's deathbed. In addition to questioning the authenticity of Dewey Dell's sense of duty to her sick mother, her distractedness offers a realistic picture of family dynamics in their unromanticized form. Dewey Dell's story itself—and her repeated phrase, "I could not help it"—emphasizes her role throughout the novel as a victim.



Dewey Dell's intuition that Darl knows her secret shows that even the family knows of Darl's powers of observation. As the novel's most prominent narrator, Darl can be seen as possessing an omniscience about other characters, making him seem more like an author figure. Dewey Dell's retelling of the same event from Cora's section speaks to the novel's interest in individual character perspectives and language, and the nature of subjective storytelling.



8. TULL

Tull tells Anse not to worry about Jewel and Darl's trip and that they'll be back before long. Anse repeats that the family will need to set off for Jefferson immediately following Addie's death as "Her mind is set on it."

Vardaman emerges from the hill with a dead **fish** in his hand, proudly telling Anse and Tull that he plans to show it to Addie. Anse does not praise Vardaman for his catch, and instead orders him to clean the fish.

Tull and Cora leave the Bundren home and get in their wagon, along with their daughters Kate and Eula. Kate hypothesizes that Anse will get another wife before the cotton-picking season. The rest of the family then discusses each of the "poor" Bundren children.

Tull has an inexplicable amount of patience for the Bundrens, especially Anse. Anse repeats the phrase "Her mind is set on it" to rationalize their trip to Jefferson as a gesture of Christian duty, when in reality, all he wants to do is buy a new pair of teeth.



Vardaman's act of catching the fish sets in motion a series of obsessive thoughts about the nature of the fish's existence and how that might explain observations Vardaman makes about his own mother's death.



The Tull family presents an alternative family dynamic to the novel. While they claim to be honorable Christians, they spend much of their time criticizing the Bundrens, albeit for good reason. The tendency to use language to rationalize actions is common in the novel, most often as a way for characters to act selfishly under the guise of heroism or another code of conduct, such as religion.



9. ANSE

Still sitting on the porch, Anse curses the road, the rain, and finally, his sons. He believes the road by the Bundren home is the source for his bad luck. Anse expresses resentment for all the things for the family that he has to pay for and complains about the fact that he is missing a tooth.

After a while, Vardaman returns to the house with the **fish** chopped up, and with his own body covered in blood. Anse tells Vardaman to go wash his hands, and Vardaman asks if his mother is still sick. Anse regrets the fact that he can't seem to get access to his heart, his feelings, and blames his apparent callousness on the bad weather.

Coping with misfortune, Anse is quick to blame things in the world around him, rather than take responsibility. He does not display sympathy for his children as is customary for a parent, but instead looks to them as a cause for his bad luck. Anse unapologetically reveals how selfish a father (and person) he is.



Ignoring Vardaman, his youngest son, Anse continues to prove himself a selfish and uncaring father, calling into question typical traditional family structures. His tendency here to blame things around him for his personal failures provides another example of a character using language to attempt to explain their negative situation.



10. DARL

On their errand, Darl provokes Jewel by telling him that Addie is going to die. Jewel does not answer, and Darl pessimistically thinks to himself, "It takes two people to make you, and one person to die. That's how the world is going to end."

Darl then recalls the moment when he accused Dewey Dell of wanting Addie to die just so she can get to town. In asking Dewey Dell this question, Darl expresses his awareness of what happened between his sister and Lame, though she won't admit it. Darl then notices the sun begin to set "like a bloody egg," and aggressively taunts Jewel again, repeating the fact that Addie is going to die.

Darl's deliberately sadistic treatment of Jewel here calls into question the traditional image of family. Despite the provocative nature of Darl's behavior, his intensity points to the fact that he, like Jewel, both are supremely affected by the impending death of their mother.



Darl's interest in the nature of existence leads him to act in ways that are often hard to understand—provoking his siblings by telling them things he knows they do not want to hear. Darl is set apart from the rest of the more ignorant Bundren characters for his sophisticated expressions of feeling in language, but his actions to express his feelings often challenge the notion of love most commonly associated with family.



11. PEABODY

The Bundrens' doctor Peabody finally comes to their household, and is surprised that Anse has waited so long to call. As a seventy-year-old man who weighs two hundred some pounds, Peabody has a great deal of trouble walking up the bluff in order to get to the Bundrens' house. Anse apologizes and sends Vardaman to get rope to help Peabody up the hill. When Peabody finally gets to the house, he notices Dewey Dell standing by Addie's bed, fanning her mother who appears dead except for vague movement in her eyes, which makes Peabody feel as though she is watching him.

Outside Addie's room, Peabody directly confronts Anse about why he did not send for a doctor sooner and Anse makes empty excuses. The two men go back inside Addie's room and Dewey Dell intervenes to tell Peabody that Addie wants him to leave. Meanwhile, Cash diligently continues to build Addie's **coffin** outside, making lots of noise with his tools. Addie screams Cash's name but is not met with a response.

As a doctor, Peabody's initial appearance offers a sense of potential hope to the story; though of course, when Peabody arrives, he tells Anse that he was called too late. Peabody's response to Anse once again emphasizes Anse's selfishness and laziness, despite his repeated statements about his duty to Addie and his desire to fulfill it heroically. As an outsider, Peabody's presence also provides a contrast to the Bundren family perspectives.



This scene shows how various characters surrounding Addie's deathbed cope with the fact of her death. Removed from the family, Peabody responds with practical concerns. Dewey Dell listens to her mother, while Cash shows affection through action, by dutifully building her coffin. Addie's screaming, however, calls into question whether Cash's actions actually take into account Addie's needs or desires.



12. DARL

Although Jewel and Darl are still on their errand for Tull, Darl is somehow able to describe what is happening in Addie's room back at the Bundren home. Addie continues to call for Cash, though Dewey Dell explains that she is actually calling for Jewel. Anse explains that Darl and Jewel are away running an errand. Addie looks out the window at Cash, who has not budged from his project of making Addie's **coffin**. Addie calls to him again. Cash stares into the room through the window, while Anse and Vardaman sit silently and together, they all watch Addie die. Dewey Dell screams for her mother and dramatically flings herself on Addie's bed.

Darl's thoughts then return to him and Jewel, still on their journey. Darl calls out to Jewel two times but is ignored by his brother. Then Darl's descriptions refocus again on the Bundren home, where Cash has just entered Addie's room, filled with the rest of the Bundren family members. Anse tells Cash to hurry and finish the **coffin** and then orders the grieving Dewey Dell to make dinner. Dewey Dell leaves the room, weeping, and without acknowledging her father. Darl then returns to his and Jewel's present scenario once again, and tells Jewel that Addie has died.

13. VARDAMAN

Vardaman runs out of the house and begins to cry after looking at the place in the dust where he placed the **fish** he caught. He notices that the fish he caught, now cut up, has become "not-fish" and "not-blood," which is now on his hands in overalls.

As he runs, Vardaman continues to cry and repeats the phrase "He kilt her. He kilt her," blaming Peabody for his mother's death. He picks up a stick and continues to scream and cry as he whacks Peabody's horses, addressing them as if they were Peabody himself: "You kilt my maw!...You kilt her!" The horses run from Vardaman's wrath. Vardaman notices a cow in the barn that wants to be milked. Vardaman ignores the cow and hides in the darkness of the barn. Cash walks by without acknowledging Vardaman. Dewey Dell, who left the house to look for Vardaman, calls out his name. Yet Vardaman ignores her and remains in the dark, telling himself that he is not afraid.

Darl's ability to describe what is happening without being there to witness it is an unexplained aspect of the novel, but can be seen simply as a sign of his ability to use language as a way to express his acute observations and intuitions about the world around him. This scene shows various characters respond to the actual moment of Addie's death. Cash, Anse, and Vardaman respond with silence, while Dewey Dell becomes hysterical. These disparate reactions once again show the Bundrens to have quite a unique family structure.



Anse's immediate ability to make orders to his children at the moment of Addie's death shows his own callous reaction to the situation, and a more general lack of sensitivity to the needs of his grieving children. He recognizes that the coffin needs to be finished and that dinner needs to be made without thinking to help with the tasks himself. Scenes like this reveal that Anse's explanations of the trip to Jefferson as a sentimentally motivated act are inauthentic.



Vardaman uses his own six-year-old intuition to relate the death of the fish he caught to the death of his mother. He immediately chooses to deal with these difficult questions of mortality and existence by focusing on how they can be expressed in language.



Vardaman's belief that Peabody killed Addie is not vindictive but another way that he, as a young child, attempts to make sense of the apparently cruel reality of Addie's ceased existence. His quickness to reach understanding through blame echoes Anse's reactions to the family's misfortune in his earlier chapter, and once again points to the human tendency to rationalize feelings and actions with language as a way to gain control over difficult situations.



14. DEWEY DELL

Dewey Dell preoccupies herself once again with thoughts of her potential pregnancy, referring to herself as a "little tub of guts." She thinks of how much Peabody could help her in an ideal and unrealistic world. She claims, "I would let him come in between me and Lafe, like Darl did." Dewey Dell is distracted by the sound of Cash's saw, but complies with her father's request to make dinner. She prepares greens and bread, but claims she does not have enough time to cook the **fish** Vardaman caught. Anse complains about the meagerness of the meal. When Cash comes into eat, he tells everyone that Peabody's team of horses has been let loose. Dewey Dell leaves to look for the still-missing Vardaman.

As Dewey Dell enters the barn, she sees the same cow waiting to be milked. She tells it to wait, still focused on finding Vardaman. She passes the stall, repeating Lafe's name to herself until she hears sounds from within the stall. It is Vardaman. She accuses Vardaman of being a sneak, paranoid that he heard her reciting Lafe's name again and again. Dewey Dell chides Vardaman for running off and for his aggressive behavior toward Peabody and his horses. She shakes him and tells him to eat dinner, as he continues to cry, eventually roaming out of the barn. Dewey Dell remains alone, still thinking about Peabody's potential help regarding her situation.

Although Dewey Dell is hysterical at the moment of Addie's death, she expresses self-interested concerns in this chapter. She is so distracted by her possible pregnancy that she ignores the issue of death, and does not have enough time to prepare dinner. The fact that this is Dewey Dell's first direct reaction to her mother's death emphasizes the theme of self-interest versus duty that pervades the novel, and calls into question the Bundrens' publicly expressed reasons for going to Jefferson.



Dewey Dell continues to be overwhelmed by anxiety about personal issues, even as she fulfills her apparent duty as a sibling to search for Vardaman. In addition to destabilizing the authenticity of her sense of duty to Addie, Dewey Dell's distractedness destabilizes any romantic notions of how family operates, especially in the face of such grief. This is especially clear given that Dewey Dell's concerns focus around a potential birth, revealing the often un-romantic causes for child-birth, the beginning of a family.



15. VARDAMAN

After Cash finishes Addie's **coffin**, Vardaman is disturbed that she will be nailed up in it. Dewey Dell comforts Vardaman by telling him that they will get bananas for the trip to Jefferson, and Vardaman thinks about the toy red train-set behind glass in the Jefferson town toy store.

Vardaman notices that Anse walks around—and then corrects himself, "His shadow walks around." He then looks at Addie, about to be nailed in the **coffin** and claims "It was not my mother." He then connects this idea to the idea that the **fish** he caught was once alive, and is now chopped up, laying bleeding in the pan waiting to be "cooked and et." Vardaman continues to obsess over the distinction between "is" and "is not" and "was" and "was not."

Vardaman's obsession with existence and how it can be expressed in language is momentarily quelled by the thought of his desires for bananas and toy-trains. This moment provides a glimpse into the way the Bundren family members think in a constant tug of war between familial obligation and individual concerns.



Like Darl, Vardaman responds to Addie's death by grappling with the idea of how a live human body suddenly leaves the realm of existence upon the moment of death. He not only compares Addie to a fish, but obsesses over what it means to be "is" versus "is not."

16. TULL

Tull recalls the moment in which he and Cora found out that Addie Bundren had died: Cora opens the door on a stormy evening to find Peabody's loose team of horses and reasons that Addie Bundren is "gone at last." Eventually, later that night, Tull and Cora get to bed but are woken up in the night by Vardaman knocking on their door. Vardaman comes into the house wet and covered in mud, and continues to talk about the **fish** he caught and chopped up for dinner. Tull reasons that Vardaman's nonsensical words and strange behavior are signs of God's judgment upon Anse for being a negligent father.

Tull and Cora escort Vardaman back to the Bundrens' home, where Cash is still working to finish Addie's **coffin**. Tull helps him with the finishing touches. The men finish the coffin before dawn and nail Addie into it. The next morning, the family and Tull find Vardaman asleep next to the coffin, which has holes drilled into it. In the act of drilling these holes, Vardaman also bore two holes in his mother's face. Cora and Tull finally return home.

Despite Tull's readiness to help the Bundrens in times of need, he internally expresses criticism for the family's strange way of existing in the world. Here, Tull dismisses Vardaman's exploration of existence (comparing Addie to the fish) as nonsense. Tull and Cora use religion as an accessible framework to pass judgments on the Bundrens: in this case, Tull ungenerously sees Vardaman's strange behavior not as a sign of grief, but as a sign of God punishing Anse for his failed parenting.



Tull's decision to help Cash here is unexpected, given his judgment of the Bundrens previously in the section. Yet it shows an instance of a character's actions providing a contrast with that character's mode of using language, a central interest of Faulkner's throughout the novel.



17. DARL

Darl once again describes what is happening at the Bundren home after Addie's death, even as he is still on the road with Jewel. Cash continues to work diligently on completing the **coffin**, despite the rain. Cash tells Anse to stop helping him and instead to go get something to cover their lantern. Cora and Tull arrive in the meantime, and Tull begins to help Cash, who announces his decision to bevel the coffin.

Cash proudly finishes the **coffin** before dawn—and Cash, Anse, Tull and Peabody immediately bring the coffin inside. Darl shifts his focus to his and Jewel's present situation and ponders the need to "empty yourself for sleep." He believes "when you are emptied for sleep, you are not" and proceeds to realize that he does not know whether he is or is not. Jewel knows he is because he does not think of these kinds of questions—is vs. is not, was vs. was not, and the issue of what will be.

Once again, we see Darl as having preternatural abilities and a rare fluency in expressing his thoughts in language. This sets Darl apart in the family. By contrast, Cash's dedication to fulfilling his duty as a carpenter and finishing the coffin marks his role as a Christ-like figure, a man of charity and self-sacrifice.



Darl's interrogation of what it means to be "empty" for sleep resembles Vardaman's thoughts regarding the difference between "not-fish" and fish. Both Darl and Vardaman explore questions about mortality and the meaning of life using rudimentary philosophical arguments, all of which rely heavily on thought-experiments based on the subtleties of language.



18. CASH

In a precise numerical list, labeled 1–13, Cash explains his decisions for making Addie's **coffin** on the bevel (on a slant). His most notable reasons are the fact that there is "more surface for the nails to grip," "water will have to seep into it on a slant," and "the animal magnetism of a dead body makes the stress come slanting."

The rigidity of this section speaks to Cash's tendency for pragmatic action over language and self-expression. Cash's obsessive nature about things in the world around him and his accompanying tendency to ignore his own needs are qualities that he channels in an effort to do heroic deeds, unlike many of the other Bundren characters.



19. VARDAMAN

Vardaman states: "My mother is a **fish**."

In what is perhaps the novel's most famous sentence, Vardaman connects the idea of his dead mother with the dead fish he caught for dinner. Vardaman's statement of course stems from the imagination of a six-year-old, but also represents a philosophical exploration of existence. To express himself, Vardaman links his mother and the fish, both dead, using a transitive property that permits him to think they are the same thing.



20. TULL

At ten o'clock the next morning, Tull comes back to the Bundrens' house with Peabody's horses. A farmer named Quick who also lives nearby tells Tull that the river is at a high level. Tull fears the bridge that the Bundrens will need to take to get to Jefferson will be swept away by the rising waters and asks Quick if he has told Anse. Quick says he has and that Anse assured him that they will be able to load up quickly and get across the bridge before it is destroyed. Another farmer named Armstid joins the conversation, adding that Anse should just bury her at the nearby town of New Hope instead. Quick reminds Armstid that Anse is set on burying Addie in Jefferson. Anse opens the door, looking disheveled despite wearing his Sunday best.

The women go inside while the men stay outside to continue their conversation. Tull goes to the back of the house and sees Cash filling up the holes in Addie's coffin. They place Addie in the **coffin** reversed—with her head in the narrow part meant for her feet—in order to permit the dramatic flare-out bottom of her wedding dress. Tull reflects on the precision and great technique of Cash's carpentry job.

The local minister named Whitfield comes to the house to lead Addie's funeral, but first tells the Bundrens that the local bridge has been destroyed by the river's rising waters. Cash, Armstid and Tull discuss the fall Cash suffered not long ago the church roof, which resulted in a broken leg that has only partially healed. Tull thinks to himself about how Addie will now be free from Anse. Cora and Tull leave the funeral and find Vardaman attempting to fish in a nearby bog on their way home. Tull tells Vardaman to come home with them, and that it is not a good day to fish, but Vardaman stubbornly resists and swears Dewey Dell has seen a **fish** in the bog.

The conversation between Tull and the farmers about the flood foreshadows the catastrophe that the Bundrens endure at the river midway through their journey. Given their knowledge that the selfish and unlikable Anse is "set on" burying Addie in Jefferson, it is also foreshadowed that the Bundrens will be stubborn, and try to cross the river regardless of circumstances. Given Anse's behavior thus far, it is clear that any catastrophe the Bundrens face will not be conquered heroically, but rather will provide yet another opportunity for the Bundrens to grapple with family dysfunction.



Addie's coffin symbolizes the weight of the Bundrens' sense of obligation to their wife and mother, regardless of their competing self-interests. Here, the fact that they place Addie in the coffin reversed merely points to the increasing degree of absurdity that defines and will continue to define the Bundrens' trek to Jefferson.



Both Whitfield's reference to the bridge and the talk of Cash's broken leg continue to foreshadow catastrophe that will only make the Bundrens' journey more awful and ridiculous. Relatedly, Tull's relief for Addie that she will no longer have to deal with Anse emphasizes the strange family dynamics in the Bundren family, and continues to call into question the authenticity of Anse's sense of duty to Addie. Vardaman's continued obsession with fish shows that he is grappling with the meaning of existence.



21. DARL

Darl points out the thick cloud of buzzards flying overhead him and Jewel, as they make an unexpectedly delayed return home. He sarcastically reminds Jewel that it is not his **horse** that is dead. Jewel curses him. Darl thinks to himself that he can no longer love his mother because he has no mother. He then states: "Jewel's mother is a **horse**." Once again, Darl describes Jewel as "wooden-backed" and "wooden-faced" as they make their way into the Bundrens' barn.

Darl continues to aggravate the rivalry that exists between himself and Jewel, especially in the face of Addie's death. As he contemplates whether or not he can express love for Addie now that she is dead, he connects Jewel's love for Addie to Jewel's love for his horse. Jewel, unlike Darl, demonstrates his emotional investment by finding self-expression in the physical world rather than in his mind.



22. CASH

Cash attempts to explain why the coffin won't balance in an intense but short dialogue with an unnamed family member, who curses Cash, saying, "Pick up, goddamn your thick-nosed soul to hell."

Cash's fixation with the coffin's balance shows that Cash does not express emotion verbally but channels it into care and sensitivity for details in the physical world—specifically, the things he has built, such as the coffin. The unnamed relative (soon revealed to be Jewel) does not embrace Cash's concerns in the face of their shared tragedy, but appears to resent Cash for his different mode of coping.



23. DARL

Darl describes the experience of lifting Addie's **coffin** with Cash, Jewel and Anse. It is revealed that the family member who had cursed Cash (in the previous section) is Jewel, who refuses to listen to Cash's anxiety about the coffin being off balance. Jewel refuses to wait for any of the other family members, and ends up carrying the entire front end of the **coffin** by himself. Darl tries to tell Jewel to wait but he ignores Darl, too, and quickens his pace as the injured Cash limps slowly behind the group. Jewel continues to address the group, repeating the phrase, "Goddamn you. Goddamn you."

Jewel's fierce determination and disregard for others seems to be his unique ways of coping with loss. Jewel's drive to move the coffin single-handedly indicates the physicality of his reaction to being in a state of grief. Jewel also reveals an intense degree of impatience for his family members and an overt desire to be kept separate from them. Jewel's cursing at his siblings does not function as a mode of expression, but serves only to estrange him, further complicating the novel's representation of family.



24. VARDAMAN

Vardaman expresses excitement about going to town, and makes another reference to the bright red train set behind the glass in the Jefferson toy store. As the family makes preparations to leave, Jewel heads to the barn, ignoring Anse's call for him to come back. Anse tells Jewel to leave his prized horse at home, so that they can ride in the wagon as a family.

Despite his interest in questions of existence, Vardaman too expresses self-interest. Jewel's choice to ignore Anse complicates the idea that the Bundrens are united in a heroic effort to fulfill a promise to Addie, and instead points to the competing self-interests that characterize the family dynamic.



Vardaman states once again that his mother is a **fish**, though Darl claims that Jewel's mother is a **horse**. Vardaman confusedly reasons that if Jewel is his brother, and Jewel's mother is a horse, then Vardaman's mother can't be a fish. Darl tells him not to worry, and tells Vardaman that he simply doesn't have a mother. The two brothers discuss the question of what it means to "be is."

As he continues to ponder existence, Vardaman finds himself caught up in the way language works. Vardaman does not understand how Jewel's mother can be a horse, if his own mother is a fish. This leads him to ask Darl about the nature of the verb "to be," revealing Vardaman and Darl's shared interest in both existence and language.



Cash approaches the wagon with his **tools**, so that he can stop and help Tull fix his roof on the way back from Jefferson. Anse tells Cash that his plan is disrespectful and to leave his tools at home. Similarly, Anse gets annoyed when Dewey Dell approaches with a package that she claims to hold Cora Tull's cakes, so she can sell them in Jefferson.

Cash's tools symbolize his attachment to trying to fix things in the world around him, rather than expressing vulnerability. Anse's negative interpretation of Cash's desire to bring his tools and Dewey Dell her package is hypocritical, as Anse is merely masking his own selfishness and disrespect by blaming it on his very own children.



25. DARL

Darl watches Anse go toward the barn as Dewey Dell approaches carrying a basket in one arm and a package wrapped in newspaper in the other. Darl notices that Dewey Dell looks "brooding and alert."

Darl's ability to articulate his observations about his family members speaks to his sense of detachedness from the rest of the Bundrens. Darl does not express sympathy for Dewey Dell's apparent anxiety as one might expect, but rather seems to keep surveillance on his sister.



The family gathers in the wagon and Anse laments Jewel's inconsiderate behavior—specifically his obsession with his **horse** and the related fact that he is not coming with them in the wagon to bury Addie in Jefferson. It is decided that Jewel will follow the Bundren wagon from behind, though Cash suggests that Jewel just stay home. Darl reasons that he will catch up. The wagon leaves and the Bundrens head to Jefferson with Addie's **coffin**.

Anse explains his anger at Jewel by speaking about the journey to Jefferson as an act of family togetherness and a fulfillment of a "sacred promise" to Addie. However, Anse is selfish and unkind to his children. This calls into question the authenticity of Anse's explanation. Anse's resentment toward Jewel is a feeling felt between many of the Bundren family members, rather than the expected family virtues of care and love.



26. ANSE

Anse gets worked up about Jewel's desire to bring his horse on the journey, thinking it shows disrespect for Addie. Anse cannot believe that Jewel would feel okay "prancing along on a durn circus animal" while the rest of the family rode together on the wagon with Addie in her **coffin**.

Anse convinces himself that he has the authority to deem the behavior of others too self-interested and disrespectful of the family's sense of duty. This is especially ironic in the context of the Bundrens in particular, as Jewel has already been revealed to feel intense emotion for his mother and her legacy, while Anse focuses principally on himself.



Darl laughs and Anse wonders how and why his son is able to laugh with his dead mother in her coffin laying at his feet. The wagon passes Tull's lane just as Jewel and his **horse** catch up with the family's wagon. Darl continues to laugh.

Darl's laughter emphasizes his ability to detach from the situation at hand—sitting in the wagon with his mother's coffin—and to have perspective on it. This can perhaps be seen as Darl's self-interested tendency that keeps him at a distance from the romanticized ideal of fulfilling a heroic familial duty. Darl knows that the journey they are setting out on is ridiculous.



27. DARL

Darl watches Jewel catch up with the family in his wagon, and notices Tull wave at the Bundrens from his lot as they pass. Cash remarks off-hand that Addie's dead body will begin to smell in the following days, and Darl suggests that Cash tell Jewel. Cash laments once again that the **coffin** is not balanced, and Darl again suggests that Cash tell Jewel all of these unfortunate details. Jewel swiftly passes the wagon on his **horse**, which kicks up a burst of mud onto Addie's coffin. Cash uses his tools to remove the dirt carefully.

This scene encapsulates much of the tensions that pervade the family's journey to Jefferson: Darl makes observations about his family members and feels particular antipathy toward Jewel, Cash does not express himself but rather spends his energy trying to fix things in order to maintain a sense of order for the family, and Jewel keeps to himself. Each of the Bundrens has a unique approach to the journey, with individual motivations and an idiosyncratic vision of family.



28. ANSE

Anse complains about how hard his life is as a farmer and laments that "nowhere in this sinful world can a honest, hardworking man profit." He hopes for a reward in heaven, where all men are equal.

Again, Anse demonstrates his self-interest and his tendency to see himself as a victim for things that go wrong for him. His obsession with receiving a "profit" or "reward" point to the fact that he is not actually concerned with fulfilling a "sacred promise" to Addie, but with himself.



The Bundrens drive along all day until dusk, when they reach the house of Samson, a farmer who lives on the way to Jefferson. The Bundrens learn the unfortunate fact that another local bridge has been submerged from recent rains, but reminds himself that he is a chosen man of God. Despite the unfortunate situation, Anse takes solace in the fact that he will be getting new teeth upon arrival in Jefferson.

The news of the sunken bridge foreshadows future catastrophe for the Bundrens, which will make their journey far more ridiculous and less heroic than even before. Anse's statement that he is a chosen man of God speaks to the theme of inauthentic religious beliefs spouted by many of the characters throughout the novel, which Addie specifically criticizes in her section (section 40).



29. SAMSON

Just before sunset, Samson is sitting on his porch with fellow farmers. The men discuss what the Bundrens are doing on their road and the farmer named Quick tells them about their quest to bury Addie in Jefferson. Because of the recently sunken bridge, the men worry about the Bundrens' journey, so Quick catches up with the family to give them the news. The Bundrens decide to turn back around and head to Samson's home. Samson offers to give them shelter for the night and the Bundrens agree simply to stay in his barn. Anse, however, talks of not wanting to accept any favors from anyone, which annoys Samson. The Bundrens plan to leave for New Hope in the morning.

Samson's wife Rachel cannot believe that the Bundrens are traveling such a long distance with a dead body, despite Anse's claim that their journey is based on "a promise." Rachel expresses distaste at her husband for accommodating the family, though Samson also thinks strongly that the Bundrens' journey is absurd. The next morning, Samson remains inside his house until he hears the Bundrens leave the barn. Yet even after the family leaves, Samson can still smell the putrid scent of Addie's corpse.

Samson and the other local farmers provide commentary on the Bundrens and their journey, reinforcing the sense of strangeness that characterizes the Bundrens as a family. Anse's pattern of reiterating his self-sufficiency and desire to avoid favors again proves to be his unsuccessful way of trying to mask his true nature—self-interested and lazy, despite all his talk of being a dutiful husband to Addie.



For good reason, both Samson and his wife Rachel are annoyed by Anse's false performance of duty, as they believe him to be distasteful and the Bundrens' journey in general to be farcical. The opinions of Samson and Rachel, as outsiders, reinforce the contrast between Anse's personal motivations and those he talks about. This contrast is one that characterizes the cases of almost all of the other Bundren characters as well.



30. DEWEY DELL

The Bundrens end up passing the sign for New Hope. Dewey Dell repeats the name "New Hope" in her head out of apparent excitement. She also begins to worry to herself about how distracted she was with her own issues while Addie was on her deathbed. Between these thoughts of regret, Dewey Dell reminds herself of New Hope's arrival in three miles.

Cataloguing all of her relationships with her brothers, Dewey Dell first imagines killing Darl with the knife Vardaman used to cut up the fish he caught. She then finds herself thinking about a bad dream she had when she used to sleep alongside Vardaman. In the dream, Dewey Dell could not see or feel anything, until she felt something "like a piece of cool silk" from below, on her legs.

Dewey Dell clings onto the potential hope brought by the appropriately named "New Hope." Dewey Dell's thoughts are dominated by self-interested anxiety, not by the other personal matters—namely, a sense of duty to her mother. This suggests that childbirth, rather than giving her joy would only continue to deprive Dewey Dell of independence.



Dewey Dell's violent anger toward Darl is not typical even for sibling rivalry; it speaks to the overall dysfunction that characterizes the Bundren family and the dynamics between the family members. The dream serves to emphasize Dewey Dell's undivided attention to her own personal anxiety.



As the Bundrens approach New Hope, they do not stop but instead turn into Tull's lane. Vardaman asks why they are not going to New Hope but the family remains silent in response. Dewey Dell repeats to herself that she believes in God.

In her highly desperate state, Dewey Dell presumably finds religion the last possible resort to gain a sense of hope. These moments (such as when Anse remarks about being a chosen man of God) call into question the authenticity of faith, and present religion as a language that provides the characters with a convenient sense of meaning in their lives.



31. TULL

After the Bundren wagon passes, Tull takes out his mule and decides to follow the family. Tull notices Anse and the rest of the family members gathering at the edge of the river, despite the news of the sunken bridge. He watches the family looking at the submerged bridge, wondering what to do in order to cross with Addie's **coffin**.

Tull's presence throughout the novel as a peripheral figure and frequent helping-hand for the Bundrens calls attention to the family's neediness, ignorance and fundamental lack of heroism, despite all of Anse's references to duty.



Tull feels as though he is the object of the Bundrens' scorn, noticing in particular Dewey Dell and Darl's cold stares and Cash's meticulous look, as though Tull were the **coffin** Cash was trying to build carefully. Jewel does not move and looks with apparent anger at Tull, eventually berating him for following the Bundrens all the way to the river. Cash quiets his brother. Tull suggests that the Bundrens might want to wait until the water level decreases, but the family proceeds to make plans to drive the wagon carrying Addie's coffin across the shallow part of the river.

Tull's narrations are perhaps most telling about the Bundrens, as he observes them with a familiar but detached eye. He notices the idiosyncrasies about each family member—Dewey Dell's anxiety, Darl's coldness, Cash's obsessive eye, and Jewel's fierce hostility. Tull's opinions and observations help to destabilize the romantic idea of family as a united front.



Tull stands around as the family members argue, trying to figure out the least dangerous way of making it across the river. Tull sternly lets them know that he will not allow his mule in the water to help them. Jewel curses the mule and Darl taunts Tull for his decision. Regardless, Tull repeats his statement that he will not allow the mule to go into the water.

Jewel's initial anger at Tull's involvement indicates his independence. It also presents him as perhaps the only character who truly believes in keeping the promise to Addie a private matter. That said, Jewel then becomes angry at Tull for not lending them his mule, acting rash in his state of grief. Even Jewel is revealed to be caught between personal matters (his grief) and heroism.



32. DARL

Darl focuses his gaze on Jewel, who is glaring with hostility at Tull. The scene sets Darl off into a memory of earlier childhood, when Jewel was fifteen. Darl recalls that Jewel began to sleep all day at this point in his life, such that the rest of the siblings had to take over the chores of feeding the mules, milking the cows, and so on. All along, Addie would rationalize enforce the other siblings to take over Jewel's share of chores so Anse would not find out about Jewel's negligence.

Darl's memory of Jewel and his past sets the stage for understanding why the brothers seem to have such an intense rivalry. Based on this anecdote, Addie and Anse also de-romanticize ideals of marriage and family, as Addie is more concerned with protecting Jewel than with being honest to her husband.



One night, Darl hears Jewel get up and climb out of his window, only to be followed by Cash. The next morning, Darl asks Cash what he saw but Cash dutifully keeps Jewel's whereabouts private. One morning in November, five months later, Jewel returns home one day on a **horse**. When Anse asks where he got the horse, Jewel replies that he bought it from Mr. Quick. Anse gets angry and scolds Jewel, but Jewel proudly answers that he would kill the horse before letting him eat anything provided by Anse.

Jewel's firm dedication to working each night so that he could buy himself a horse sets him apart from the rest of the Bundrens. While admirable, Jewel's commitment to action causes him to lie to his siblings and get his mother involved in the deception, all in order to prove himself independent. Even in this situation, there is a contrast between what is seemingly heroic (Jewel's work for the horse) and a self-interested action.



Addie is devastated that Jewel has kept this part of his life a secret, but Cash attempts to comfort her. In the night, Darl discovers Addie lying next to Jewel's bed weeping. Darl claims at that moment, "And then I knew that I knew. I knew that as plain on that day as I knew about Dewey Dell on that day."

Darl's enigmatic reference to "knowing" something about Addie in Jewel is a moment of intense foreshadowing about further dysfunctional aspects of the Bundren family. Again, Darl is in a position of being a powerful observer and man of language, especially when contrasted with the physicality of his brother Jewel.



33. TULL

Tull thinks about Anse's haplessness and the potential danger of crossing the river with the **coffin**. Anse challenges Tull again about his team of mules, but reasons that he is not attempting to blame Tull for anything.

Again, Anse goes out of his way to defend himself as a self-sufficient person, but in doing so, calls attention to his own ignorance and selfishness.



Tull helps Anse, Dewey Dell and Vardaman cross the river, offering Vardaman in particular a hand as he walks across. Tull suggests again that the Bundrens wait to bring the wagon across the river, leading Anse to accuse Tull of begrudging the family their determination to get Addie to Jefferson, and repeats that he is merely fulfilling a sacred word, a promise that she is counting on from heaven.

Tull consistently both criticizes the Bundrens and helps them, indicating that he is torn between judging their endeavor and supporting it. Tull provides a complicated commentary on the Bundrens as a unique representation of family. Anse's repeated defense of the journey becomes increasingly absurd, as his actions continue to show selfishness and contradict his words.



34. DARL

Down the river from where Tull, Anse, Dewey Dell and Vardaman crossed, Darl and Cash proceed with the wagon to the ford. Jewel remains on his **horse**, following Darl and Cash at the wagon's rear wheel. The brothers spot the rest of the Bundren clan on the other side of the river, and begin arguing about how they will successfully cross the river with the wagon. After bickering, the brothers decide that Jewel should cross the river first on his horse, offering Darl and Cash a rope on the other side. Then, Darl should stay in the wagon as Cash helps it cross from the outside.

Unlike Tull's narration in the previous section, the bickering between Darl, Cash and Jewel returns to the present tense, increasing the sense of immediacy and urgency through language. Their disagreement also provides a granular example of how the Bundrens' familial obligation is tied up with rivalries among siblings and competing self-interests, and is not born out of genuine duty to Addie Bundren.



When Jewel, Cash and Darl attempt to execute their plan, a large log rushes toward them with the river's current. Desperate, Darl dismounts the wagon and Cash focuses on the safety of the **coffin** and his box of **tools**. The log ends up crashing into the wagon, but Cash holds onto the coffin. Jewel shouts at his **horse**, as the other family members rush along the riverbank. Because of the strong surge of water from the river's rapid current, Anse's mules have been drowned.

Darl's description of the river episode is imbued with religious significance. He refers to the scene as "the wasted world," which likens the Bundrens' journey to Biblical referents, particularly the image of hell. The Bundrens' quick response to the catastrophe seems to heighten their heroism, though in doing so, also calls into question whether the journey itself is heroic to begin with.



35. VARDAMAN

From the other side of the riverbank, Vardaman witnesses Cash's valiant attempt to hold the **coffin** securely on the wagon and to keep it from falling into the rushing water. Dewey Dell screams Vardaman's name as he watches Cash finally lose his grip. Vardaman hollers for Darl to chase the coffin downstream, and eventually meets Darl in the water to help him rescue Addie's coffin. Darl tries to rescue it but does not succeed. Vardaman asks Darl where Addie is, reminding him that she is a **fish**, and that he let her get away.

Even in the case of danger, Vardaman keeps his thoughts fixated on observing his brothers' individual reactions to the scenario, revealing his interest in understanding his family members and the world around him. Vardaman continues pondering the nature of existence and attempting to express it, likening Addie's coffin once again to a fish, this time because her coffin falls into the river.



36. TULL

Tull goes home and tells Cora about the Bundrens' wagon fiasco at the river. She thinks both that the hand of God brought the log to the river, and that Anse is at fault.

As Addie explains in her chapter, Cora's way of invoking God in service of judging others reveals the potential hypocrisy of religion that is a theme throughout the book.



Tull then recalls the experience at the river in his own mind““ specifically vivid is his memory of hearing Vardaman's loud cries as he ran past him and into the water. Tull blames Anse for the misfortune of the situation, and explains how Jewel tightly gripped the rope keeping the **coffin** and the wagon within reach. Cash, however, was not able to swim and was rescued from the river in a highly compromised physical state.

Tull's judgment of the river fiasco, by contrast, is based on first-hand experience. Tull's empathy for Vardaman shows the absence of care that Anse feels for his own children. Tull's narrations continue to complicate the picture of the Bundrens and their journey's unheroic aspects.



37. DARL

Cash is found lying on the side of the river wet and unconscious, next to a puddle of his own vomit. The family makes arrangements to find missing objects in the river from the now decrepit wagon, which the other family members are working to retrieve from the rushing river as well. Tull fixes a rope to a nearby to hold as he looks for missing things in the water. Jewel dives right into the current to look for Cash's **tools** in particular. The family and Tull attempt to wake Cash up from his unconsciousness: Dewey Dell addresses Cash by name as she lifts his head, while the others hold his tools, which Jewel has rescued, above his head. Jewel and Tull go in search of Cash's saw set, realizing that it is still missing. Cash wakes up and vomits once again.

In a certain sense, it is possible to understand Cash's injury in direct relationship to his instruction to Darl to stay in the wagon for safety. Cash is a martyr who sacrifices his own well-being to provide for others. Cash's injury can thus be seen simply as bad luck, or as a religious curse unfairly brought onto the Bundrens' most innocent family member, reinforcing Cash's victimization and other Christ-like qualities. Jewel's response to Cash's injury and lost tools continue to show his fierce commitment to action as a way of expressing himself.



38. CASH

Cash once again repeats the sentence, "It wasn't on a balance," referring to the **coffin**. He remembers telling the other Bundrens that if they wanted the coffin to be balanced, they should balance it.

Even in the face of catastrophe, Cash's obsessive mind continues to show itself, revealing the unromantic ways that loved ones cope with grief and other difficulty, especially within a family unit as strange as the Bundrens. Cash's identity as a carpenter and tendency to situate himself as a martyr makes him a Christ-like figure throughout the novel, giving further relevance to the theme of religion and faith.



39. CORA

Cora remembers a tense conversation with Addie about faith and religion. Specifically, Cora recalls scolding Addie for her assumption that humans such as herself can judge what is and is not a sin, thus neglecting to honor God for his judgment. Addie mysteriously replied, "I know my own sin. I know that I deserve my punishment."

Cora believes herself to be an ideal Christian and takes it upon herself to be a source of authority. This scene is ironic, as Cora spends the novel fiercely judging Addie and the rest of the Bundrens for their apparent sins, despite pontificating that only God can be a source of judgment.



Cora preoccupies herself with remembering how presumptuous Addie Bundren was about notions of judgment and sin. Cora believes Addie's sin was loving Jewel more than Darl, and since Jewel didn't love her, Addie received due punishment for her sin.

Cora is quick to judge all things in the world around her as reflections of God's opinions on individuals and their actions, which contradicts her belief that only God can judge the actions of others.



One day when Cora told Addie that Jewel is her sin, Addie begins to answer affirmatively, but cuts herself off. Instead, Addie merely explains, "He [Jewel] is my cross and he will be my salvation. He will save me from the water and from the fire."

Addie's enigmatic response to Cora affirms the existence of something concrete that explains the dysfunction of the Bundrens. Addie invokes the image of a "cross" and the idea of "salvation" to express the magnitude of love she feels for Jewel.



40. ADDIE

Addie recalls her days working as a schoolteacher, miserably sneaking off at the end of each afternoon to a quiet place where she could spend time hating her students. (It is not made explicit whether this chapter rewinds to the point when Addie was still alive, or is a posthumous monologue, somehow delivered by Addie's corpse inside the **coffin**).

Addie muses on her father's old saying that the reason for living is to stay dead for even longer. From there, she remembers the experience of being courted by Anse, devoted but awkward in his younger ears. After Anse and Addie got married, she quickly gave birth to Cash and Darl, leading to her depression over the loss of independence and freedom. She declares, "I knew motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it," cynically denouncing the importance of language and words. Similarly, she belittles Anse's use of the word "love" as "just a shape to fill a lack" and believes Anse to be dead to her at this point.

Addie then begins an affair with Whitfield, the local minister. While she finds escape in the passion of the affair, she does not understand how a man of faith could do something so sinful. This causes Addie to lose faith in religious principles in general. As a result of the affair, Addie has another child—Jewel—her only non-Bundren child. To make up for her sinful behavior, Addie (and Anse) have two more children—Dewey Dell and Vardaman. Addie says: "I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of." Finally, Addie recalls talking to Cora Tull, who prayed for Addie because she found Addie to be someone "blind to sin." Addie dismisses the ideas of sin and salvation alike as "just words."

41. WHITFIELD

When Whitfield hears Addie is dying, he "wrestled with Satan" and decides to go to the Bundrens' home, so that he can absolve himself of sin through confession, hoping that he can confess before Addie does so. After his decision is made, Whitfield claims to feel freer and to have a quieter soul.

Addie's sudden appearance is surprising and emphasizes the novel's interest in the multiplicity of subjective stories about the death of Addie Bundren. The lack of explanation for why the section appears now rather than earlier or later itself points to the fact that there is no objective story. Addie's cynical perspective on her students debunks the idea that she embodies the role of the beloved mother figure to begin with.



Addie's tepid investment in Anse explains, on some level, Anse's lack of feeling toward his wife's death despite his talk of duty. Addie deromanticizes the experience of childbirth, pin-pointing the births of her eldest children as the starting points of her depression and of her loss of faith in words. Addie's frustration about the loss of independence brought on by having children is implicitly echoed by Dewey Dell, who is anxious that she must bear the burden of pregnancy, while Lave is able to give her ten dollars and run off.



Unlike Anse, Addie is not unaware of the existence of a moral compass, but chooses to challenge ideas of right versus wrong based on her own subjective experiences. Specifically, her affair with Whitfield casts doubt on her faith, and aggravates her general skepticism toward words and the institution of religion. Jewel's role as Addie's illegitimate child explains her affinity for him and hence further destabilizes the representation of the Bundren family as traditional.



In contrast to Addie, Whitfield uncritically accepts religion as a moral code, in spite of sinning. He resolves that verbally acknowledging his affair with Addie to Anse will absolve him of God's punishment for his sinful actions.



However, when the minister reaches Tull's home, one of Tull's daughters calls out to Whitfield that Addie Bundren has died. Whitfield decides not to confess, as no one in the Bundren family or outside of it seems to suggest knowledge of the affair. Whitfield delivers a complex series of thoughts about God's mercy, and how God permitting Addie to die prior to Whitfield's actual confession was an act of "bounteous and omnipotent love."

Faulkner implicitly critiques religion in this chapter. Whitfield's lazy belief that God will forgive him for his intention to confess his sin to Anse is fraught with hypocrisy. Yet Whitfield remains respected, indicating a further critique of religion. While the innocent Cash appears to be punished, perhaps by divine forces, Whitfield is viewed as wholly innocent by those around him.



42. DARL

The Bundrens strap the injured Cash on top of Addie's **coffin**. The family members try to talk with Cash about his health, but Cash merely mutters about his **tools**. Jewel rides ahead on his **horse** to Armstid's home and comes back to the Bundrens with Armstid's team of mules that he has lent them temporarily.

Even in his state of utter helplessness, Cash continues to value his tools above all else, revealing his commitment to fixing things for others. Cash continues to present himself as a Christ-like figure, though his heroic stoicism borders on the absurd. This, like the Bundren journey in general, calls into question the nature and meaning of heroism.



The Bundrens then continue on and arrive at Armstid's house. Upon arrival, the family collectively carries Cash in the house. Armstid generously offers them shelter in the house, though Anse declares that they will be fine in the shed. Anse then asks if Armstid would mind giving his children a snack. Armstid kindly agrees to feed the family. Anse repeatedly says that all of Armstid's favors are "for her [Addie's] sake." Darl notices that Jewel remains separate from the family while they eat in Armstid's home, and describes Jewel's rituals of taking care of the **horse**.

Anse reveals his hypocrisy once again, proudly declaring that he does not wish for Armstid to be too generous and allow them to stay in his home, but immediately then asks for a snack for his children (though most likely for himself). Anse consistently tries to use words to express himself as a hero, doing everything "for her [Addie's] sake," but his actions undermine this and reveal his true, selfish nature.



43. ARMSTID

Armstid attempts to help Anse troubleshoot the question of where to get more mules, first suggesting that he ask Snopes, another nearby farmer. Anse mumbles in response and eventually tells Armstid "A man'll alwas help a fellow in a tight, if he's got ere a drop of Christian blood in him." Presumably in response to this remark, Armstid offers Anse one of his mules to borrow. Anse declines the offer and says that Addie would prefer traveling with mules that were the Bundrens' own mules.

Anse's response to Armstid's helpful suggestions is passive-aggressive and reveals Anse's inability to communicate directly and with integrity. Specifically, he unapologetically invokes Christianity to manipulate Armstid into offering his mules. Then, after receiving the result he expectedly wanted, Anse defends his own selfish desire to own the mules by attributing that desire to Addie.



Meanwhile, Jewel returns to Armstid's house with a horse-physician to help Cash with his injured leg. The doctor orders Cash to drink whisky and Anse realizes that Cash has re-broken the leg. The doctor sets Cash's leg, which causes Cash to faint.

Despite only having one narration, Jewel's gestures reveal his personality. While Jewel and Darl have an intense rivalry, Jewel shows himself to care for Cash through actions, not words.



Anse leaves Armstid's house the next morning with Jewel's **horse**, riding off to inquire Snopes about opportunities for buying a team of mules nearby. Back at Armstid's house, Darl notices the cloud of buzzards that is beginning to gather above Addie's **coffin**. While Anse is out with his horse, Jewel tries to make himself useful by getting the wagon out of their host's shed, but struggles in doing so. He asks for Darl's help, as he is standing nearby and asks what Jewel is doing, but Darl refuses to help his brother.

Anse triumphantly returns boasting of the fact that he got the family a new team of mules. He calls Jewel over, but Darl intervenes and asks Anse what he gave Snopes to get the mules. Anse does not make eye contact with Darl but answers to the two brothers that he gave a mortgage on some farm machinery. When Darl presses him that there must be more he gave over, Anse eventually admits that he also gave money that Cash was saving (to buy himself a graphophone, explains Darl), some money from his teeth fund, and, finally, Jewel's **horse**.

Jewel appears more dumbfounded than infuriated at this news, and decides to ride away on his horse, making it so that the mule deal would not ultimately pan out. Though the next morning, a man approaches Armstid's house delivering the Bundrens their new team of mules, explaining that Jewel's **horse** was simply left on Snopes' farm. Jewel is still missing.

Unlike many of the other characters, Darl does not attempt to rationalize his actions as heroic, but shamelessly thinks the way he wants to think and acts the way he wants to act. Here, Darl refuses to help Jewel move the wagon out of Armstid's shed not because he does not want to be a good guest, but because he wishes for Jewel to be angry.



After purchasing the new team of mules, Anse believes himself to be fulfilling a heroic act for the rest of his family. However, Anse could have simply borrowed Armstid's mules and spared the saintly Cash his meager savings and Jewel his prized horse. Anse attempts to justify his gesture as selfless, as he donated some money from his teeth-fund; though in reality, this episode reveals Anse to be the embodiment of selfishness and hypocrisy, the antithesis of what a father should be to his children.



Jewel's eventual acceptance of Anse's decision is surprising, as Jewel usually acts impetuously and aggressively. However, his silence functions as expression: unlike Anse and the rest of the clan, Jewel feels such a strong sense of duty to get Addie to Jefferson that he can put his own desires aside and make a sacrifice that is truly for the sake of his mother.



44. VARDAMAN

Vardaman obsessively counts the number of buzzards, traveling in black circles around Addie's **coffin**. Vardaman listens to Darl ask Cash how his broken leg is feeling, and Cash replies that "It don't bother none."

Darl asks Cash if he should tighten or loosen the ropes keeping Cash tied down. Darl proceeds to tighten them and repeats the question to Cash of whether or not it hurts. Despite visible pain on his face, Cash denies that it bothers him. Meanwhile, Darl snidely remarks to Dewey Dell that the cakes she is carrying will "be in fine shape" by the time they arrive in Jefferson. Vardaman continues to count the number of buzzards, which are only increasing as time passes.

Vardaman's attention to the buzzards reveal his sustained interest in what existence entails after death. Cash's full-on denial of his own pain is almost farcical, and thus no longer has continued resonance with Christ. Instead, Cash's exaggerated stoicism challenges the meaning of heroism. Cash is heroic in withstanding the pain in his leg, but for what?



While Darl's choice to repeat his question to Cash is provocative, it also shows that he is the Bundren family member who most readily and frequently expresses his opinions out loud. Similarly, he draws attention to the supposed cakes that Dewey Dell has been carrying, foreshadowing that Dewey Dell is not, in fact, carrying cakes.



45. MOSELEY

A clerk in the Mottson town pharmacy named Moseley notices a girl looking inside the store-window with a blank look on her face. The girl is Dewey Dell. She eventually comes into the store, carrying a package wrapped in newspaper and appearing confused as to where to look for what she is there to buy. Moseley asks her what she is there for but doesn't get an answer until he asks if she needs medicine. She answers affirmatively, and ultimately mentions that she is there to buy an abortion. Moseley tells her that they have nothing for her in the store, and that she should instead buy a wedding license.

Disturbed by his encounter with Dewey Dell, Moseley then learns more about the Bundrens from his colleague Albert. Apparently, Anse was approached by a town marshal that same day because of the smell of "rotten cheese" emanating from the family's loud and decrepit "ramshackle wagon." Furthermore, the town marshal saw one of the Bundren children buy cement intended to be used as a setting for Cash's broken leg, and eventually tells Cash to go see a doctor.

Moseley offers a unique perspective on the Bundrens and their often ridiculous actions, highlighting the novel's interest in subjectivity versus objectivity, language versus action. Dewey Dell's fear about asking Moseley for the abortion is palpable, and emphasizes the novel's unromantic view of pregnancy and birth. Despite the self-interest of wanting to go to Jefferson for an abortion, Dewey Dell merely acts out of a practical state of desperation.



The opinions of Moseley's colleague and the town marshal reveal the heightened degree of absurdity with which onlookers regard the Bundrens' journey. The observations of the Mottson townspeople foreground the question of whether the Bundrens' commitment to burying Addie in Jefferson can even be seen as remotely heroic.



46. DARL

The family and their mules make a pit-stop in front of a house, and Darl tells Dewey Dell to go inside and ask for a bucket to retrieve water. Darl then tells Dewey Dell that she seems to have had trouble selling the cakes in Mottson. Anse, meanwhile, repeats the phrase, "I wouldn't be beholden. God knows."

Dewey Dell returns with the water bucket and Darl begins to mix the cement to make a cast for Cash's leg. Cash repeatedly tells the family that he can wait another day to have the cast, but they proceed to pour the cement into his splints anyway. Cash responds by saying that the cement feels fine. Jewel, who still had been missing, returns to the family silently. No longer with a **horse**, Jewel boards the wagon. Anse points out the upcoming hill and tells his children to get out and walk.

Once again, Darl subtly expresses his knowledge of Dewey Dell's thoughts and actions out loud, by taunting her about the "cakes" she is trying to sell. Also once again, Anse invokes God, hypocritically attempting to justify his own selfishness.



The cast Darl creates out of cement only adds to the absurdity of Cash's "heroic" response to his suffering. The cement cast ultimately makes Cash's leg worse, yet not once does he express himself. Similarly, Jewel re-enters the scene in silence, heroically choosing not to express his anger in order to get to Jefferson (for his mother's sake) as smoothly as possible.



47. VARDAMAN

Vardaman, Darl, Jewel and Dewey Dell walk up the hill. Vardaman mentally narrates the situation in simple, declarative sentences: "Jewel came back"! He was walking. Jewel hasn't got a **horse** anymore. Jewel is my brother. Cash is my brother. Cash has a broken leg." Vardaman then shifts his attention to the buzzards once again and asks Darl where they stay at night. Darl doesn't answer and Vardaman resolves that tonight, he will explore where the buzzards stay at night.

Vardaman struggles to express the particulars of his present situation, including the details of each of his sibling's personal experience. In addition to obsessing over language, Vardaman continues to obsess over the buzzards around Addie's coffin, indicating his continued interest in probing even the basest realities of his mother's death.



48. DARL

The Bundrens arrive at their next stop on the way to Jefferson, a farm owned by a man called Gillepsie. Upon arrival, Darl asks Jewel "Whose son are you? Your mother was a **horse**, but who was your father Jewel?" Jewel becomes angry and repeats again and again that Darl is a "goddamn lying son of a bitch." Darl tells his brother not to call him that and asks again who Jewel's father is.

Cash begins to sweat because of his cemented leg and the temperature outside, and politely tells his family members that his leg feels hot. The Bundrens decide to pour water on Cash's leg, after which he repeatedly assures them, "I'm obliged. It feels fine."

Here, Darl passive-aggressively reveals his awareness of Jewel's identity as Addie's bastard son, sadistically asking Jewel who his father is. Darl's verbal attack on Jewel, who is highly physical, naturally leaves Jewel infuriated. This reaction only leads Darl to keep provoking his brother, such that we just continue to watch their rivalry grow more tense.



Cash's predilection for self-sacrifice is no longer Christ-like but ridiculous to the point of being pathological, as he silently endures the pain of a swollen, broken leg covered in cement. His stoic response is not even a sign of martyrdom but merely calls into question the code of heroic behavior to which Cash subscribes.



49. VARDAMAN

Vardaman and Darl go out for a walk at night to hear Addie talking from inside her coffin, as Darl assures Vardaman that he can hear Addie speaking to them. Darl explains that Addie is calling on God, in an act of Christian charity, to rid her from the sight of man. After they "listen," the two brothers return inside to check on Cash. Vardaman states that he saw something that Dewey Dell told him not to talk about—something that concerns Darl.

Dewey Dell and Vardaman go to sleep outside on the porch, from which the barn is visible. Vardaman notices Gillepsie's son help Jewel, Darl and Anse move the **coffin** from below the apple tree outside indoors to the barn. Vardaman, as he promised to himself, goes to see where the buzzards stay at night. After doing so, Vardaman evidently spies Darl setting fire to the barn and repeats, "I saw something that Dewey Dell told me not to tell anybody."

While Darl never first-handedly justifies burning Gillepsie's farm down as an act of Christian duty in his narrations, he does prepare Vardaman for this rationale by telling him to listen as Addie calls on God to remove her from the sight of man. Darl's trick is stealthy, and reveals his awareness of the way in which religion itself uses language to convince believers to act in particular ways.



Additionally, Darl is aware of how his family and others around him rely on the framework of religion and notions of duty to structure their actions and thoughts according to a moral compass. Thus, he utilizes this awareness to convince Vardaman that his action is in fact heroic. And in fact, there is something heroic in Darl's attempt to put an end to the ridiculous quest the Bundrens have embarked on.



50. DARL

Darl and Jewel sprint toward the barn. Darl describes the burning barn and notices the sense of urgency and hostility in Jewel's fire-reflecting glare. Anse, Gillepsie, Dewey Dell and Vardaman emerge from inside the house afterward, to witness what is going on outside.

Despite his usual capacity for expression and observation, Darl omits the fact that he set fire to the barn as a "heroic" attempt to put an end to the Bundrens' journey. Instead, he focuses on his rivalry with Jewel and Jewel's competing "heroic" impulse to deal with the fire.



Jewel, appearing furious and with "muscles ridged through his garment," enters the barn to save Gillespie's animals as well as the Bundren's mules. After saving all of the animals, Jewel then single-handedly rescues Addie's **coffin** from the fire. Dewey Dell protectively calls after Jewel, while Darl marvels in the sight of his brother "enclosed in a thin nimbus of fire."

After saving Addie's coffin from the river and fire, Jewel fulfills Addie's prophecy that he will save her from both flood and fire. This sets Jewel, rather than Cash, in relationship to Christ as a figure of salvation, and reinforces the authenticity of Jewel's sense of duty to Addie. Still, the powerful opposition between Darl and Jewel regarding the apocalyptic obstacle of the fire principally calls into question the novel's meaning of heroism. Darl heroically tried to end the quest; Jewel heroically prolongs it. Heroism is not black and white, and can have contrasting goals.



51. VARDAMAN

Vardaman notices that the barn is burning and therefore that it "wasn't a barn now." Cash's foot turns black from the cement cast, while Jewel's back becomes red from the fire-induced burns. Dewey Dell rubs medicine on it, which then makes it also turn black.

In observing that the barn "wasn't a barn" any more, Vardaman applies his same vocabulary for expressing questions and thoughts about human (and fish) existence and mortality to the now destroyed barn.



Anse breaks off Cash's cast and his leg begins to bleed. Darl then asks Jewel if his back hurts. At some point, Darl leaves and the family asks where he is. Darl ends up lying next to Addie's **coffin** under the apple tree weeping. Vardaman finds Darl and comforts him by telling him that Jewel got the coffin out of the burning barn and so there is no need to cry. In his head, Vardaman repeats that he saw Darl do something the other night when he was looking where the buzzards go and that Dewey Dell said he should keep a secret.

The image of Darl crying beside Addie's coffin shows Darl in a state of vulnerability that he does not call attention to in his own narrations. Whether he weeps from guilt at trying to burn the coffin, grief about his mother's recent death, or about his failure to end their quest is unclear. It is clear that Darl's gift for expression and observation do not indicate simply that he is a fully detached character, as his words and actions do have their foundation in intense emotion.



52. DARL

The road-signs begin to suggest that the family is just outside of Jefferson. Cash is lying on top of Addie's **coffin** with shards of cement all across his leg. Anse states that they must take him to a doctor. Dewey Dell asks to stop and despite the fuss Anse makes, he allows her to go into the bushes. When she emerges, she is wearing her Sunday dress, a necklace and stockings. Anse scolds her for bringing her nice clothes along, but Dewey Dell ignores him.

Dewey Dell reveals that she had not been carrying Cora's cakes, but clothing to wear to the Jefferson pharmacy, where she plans to get an abortion treatment. While Dewey Dell's gesture recalls her self-interest along the journey, Cash, once again, continues to prove himself to be self-sacrificing to a fault, cooperatively silent despite shards of cement on his swollen, broken leg.



As the Bundrens make their way into town, a bystander complains about the stench coming from their wagon. Jewel curses at the man, who then flashes a knife. Darl apologizes on his brother's behalf and successfully calms the altercation between the two men. Jewel refuses to board the wagon, and instead sets his foot on the hub of the wagon's rear wheel, appearing "motionless" and "wooden-backed" as the family continues on their way to Jefferson.

Here, Darl surprisingly comes to his brother's defense and quells the argument between Jewel and a Jefferson pedestrian. This incident reveals Darl's relative detachment from the enterprise of burying Addie in Jefferson, and speaks to their divergent tendencies—Darl's toward verbal articulation and Jewel's toward physical expression.



53. CASH

Cash explains that the Bundrens needed to send Darl away to an asylum in Jackson (the capital of Mississippi). He explains that Gilepsie knew that Darl set fire to the barn, and threatened to sue the Bundrens—and they could only get out of it if they sent Darl away to an asylum. Cash reflects on the meaning of "crazy," as he believes humans are neither "pure crazy" nor "pure sane." Furthermore, Cash stresses his belief that Jewel is too hard on Darl. He reflects on the potential truth that God was simply trying to take Addie away more swiftly and naturally, wondering if Jewel's apparently heroic gesture of saving her coffin first from flood and then from fire was an act against God's will.

Still, Cash thinks about how nothing explains the act of burning down a man's barn and livelihood. Anse offers to take Cash to the doctor before going to bury Addie, but Cash, in turn, offers to wait. The family proceeds to a nearby home to borrow a spade. Cash specifically takes pleasure in the music playing from a gramophone inside the house. Cash notices a woman in the window of the house. Finally, the Bundrens inter Addie's **coffin** in Jefferson's soil. The men from the mental institution then arrive to take Darl away. Cash and Dewey Dell try their best to calm Darl, who is suffering a sustained hysteria of laughter as he is being taken away.

54. PEABODY

Peabody reprimands Cash for allowing Anse to treat his leg with cement. Cash deferentially answers that the family just intended to ease his pain, and that the treatment never bothered him. Cash's response only angers Peabody further, who tells Cash, "Don't you" try to tell me you rode six days on a wagon without springs, with a broken leg and it never bothered you."

Still, Cash answers that it never bothered him. Peabody answers that he probably means it never bothered Anse, and launches into a diatribe against Anse's selfishness and negligence as a parent.

Cash's reflections on madness versus sanity speak to the novel's exploration of the difference between subjectivity and objectivity, how an action is described versus the action itself. Cash emphasizes the role that society has in making sense of and judging individual actions. This leads Cash to wonder if what Jewel thought was heroic was even heroic at all, as God could've been attempting to tell the family something. Ironically, this was Darl's rationale for burning Gilepsie's barn down.



In this section, Cash's narration switches to the past tense, indicating an increased sense of understanding with the situation he is describing. In particular, his dwelling on the details of the home from which Anse borrows the spades to bury Addie functions as a moment of foreshadowing. This situates Cash in a Darl-like position of being the family member who is perhaps best-equipped to express the Bundrens' dysfunctional story with details and emotional circumspection.



Peabody's criticism suggests that Cash's tendency to be self-effacing is not inherently good, but rather shows a lack of self-respect on some level. Thus, Peabody shows care for Cash through this scorn, as he hopes for Cash to express himself in order to feel strong, rather than sublimate his own needs in an effort to appear heroic.



Here, Peabody continues to push back against Cash's exaggerated stoicism. Peabody is the only character to do this, as he understands Cash's personality not as an inherent flaw but as a reaction to his father's bad parenting.



55. MACGOWAN

Dewey Dell enters the Jefferson pharmacy when MacGowan is on duty. Since he finds Dewey Dell to be "a pretty hot mamma for a country girl," MacGowan decides to lie and pretend to be a doctor. She tells him her situation, and he comforts her, while telling her that ten dollars is not enough to get the operation. MacGowan asks, "How bad do you want to do something?" Dewey Dell says that she will do anything in order to get an abortion. Still pretending to be the doctor, MacGowan takes a random glass for Dewey Dell to drink. He tells her to come back later for the rest of the operation. Dewey Dell agrees and returns that night with Vardaman, who waits outside on the curb. MacGowan gives Dewey Dell a box of capsules and leads her to "the rest of the treatment" in the pharmacy basement, where he will take advantage of her.

MacGowan's attempt to pretend to be a doctor is not particularly sophisticated, and thus reveals the extent of both Dewey Dell's desperation and her ignorance. The fact that Dewey Dell is not only manipulated by Lave in the first place, leading her to bear the burden of pregnancy, continues to de-romanticize the idea of childbirth, and further victimizes Dewey Dell. The extremity of Dewey Dell's desperation also retroactively points out the extent of her self-interested thoughts throughout the Bundrens' journey, as she truly is willing to do whatever it takes to get an abortion.



56. VARDAMAN

Dewey Dell takes Vardaman on a nighttime walk through the streets of Jefferson. She insists that they go in a particular direction, even as Vardaman requests that they go look at the red train in the toy-store window. Vardaman continually thinks about the fact that Darl is his brother, and that Darl is going to Jackson.

While Dewey Dell focuses on her physical health, Vardaman is concerned with the red toy train. This moment, while seemingly unimportant, draws attention to the competing self-interests that largely characterizes the Bundrens' family dynamic, and detracts from the authenticity of their shared sense of "duty" to Addie.



Dewey Dell and Vardaman eventually stop at the pharmacy, which is the only lit store on the street. Vardaman waits outside for Dewey Dell, who is led inside by a man. As he waits, he keeps thinking to himself about how Darl is his brother, how Darl went crazy, and how Darl went to Jackson. When Dewey Dell emerges from the store, she curses, "That son of a bitch" and desperately claims, "It's not going to work. I just know it won't. I just know it."

From the vantage point of the six-year-old Vardaman, Darl's banishment is not that different from Addie's death. Both are traumatic losses that are seemingly inexplicable. Vardaman spends his time waiting preoccupied with the question of how to express his thoughts about Darl, given that Darl's existence is now different in nature than it had been previously, now that he "went crazy" and is in Jackson. Dewey Dell's bitter words reveal her total victimization: in order to get the abortion she has allowed another man to take advantage of her sexually, even as she is fairly sure she is being cheated.



57. DARL

Darl describes the experience of being forced onto the train to Jackson by the mental institution workers. He does so in the third person, referring to himself as Darl, with only a few interruptions from the first-person voice. He repeats the word "Yes yes yes yes" and laughs by the window on the train. At the end of the chapter, Darl concludes, "Darl is our brother" ".Our brother Darl in a cage in Jackson where, his grimed hands lying light in the quiet interstices, looking out he foams."

After the Bundrens send him away to Jackson, Darl's capacity for articulation breaks down. He refers to himself in the third person, suggesting that part of his ability to express observations about others earlier stemmed from his detachment from them. Here, Darl detaches from his own subjectivity and puts himself in the position of his siblings, saying "Darl is our brother."



58. DEWEY DELL

Anse spots Dewey Dell's ten dollars, initially given to her by Lave and still left over from the failed abortion attempt. Anse asks her about where she got it. Dewey Dell insists that the money belongs to Cora Tull, as she sold her cakes in Jefferson. Anse accuses her of lying, saying that she had her clothing in the package, not Cora's cakes. Dewey Dell tells him to keep his hands off the money, which, again, she says is not hers. Presenting himself as a victim of Dewey Dell's unjust cruelty and lack of appreciation for his parenting, Anse reprimands Dewey Dell for calling him a thief over Addie's grave.

Dewey Dell repeats again and again that the money is not hers, but Anse does not care to listen to her. He takes the money and leaves.

While Dewey Dell straddles the impulse to cope directly with Addie's death and to focus on her own needs, she is more honest about her simplicity and guilt about being self-interested when compared to many of the other characters. Dewey Dell enters and exits the novel in an unresolved state of desperation, with her inner thoughts as the only place of solace into which she may retreat.



Anse's manipulation of and utter disregard for Dewey Dell prepares us for his final gesture of senseless self-interest in Cash's closing section, and emphasizes his horrifying inability to act as a father.



59. CASH

The Bundrens—minus Darl—return to the house from which they borrowed the spades. Jewel suggests that Vardaman go return them, but Anse insists that he do it, and ends up staying inside the house for a long time. Cash defends his father's slow pace, explaining that he simply is not spry. When Anse comes back, they leave for Peabody's house, though Anse goes to the barber to get a shave, telling the family that he has business to take care of.

The next day, Anse goes out again and tells the family that they will meet later to leave Jefferson finally. The children eat bananas outside, waiting for Anse to return. Eventually, he comes back with a guilty look on his face, wearing a new set of teeth. Anse walks alongside a "duck-shaped" woman with "hardlooking" eyes, who is carrying a gramophone. In the last sentence of the book, Anse approaches his children and says, "Meet Mrs. Bundren."

In Darl's absence, Cash asserts his narrative voice, describing final details about the novel's "action"—the Bundrens' journey. Cash does not seem to have changed: he is still charitable to a fault, rationalizing Anse's selfishness. Whether Cash's defense of his father is heroic, stemming from a sense of familial duty, or is an indication of his excessive kindness remains in question.



Anse's casual introduction of the new "Mrs. Bundren" marks the novel's most ironic scene. After "heroically" fulfilling Addie's promise to be buried in Jefferson, Anse ends up marrying the woman from whom he borrowed shovels to bury Addie's corpse just one day before. The quick replacement of Addie not only emphasizes Anse's selfishness, but suggests that the entire was an effort to replace Addie and that that family is just a set of roles to play, rather than a true unit of people.





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