

PERCEPTION AND THE DESTRUCTION OF BEING IN *AS I LAY DYING*

When the artist goes so far as to discard resemblances, to rule out any similitude between image and reality other than a fortuitous one, meaning is set free by the disintegration of *representation* and begins to exert a negative influence. Meaning is the product of the forces of destruction. It flashes out across dissemblances, lacunae, approximations, deliberate indeterminations. Invisible, it blinds because it dissolves the figures in its inimitable presence.

Such also are the meanings that haunt our world.

Jean-Paul Sartre

As *I Lay Dying* in its narrative style mirrors modernist epistemological concerns with perception. Faulkner makes us aware of the correspondence between the visual and the verbal by paradoxically including empty space in the text, omissions, divisions, and interstices. Dividing the novel into sections each headed by a character's name imposes frames within the narrative structure; and events are told through a series of frames by means of private, idiosyncratic language, visions, images, and remembrances. Throughout the novel metaphorical frames—coffin, window, door, coin, spy-glass, womb, grave—represent the characters' desires to contain and to control contradictory meanings of their worlds. Dominating *As I Lay Dying* are Darl's desires to reconcile perceptions with existence, specifically his frustrated attempts to construct his world, while simultaneously destroying Addie's influence over him. Darl figuratively places Addie with metaphors of confinement, frames that serve as sites of death. As much as Darl wishes to ground his existence upon his perceptions, invariably the disintegration of representation—the disparity between word and world—negates not Addie's haunting presence, but his own being. Darl's madness, then, is due to an inability to recognize his own perceptions as a network of symbols that do not convey reality, but displace it and negate it. Darl's modernist tragedy of being is also the dark, destructive comedy of representation and language.

Faulkner's interest in modernist perceptual theories began in the early 1920s. From Paris, during August of 1925, Faulkner sent a letter to his mother expressing his appreciation for modernist artists, especially "futurist and vortacist" (SL 13). Another letter to his mother, written one month later, concludes with Faulkner's comic approval of modern artists, particularly Cézanne: "And Cezanne! That man dipped his brush in light like Tobe Caruthers would dip

his in red lead to paint a lamp-post" (SL 24). It hardly requires a great leap to see how Faulkner could create a Mississippi hill-country man, Darl Bundren, who often waxes modernistically poetic. Of course, Faulkner was predisposed to Cézanne and modernists through his association with Phil Stone and his suggestion that Faulkner read Willard Huntington Wright's *The Creative Will* (1916), as well as modernist concepts in currency from Sheldon Cheney's *A Primer of Modern Art* (1924) and H. L. Mencken's praises of James Gibbons Huneker's "Paul Cézanne" in his edition of those seminal American essays on modern art (1929). Moreover, Faulkner was fascinated by the chaotic perspectivism of Cubists and sensual dynamics of Futurists, in particular, the Cubists' obsession with multiple modes of seeing and the Futurists' seeing and memory.¹ Cubism liberated artists from realistic perspective, undid classical assumptions of reality, and turned reality on its head by concentrating upon juxtaposition and relation, so that, as Joseph Riddel explains, "particularity and difference, not an expected syntax of relations—this defines the 'field' lifted out of the ordinary" (67). Faulkner's fascination with modernist perceptual experimentation is evident in *As I Lay Dying's* stylistic debts to Post-Impressionism, Cubism, and Futurism. The novel's fragmented, multiple narratives recall the fragmented perspectives of Braque and Picasso; its characters' penchants for simultaneously arresting and propelling movement resemble the obsessions with motion of Severini and Balla; its employment of physical descriptions colored by evocative emotions calls to mind the landscapes of desire created by Cézanne and Van Gogh.²

Still, Faulkner's purpose was not solely imitation of visual arts in literary style. He employed heterogeneous styles to disclose the disturbing consequences of his characters' perceptions, as well as to impart the ways their particular styles, their language, inform our concept of the processes of perception. The immediacy of the object was determined by its associations with and remembrances of other objects. In effect, the world represented was not the world as it actually is, but as it appears. Clearly, art could no longer represent the world as somehow immune to sensations and experience, but should, as Cézanne contended, give "concrete shape to sensations and perceptions" (20). Faulkner repeatedly employs "shape" as a metaphor for the way his characters visualize their world and reconstruct its meaning. The world is already reshaped by perceptions. Significantly, it is language, the metaphorical reshaping of the world, which grants us access to consciousness.

¹Noteworthy for Darl's narratives is the Futurist declaration, "The Exhibitors to the Public," from *Theories of Modern Art*, in which Boccioni, Carra, Russolo, Balla, and Severini expound their theory of "dynamic sensation" with its general laws of violence and incorporation, by which the artist and spectator become placed at the center of the painting, participating in its expression, and this is made possible because "the picture must be the synthesis of *what one remembers and of what one sees*" (296).

²Calvin Bédient focuses upon the force of the novel's "opacity," its aesthetic and non-analytical aspects, which require one to look for "analogies in painting and music;" the experience of the novel's opacity is likened to "an expressive verbal gesture, a mood-painting; they are as immediate in interest as the sudden clutching of a hand or the swirls in a Van Gogh cypress" (136).

In his narratives, Darl often relies upon artistic metaphors to demarcate his animosity toward members of his family. For example, Darl sees Jewel in terms of banal, crude modes of art, as though the form itself will be the essence of what Jewel is. In the novel's opening chapter he sardonically refers to Jewel as a cigar-store Indian. Several times Darl refers to Jewel's face as having a wooden quality, as though he were devoid of human sensations and emotions. In the dramatic scene of the conflagration of the barn which houses Addie's coffin, Jewel's heroic rescue of his mother's corpse is satirically rendered by Darl, who sees him as "a flat figure cut leanly from tin" (218). When Jewel struggles with Gillespie, who tries to stop Jewel from entering the burning barn, Darl perceives them as "two figures in a Greek frieze, isolated out of all reality by the red glare" (221). This Keatsian image does not elevate Jewel, but dissociates him from reality, dehumanizing Jewel. Darl, early in the novel, perceives Jewel and his beloved horse as "two figures carved for a tableau savage in the sun" (12). Similarly, Darl equates his father and Jewel with caricatures: he sees Anse's face as "carved by a savage caricaturist in a monstrous burlesque" (78) and perceives Jewel as "a figure carved clumsily from tough wood by a drunken caricaturist" (163). In both cases the caricaturist is Darl, who has "carved" them into the shape of his own perceptions, his own fixations. Even Addie's coffin amid the explosion of flames in the barn is rendered metaphorically: "The front, the conical façade with the square orifice of doorway broken only by the square squat shape of the coffin on the sawhorses like a cubistic bug, comes into relief" (219). As a "cubistic" object, whose several surfaces can be viewed simultaneously, the coffin suggests the extent to which Addie is the focus of the Bundrens' efforts, frustrations, and fixations.

As is so often the case in Faulkner's novels, his characters' perceptual problems are conveyed through their reliance upon the visual. Nearly every narrative concentrates upon observations, looks from others, and the narrators' own gazes. Darl, especially, disturbs others with his eyes. Dewey Dell and Anse observe an unsettling distance in his eyes, which are "full of the land all the time" (36). Both recognize, although incompletely, but fail to comprehend the effects of Darl's stare. That distance, that alienating presence granted to Darl, actually expresses their perceptual displacements of themselves.

Jean-Paul Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*, explains this distance created by the look of the Other in terms of shifting fields of perception: another's gaze creates the paradoxical illusion of being at a distance from the beholder and also sharing an uncomfortable immediacy; in order to compensate for this integration of presence and distance, the individual confronted by another's look feels his perception "decompose and pass into the background" (258). Martin Jay, in his admirable study on the denigration of vision, *Downcast Eyes*, views Sartre's analysis of the gaze as fundamentally an issue of power, by which "perception is understood as an act in the sense that it transforms the object of the gaze, whereas imagination is identified less with derealizing freedom than with the paralyzing internalization of the other's gaze" (288). When Anse and Dewey Dell behold Darl, his alarmingly inscrutable look removes their imme-

diacy and they experience a disquieting shift of their own perceptions which now are constituted by Darl. Still, it is that distance which they believe affords Darl a mystical, almost clairvoyant vision of their secrets. Dewey Dell, after her assignation with Lefe in the secret shade, encounters Darl and immediately suspects that "he knew without the words like he told me that ma is going to die without words, and I knew he knew because if he had said he knew with the words I would not have believed that he had been there and saw us" (27). She seizes upon this certainty of Darl's knowledge not by words directly, but implicitly, by his gaze. And she hates him for knowing her secret. Both Dewey Dell and Anse assume their existence is compromised by a stare, as though Darl were able to penetrate through and expose them completely. Clearly, Sartre gained much from reading this novel.³

Dewey Dell and Anse are not alone in their uneasiness with Darl's gaze. Tull, when confronted by Darl's "queer eyes" (125), finds himself in the awkwardly unnerving predicament of self-evaluation and self-perception. Tull sees himself mirrored in Darl's eyes; his perceptions are also displaced, so that as Darl looks at him, Tull sees himself looking at himself. And that's what "makes folks talk" (125). That's what unsettles Darl's family and others: not so much his gaze, but the way it transforms them. They become objects of Darl's subjectivity but he does not become the object of their subjectivity. This objectification, however, relieves the tension and uncertainty prompted by introspection; by an act of transference, Darl is the one who inspects, not Tull. Tull frames this scene by objectifying himself in the presence of what he cannot comprehend.

Addie and Darl share this ability to fix others with their eyes, almost as though the trait were genetically passed from mother to son. When Peabody attends to Addie on her death bed, he observes how her eyes affect everyone in the room with a paradoxically imperceptible presence: "She looks at us. Only her eyes seem to move. It's like they touch us, not with sight or sense, but like the stream from a hose touches you, the stream at the instant of impact as dissociated from the nozzle as though it had never been there" (44). Her omniscience, like Darl's, seems to emanate from perceiving eyes, which can touch without touching and make present what is merely illusory. Her eyes objectify others and thereby make them self-consciously aware of their own perceptions. Peabody also senses Addie's eyes "shoving at me" and recognizes the force of her presence which expresses itself, like Darl, without words (45). That "object

³ . . . Faulkner, whose novels *As I Lay Dying* and *Sanctuary* were published almost simultaneously in French translation. There had been several earlier writers, Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Hemingway among them, who had rejected the false objectivity of the realistic novel and chosen to interpret the world by means of a more subjective approach; but the novelty and effectiveness of Faulkner's technique amazed us. Not only did he show great skill in deploying and harmonizing multiple viewpoints, but he got inside each individual mind, setting forth its knowledge and ignorance, its moments of insincerity, its fantasies, the words it formed and silences it kept. . . . But in Faulkner such ambiguities contained deep materialist implications. If objects or habits were presented to the reader in a preposterous light, the reason was that misery and want not only change man's attitude to things but transform the very appearance of such things" (de Beauvoir 149-50).

nakedness" of being, which Addie's eyes hide and Darl's gaze conceals from others, ironically discloses the nakedness of others, exposing their pride and furious desires (46).

Darl, of course, is not immune to this process of objectification. Consider, for example, his description of Cash showing Addie the coffin he builds for her:

He looks up at the gaunt face framed by the window in the twilight. It is a composite picture of all time since he was a child. He drops the saw and lifts the board for her to see, watching the window in which the face has not moved. He drags a second plank into position and slants the two of them into their final juxtaposition, gesturing toward the ones yet on the ground, shaping with his empty hand in pantomime the finished box. For a while still she looks down at him from the composite picture, neither with censure nor approbation. Then the face disappears. (48)

Darl reconstructs this scene in terms of frames: Addie's "gaunt face," itself a "composite picture" suggestive of a framed image, is framed by the window; Cash's pantomime of the completed coffin frames Addie; and Darl's narrative frames the scene. Although Darl provides exacting details within these frames, he is not present to observe what occurs. He and Jewel have gone off to cut and haul another three-dollar wagonload of wood; so, Addie's death scene is played out only in Darl's imagination. Darl's absence further complicates these frames.

The boys' departure from the farm has previously been described by Cora Tull, who reports that her husband saw Darl almost begging Anse "on his knees not to force him to leave" Addie in her condition (22). But Anse and Jewel want the three dollars; Cora expects no more of the uncaring, materialistic Anse, but is surprised by Jewel: "to think of that boy, that Jewel, selling all those years of self-denial and down-right partiality" (22). Cora believes that Darl and not Jewel actually shared a true love with Addie. Cora's sanctimonious and sentimental Christianity misleads her into believing that Darl's actions were "the sweetest thing I ever saw. It was like he knew he would never see her again" (21). Yet, Cora hits upon the reason for Darl's emphatic, emotional protests, for he does know that he will never *see* Addie again. But Darl needs to see Addie die because the act will be the culmination of his hatred. Viewing her death will be a final act of defiance. Typically, he must *see* her before he goes. Cora, though, describes the scene with her characteristic lack of understanding Darl's motivations:

It was Darl. He come to the door and stood there, looking at his dying mother. He just looked at her, and I felt the bounteous love of the Lord again and His mercy. I saw that with Jewel she had just been pretending, but that it was between her and Darl that the understanding and the true love was. He just looked at her, not even coming in where she could see him and get upset, knowing that Anse was driving him away and he would never see her again. He said nothing, just looking at her. (24-25)

Darl's position in the doorway produces a framed perception of Addie similar to the composite picture in the window frame. Cora's repetition "He just looked at her" informs us of Darl's intention. He does not want a "goodbye kiss" (22) as Cora implies earlier, nor just a last look; instead, he wants to look at Addie without her looking at him. If Darl were to stand where she might gaze

upon him, then she would rob him of this triumphant objectification. He must fix Addie in order to limit the possibility of her objectifying him. The power of Addie's gaze is diminished by this act, but not the power of her being. For Darl, that could only happen if he were to witness her demise. Since he cannot, he reconstructs her death in his mind. Yet, the very act of reconstructing the death scene, especially with the repetition of frames, demonstrates Addie's unceasing control over Darl.

By focusing upon her face and eyes, Darl's narrative exposes his fixation with Addie's undying presence. This imagined death scene opens with Addie lying motionless upon her bed, as "all her failing life appears to drain into her eyes," yet "her eyes alone are listening" to Anse's voice (47-48). Again, Addie's eyes manifest her entire being; they even act, as Peabody notices, as the organs for all her senses. Upon hearing that Jewel and Darl are gone, Addie rises in her deathbed, looks out the window and shouts to Cash. After seeing Cash's work, she lies down to die. Even in death, Addie's presence continues to exert itself: "her eyes, the life in them, rushing suddenly upon them; the two flames glare up for a steady instant" (48). As the sound of Cash's saw continues, her face appears to react to each steady stroke: "her face seems to wake a little into an expression of listening and of waiting, as though she were counting the strokes" (50).

Even though Darl has already performed a kind of ceremonial death rite for Addie, he has not vanquished her completely from his life. Re-enacting her final moments is yet again another ritualistic performance of her death. But his imaginary reconstruction of the events does not bring about closure. Instead Darl continually calls up her image as though she were still exerting her presence. Each repetition of Addie's being frames the next. Darl's use of frames clearly points to his fetishistic need to reduce Addie to an object. His narratives have the same effect as the frame circumscribing a work of art. Frames, by their very nature and function, set boundaries for the object perceived and create borders to contain the object; frames delineate both what resides inside and what remains outside; frames differentiate between what constitutes the text and what is exterior to it. The framing metaphors expose Darl's desire to arrest Addie's power over him. Each frame, however, depicts fixed images whose visual effect is not totality but rather fragmentation. Darl's frames, like the face at the window, are only composites of Addie, not Addie herself.

For Darl the act of framing is an act of representation and an act of re-presentation. Representation relies not on how the object depicted conforms to or deviates from reality, but on the structuring system which achieves a sensation of reality. Structuring and framing Darl's narrative is his desire for presence. To frame an object, then, is to conceive of its meaning, its significance, as though it were a thing. Moreover, frames would make no sense if there were not already a grammar or language which employs frames and grants them significance. As we have seen, Darl's artistic metaphors are his means of capturing the very essence of the objects he views. His metaphors operate like visual phenomena; in this case, they produce the sensations of actually seeing Addie die. Here, though, a single frame is insufficient to represent Addie's death.

Addie continues to preoccupy Darl. Each time Darl frames Addie, he recontextualizes her and, in turn, reveals the extent to which she resists being caught within his frame of reference and defies the imposition of his interpretation. Addie's powerful and disturbing gaze affects Darl even when he does not directly confront it. Moreover, Darl's fixation with her face and eyes reveals his own sense of objectification. Like the face in the window, Addie disappears from sight and will not remain within his gaze. Darl's acts of framing and reframing inscribe limits for the image of his mother, but this image, unlike the representational logic generally associated with fetishism, does not fully substitute for Addie herself. In fact, Darl's metaphors indicate not so much a presence as a lack of presence, as Derrida has suggested about the nature of frames in general, both artistic and philosophical framings: "This lack, which cannot be determined, localized, situated, *arrested* inside or outside *before the framing* is simultaneously . . . both *product* and *production* of the frame" (71). To contain, to arrest, to eliminate his mother's influence, Darl resorts to metaphors of enclosure—composites, borders, coffin, window, wheel rim—but each framing metaphor fails.

Within these frames, as within the empty window frame and the incomplete coffin, no object resides. When Cash looks up at Addie's face in the window he sees Addie as a "composite picture" of memories. "Composite" reinforces this lack of presence by creating not one image, but several framed images; the composite is not of the immediate present, but recollections of the past. Moreover, this framed image is not part of Cash's perceptions, but belongs entirely to Darl's imaginative perceptions. Cash's pantomime encloses Addie within an imaginary coffin, but the act is a substitutive performance of Darl's desires. Darl concludes his narrative in real time, with Jewel struggling to pry loose the wagon's wheels and axle from a muddy ditch; he repeats to Jewel the fact that Addie Bundren "*is dead*" (52). His statement culminates his earlier tormenting questions to Jewel as they began their journey for the timber: "'Jewel,' I say, 'do you know that Addie Bundren is going to die? Addie Bundren is going to die?'" (40). Darl needs to give voice repeatedly to Addie Bundren's death throughout his narratives.

While perception is the ground of being for Darl, he nevertheless recognizes how external qualities of the world trouble his consciousness. Disparities between the perceiver and the thing perceived are rarely resolved, and Darl feels abjectly helpless to discern what the world means. For example, during the ill-fated fording of the flooded river, Cash breaks his leg, the mules drown, Addie's coffin is nearly lost, and the world seems on the verge of absolute chaos. Just before the darkly comic cementing of Cash's leg, Darl speculates about man's bewildering existence in a world gone awry: "How do our lives ravel out into the no-wind, no-sound, the weary gestures wearily recapitulant: echoes of old compulsions with no-hand on no-strings: in sunset we fall into furious attitudes, dead gestures of dolls" (207). This fusion of silence and sound, negation and identity, defines the ontological fate Darl laments. Man escapes from his existence momentarily, only to have it echo back to him his own obsessions, to

recapitulate his furious and weary desires. The world Darl envisions entangles him within a web of paradoxes and absurdities; Darl wants to disentangle himself from it: "If you could just ravel out into time. That would be nice. It would be nice if you could just ravel out into time" (208). His crucial trope, "ravel," describes paradoxical entanglement and disentanglement of man and the world brought on by perception. Ravel originally meant to weave together or to make more complicated, but it now generally means the exact opposite, to untwist, unweave or to make clear; hence, ravel also means unravel. J. Hillis Miller theorizes that the "indeterminable oscillation" of ravel and unravel leads narratives not to closure nor to opening up the text, but rather to "the paralysis of this inability to decide" between these movements (6-7). Darl cannot free himself from the world, because his perceptions already entrap him in the text of his own making, his translations of phenomena into his own meaning. His only recourse is to read that text of his existence and perhaps unweave its meaning. Yet, as he unweaves, his mind begins to unravel.

Perception, time, and familial relationships conspire to frustrate Darl's understanding of his own existence. His cryptic language divulges how his mind works, and it also betrays his obsession with who he is. The verb *to be* offers Darl a framing device to structure and to evaluate his existence:

In a strange room you must empty yourself for sleep. And before you are emptied for sleep, what are you. And when you are emptied for sleep, you are not. And when you are filled with sleep, you never were. I dont know what I am. I dont know if I am or not. Jewel knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know whether he is or not. He cannot empty himself for sleep because he is not what he is and he is what he is not. Beyond the unlamped wall I can hear the rain shaping the wagon that is ours, the load that is no longer theirs that felled and sawed it nor yet theirs that bought it and which is not ours either, lie on our wagon though it does, since only the wind and the rain shape it only to Jewel and me, that are not asleep. And since sleep is is-not and rain and wind are *was*, it is not. Yet the wagon *is*, because when the wagon is *was*, Addie Bundren will not be. And Jewel *is*, so Addie Bundren must be. And then I must be, or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room. And so if I am not emptied yet, I am *is*.

How often have I lain beneath rain on a strange roof, thinking of home. (80-81)

Darl's ontological explanation juxtaposes sensory, temporal, and familial terms—sleep, being and non-being, time, and Addie and Jewel. Confusion naturally arises upon first reading this passage, especially since Darl provides few clear divisions within his argument; his words comprise a strange, provocative interplay of sights, sounds, and memories. But he cannot separate those visions and sensations that simultaneously engage his consciousness; they are his existence at this moment. Like a "cubistic" painting, the surfaces of his perceptual field converge upon one another, each contingent upon yet defining the next. Sorting through these disparate images affords the reader a chance to view the world as Darl does.

Characteristically, Darl articulates the phenomenon of being in sensory metaphors. Perception awakens Darl to an awareness of his own existence. Darl

must, therefore, "empty" himself of perceptions before he can enter into a state of not-being, of sleep. Time also intercedes, progressively transforming being from "are" to "are not" to "never were." Sleep resembles a death-like state. Darl's sleep is the converse of Addie's empty, lifeless coffin, carried by Cash and the others to her bed, where it slumbers as though filled with life: "It is light, yet they move slowly; empty, yet they carry it carefully; lifeless, yet they move with hushed precautionary words to one another, speaking of it as though, complete, it now slumbered lightly alive, waiting to come awake" (79-80). Addie's death seems to resurrect her being, whereas Darl's sleep annihilates his existence. By transposing his sleep with Addie's death, Darl discloses how Addie's omnipresence makes him view himself as an object. Clearly, he confesses his uncertainty about his existence: "I don't know what I am."

Existence attains a thing-like aspect, a "what you are." Darl examines being in terms associated with ownership; however, the logic of the possessive pronouns actually denotes states of perception rather than direct possession. Since this narrative occurs after Darl's recreation of Addie's death scene, associations between the mule-wagon and its load and a hearse and its coffin spring to mind. In reality, the wagon does belong to Darl and Jewel, but the load, that will be exchanged for three dollars, does not. Perceptually, rain and wind "shape" the wagon for Darl and Jewel; it is theirs because it belongs to the immediacy of their perceptions. The load, on the other hand, has no immediacy, but exists in a state of transition: in the present, the timber is "no longer theirs who felled and sawed it" nor is it yet theirs who will purchase it. Those who were conscious of it in the past have a similar relationship to those who have not yet seen it; for both, it does not exist as a presence. The load simply is not *is*. Symbolically, the load represents Addie's coffin, itself now in a transitional state from the hillfarm where it resides to its future gravesite in Jefferson. The wagon will at some future time accommodate the family as Addie's hearse. But for now, it hauls timber and *is*; when it substitutes as a hearse, the wagon will be *was*. Transformation from wagon to hearse ushers in a new state of existence for Addie as well, who "will not be."

Consciousness determines being for Darl. *Is* is the perceiving moment of an object, even if that object is the self. Jewel *is* by the sheer fact that Darl perceives him. Sleep constitutes an *is-not*, a state of non-immediate consciousness of objects. The state of not perceiving is likened to not-being. According to Darl's temporal and perceptual scheme, rain and wind form an *is* which is also a *was*. Because of their direct and exacting immediacy, rain and wind "shape" instantaneously and then fade. Their immediacy continually engages with a past perception, with the non-immediate. The wagon still *is* because rain and wind continually form it in the present; and when rain and wind cease to form it, the wagon becomes *was*. At that time, Darl and Jewel will have returned to discover that Addie Bundren has died, that she "will not be." By logical extension Darl's argument seems self-evident: if consciousness determines being, and death or sleep is not being conscious, "then I must be, or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room." Darl's musings are not merely semantic

plays upon variations of *to be*.⁴ Sequentially the propositions lead to the conclusion that Addie's demise predicates Darl's consciousness and existence: "Addie Bundren will not be. And then I must be." To fully *be*, Darl must substitute himself for Addie.

Transference and substitution are also the primary characteristics of Addie's rhetoric and demonstrate her manner of trying to control her world. They afford Addie a sense of authority, for she can at will exchange one person for another as easily as she can replace one word with another. Addie's world, then, is not one filled with the presence of others, but one of their absence. She perceives nearly everything and everyone in terms of voids to be filled, and she desperately tries to employ language as the means to articulate and to eradicate these voids.

After taking Anse, Addie gives birth to Cash and to the understanding "that words are no good; that words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at" (171). "To say at" here betrays Addie's inability to designate fully these voids; she can only approximate them. Words are inadequate for motherhood, fear, and pride. Words are no good because they cannot fill voids, only people can. Cash's birth violates Addie's "aloneness" (172), which Anse's sexual acts with her have never yet done. Addie uses Cash to frame her discussion of the inability of words and the violation of her existence. Cash she equates with the schoolchildren, who through the pain of the switch, likened to the pain of childbirth, combined Addie's blood with their own. Reinforcing this maternal connection is the umbilical imagery of words themselves:

we had had to use one another by words like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging and twisting and never touching, and that only through the blows of the switch could my blood and their blood flow as one stream. (172)

Words create an alienating barrier separating the individual from a world of others, whereas the pure umbilicus binds individuals in pain, suffering, and sensations.

Words for Addie are purely functional only, "just a shape to fill a lack" (172). For Addie, names are in themselves not designations for human beings, but representations of alien shapes that intrude upon her life. Ironically, Addie cannot express her revenge except through words, except by creating new shapes to fill new voids. She uses a contradictory logic of shapes to fill voids. Anse fills the void of her sexual desires, but Cash makes Addie aware once again of her aloneness, a void that a shape now violates. This contradictory logic allows Addie to separate words from experience and words from people in a system of unstable and unending substitutions. By using shapes as references to people, things, and emotions, Addie already and unwittingly alienates herself further from life. Addie symbolically defines the circle, a shape circumscribing

⁴For an intriguing discussion of this complex passage, but one which ultimately concludes that Darl's attempts to "prove his existence through an assumption of transformation" are "just a matter of words," see Donald M. Kartiganer, "The Farm and the Journey: Ways of Mourning and Meaning in *As I Lay Dying*" (298-99).

a void or lack, as her existence, which has a mystical power of keeping out the intrusion of words: "time, Anse, love, what you will, outside the circle" (172).

Addie's logic always circles back to herself in movements of self-recognition and self-fulfillment. When Darl is born, though, she seeks revenge upon Anse, who she feels has tricked her by words. Her revenge begins with forcing Anse to promise to bury her body in Jefferson, a symbolic return to the site of her first violation: "because I knew that father had been right, even when he couldn't have known he was right any more than I could have known I was wrong" (173). In the second act of revenge, Addie symbolically kills Anse:

I would think about his name until after a while I could see the word as a shape, a vessel, and I would watch him liquify and flow into it like cold molasses flowing out of the darkness into the vessel, until the jar stood full and motionless: a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame; and then I would find that I had forgotten the name of the jar. I would think: The shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a and I couldn't think *Anse*, couldn't remember *Anse*. (173)

Addie transforms Anse the name into an object: she creates a shape for Anse that represents a lack—vessel. The image is framed as a door, presenting itself as an absence. Anse diminishes as Addie's powers of objectification increase, until Anse becomes part of the void itself, part of the darkness, until all that remains is the shape with a forgotten name. But, in naming that which has been un-thought rather than remembered, Addie implicitly grants Anse presence. She frames Anse—shape, vessel, jar, door frame—in order to give significance to the frame than to what fills it. This is her manner of castration, for her representational murder takes away the sexual power Anse has over her in procreation. Now, Addie is an independent procreator through the power of language. She remembers herself as a blank space: significant as a shape more than as a lack, because the shape frames nothingness, as the virginal space of her own body will always maintain the shape without anything within it. More than representing absence, the space in the text signifies a deferred presence, transformed from thing to not-thing, from being to not-being, from name to forgotten name. Anse now becomes what she lacks, that virginal space which has been lost and violated. Addie, thus, transforms Anse into the very absence which constitutes her sense of self. In reducing Anse to a shape which she can discard, Addie has returned to the initial moment of Anse's violation in the marriage bed. In fact, Addie has performed mentally and linguistically Anse's violation. As she lost her essence, as the significance of her self had been discarded in the act of lovemaking, now she discards Anse. All of Addie's methods to reduce Anse to nothingness fail because she cannot forget him completely; Anse remains as much as the door frame, the vessel, and the jar remind her of the space they contain.

Addie completes her revenge by inflicting her perverse need for recognition upon her children. She can transform her children as easily as she did

Anse: "And when I would think *Cash* and *Darl* that way until their names would die and solidify into a shape and then fade away" (173). The Medea impulse of revenging the father through destroying his offspring is unmistakably apparent here. She objectifies Cash and Darl in order to avenge her losses upon Anse. Darl seems acutely aware of the cruelty of Addie's solipsistic logic and understandably despises his mother for it. The abuses of her own father, through words and deeds, Addie revenged upon her schoolchildren; the violation from Anse she now revenges upon her own children. These symbolic killings refer us back to the novel's title: who lay dying? what kind of dying? Addie's dying is a temporary state before her ultimate demise; for her children, however, the state of dying is part of their existence, imposed upon them by their sadistic mother.

Addie shapes the world according to her own perverted logic. Anse is both shape contained within a lack and that lack's own echo, the empty, inauthentic repetition of his name: "I would let him be the shape and echo of his word" (174). Without Anse, though, Addie has no-thing to replace her own lack, so she seeks out God: "hearing the dark land talking of God's love and His beauty and His sin; hearing the dark voicelessness in which the words are the deeds, and the other words that are not deeds, that are just the gaps in people's lacks" (174). For Addie the deed of fulfillment is sin and all other words are now to her mind just like her children, orphaned and without referentiality: "fumbling at the deeds like orphans to whom are pointed out in a crowd two faces and told, That is your father, your mother" (174). In her representational schemes of negation, Addie can lie with Anse and not lie with Anse, can bear children and not claim them, become mother and then refuse herself to Cash and Darl.

With Anse, Cash, and Darl eliminated from her consciousness, Addie can revel in the non-language of sin. For Addie, sin and love are merely sounds, shapes, and echoes, just as her husband and children are merely sounds and shapes without meaning to her. With Whitfield, Addie transforms sin into something sanctified. Her metaphors for sin again shape and frame her actions into lacks. Clothing she equates with sin, as something exterior to the individual; thus, removing garments allows adultery, in the absence of words, to become only a deed: "I would think of the sin as garments which we would remove in order to shape and coerce the terrible blood to the forlorn echo of the dead word high in the air" (175). Addie sees a disparity between words and deeds, as though two infinitely extending lines made their conjoining an impossibility: words for Addie sail into the emptiness of the air, while deeds cling to the materiality of the earth. Yet, Addie does not follow her own logic; instead, she is the focal point for the two axes of words and deeds. Like Anse, sin now is both shape and echo, both absence and the repetition of presence.

Addie prepares for death, in which she can regain that aloneness she has desired for so long. In order to prepare herself for death, though, she must divorce herself completely from husband, children, and words. Like children, words, as Addie has acknowledged previously, spring from the father. To regain her own impenetrable, impregnable circle of existence, Addie emasculates

fathers, orphans children, and deprives words of signification. The circle is Addie's primordial center of the two axes, the place where she exists in the perfect correspondence of words and deeds, and where no intrusions can occur. In that circle of being, Addie can render all others non-existent. The shape is, of course, the womb, the source of female reproductive activity. Addie wants reproductive powers to be hers alone, as she claims of her children: "My children were of me alone, of the wild blood boiling along the earth, of me and of all that lived; of none and of all" (175). Her children are hers in the sense that Anse is now dead; Cash and Darl, the children she refers to, are equally dead to her. Addie's reproductive power is the power of death, a death in life, a death to the living, and a death to life itself. The irony of Addie's justice is that her cruelty toward others has not liberated her whatsoever; her narcissistic exchanges of father for husband, husband for lover, children for self have left her with only nothingness, with her own death.

Addie views her children as fungible, not unlike a Diane Downs, Susan Smith, or Livia Soprano. They are part of her obscene economy of exchange and payment, as the names Jewel and Cash certainly suggest, as Patricia McKee has admirably discussed at length. Addie's arithmetical calculations, adding and subtracting her children, produce a confusing remainder. Cash's autonomy is reduced when Darl is born. Jewel, the result of her adulterous affair with Whitfield, negates the first child, Cash. Dewey Dell negates Jewel. Vardaman, the youngest, is given to Anse "to replace the child I had robbed him of," who was Darl. Anse, according to Addie's tally sheet, has "three children that are his and not mine" (176). Anse's children are Cash, Dewey Dell, and Vardaman. Jewel is Addie's child. And Darl remains as the true orphan of the family, robbed of a father by Addie's negation and denied a mother by Addie's perverse neglect. Darl's central position in the novel now makes sense, since he is the outcast, kept outside Addie's circle and forced outside the family circle as well. Clearly, Darl wishes to tell his tale as a way of negating Addie, making her not exist.

Addie's narcissistic fixations with words and others indicate a complex fetishizing of language. Her representational patterns of negating objects, yet all the while enframing them within significant shapes, demonstrate a rudimentary fetishism. Words and others are given additional significance, not a lack of significance, by Addie. The irony of this process of negation can be observed in her metaphors of presence. Her framing metaphors—vessel, jar, shape, garment, circle, house—mark limits or boundaries for absence. Furthermore, Addie frames and enshrines absences as vital presences. Anse as a name and man becomes a lack when he is objectified by Addie; however, his objectification only proves the endless process of her negating. Addie wants to deny the power of words in order to exalt in the power of vision, of seeing and transforming the world according to her self. Anse and her children remain disturbing presences for Addie; she can rid herself of them only by her own death, not theirs. While she may symbolically kill them, they do not actually die and, thus, her actions reveal her own lack, her own impotent rage. As they are the living dead haunting her existence, so she, in turn, will haunt them as a presence. It is a

dark irony indeed that the child she so willingly orphans, Darl, is the one most obsessed with her presence.

Addie's own narrative explains that her adulterous affair with Reverend Whitfield was an act of vengeance against Anse. To her, his word "Love" was "just a shape to fill a lack," suggesting that his intrusion upon her existence—"My aloneness had been violated"—objectified her (172). She can care for Cash, her first child, with motherly affection so long as no other child intruded upon her. When she discovers that she is pregnant with Darl, Addie in her rage transforms Anse into a lack:

I would think about his name until after a while I could see the word as a shape, a vessel, and I would watch him liquify and flow into it like cold molasses flowing out of the darkness into the vessel, until the jar stood full and motionless: a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame. . . . (173)

Her metaphors remind us of Darl's emptying of consciousness, perception, and self. Addie, though, transposes that emptying of being onto Darl by her denial of his existence; hence, Darl perceives his world in terms of existence and non-existence, as being and not-being, self and Other.⁵ Addie's empty shape only partially resembles Darl's discussion of existence, because for Darl the empty shape is what he desires for himself. For Addie that lack, her emptying, is her annihilation of another's existence, her revenge played out upon her children. It is quite difficult to read Addie's section as the utterance of a defiant, rebellious, or violated woman, especially since her revenge targets her innocent children.⁶

Her arithmetic of motherhood grants and denies her children's very existence. Her first child, Cash, was negated by Darl, so she slept with Whitfield to

⁵"The novel speaks clearly enough of the nurturing and the hatred of children, of children so close to Addie as to overcome the barrier of otherness, and of children cast outside the circle of Addie's wordless love. Cash is firmly within that circle, and Jewel, we recall, exists in that nutritive circuit established between him and his mother by the calm flow of milk. As for the other children, they are Other" (Adamowski 12). But Cash resides in that circle of wordless love only until Darl is born; from that point on, he is disowned by Addie.

⁶For a characteristic reading of Addie as representative of a violated or rebellious woman, see James A. Snead: "Addie, 'emptying out,' embraces the lack. She does not pretend that 'love' has made her whole. 'Violation' is inevitable in life. But the remnant—her insight and her violation—is hers. Women have the opportunity to understand better than men the real violations of language and society" (68-69). This weak appeal to feminism is typical of critics who envision Addie as somehow marshaling a feminist response to social conditions; however, such interpretations conveniently forget Addie's sadism toward her pupils, her bitter rejection of her own children, and her horrifying presence throughout the novel. They also forget that Addie's consciousness is, after all, Faulkner's construct. The following are noteworthy examples of critical attempts to uplift Addie. Constance Pierce: "She cleans house and makes things 'right' the way women have traditionally: through loveless sex, the harshest atonement, guaranteed to tame and nullify any blood, however wild . . ." (303). See Jill Bergman, in particular the Addie-as-rebel argument: "Addie challenges the ideology of the sexless mother by continuing to experience and express desire after the birth of her children. . . . Thus Addie both sees herself outside language and uses language to rebel against the role it has tried to force her into. . . . By this means, Faulkner invests Addie with power to rebel against the codes forced upon women by a society that attempts to define them by their biology" (405). Finally, for Addie's revenge on Darl as a limited victory against patriarchal culture and its symbolic order, see Doreen Fowler, "Matricide and the Mother's Revenge: *As I Lay Dying*."

negate Darl. And she continues this addition and subtraction game with all her children: "I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of. And now he has three children that are his and not mine" (176). Addie's name resonates with an allegorical meaning, as though she *adds* to her children's being. According to Darl's logic, so long as Jewel *is*, Addie Bundren must *be*. Yet, Jewel embodies a lack of being, his desire for Addie, which constitutes his existence: "he is what he is not and is not what he is."⁷ By the same token, Jewel's antagonistic relationship to Darl makes Darl *is*. Addie's rejection of Darl and her perverse obsession with Jewel continually allow Darl to be *is*. Darl's being is determined first by Addie and then by Addie again through Jewel.

Darl's world is constituted in terms of the presence of others. His perception of his self is adumbrated by a haunting shadow of his absent mother's presence. Darl's perceptions radically transmute the immediate with memories of Addie; every perception Darl has is always already a part of the remembered experience. Darl views the Mississippi landscape and road as merely an extension of his mother's presence: "It wheels up like a motionless hand lifted above the profound desolation of the ocean; beyond it the red road lies like a spoke of which Addie Bundren is the rim" (108). She encircles and inscribes the world for Darl; he cannot escape her presence because she enframes each of his perceptions. Darl's world is not the result of a subject visualizing objects, but of a subject deeply and profoundly affected by the perceptions and presence of others.

With Cash, Darl believes that he shares a close affinity, as though he and Cash truly were one person. Addie's narration partially explains this curious affiliation, for she has lumped the boys together and disowned them both:

It was not that I could think of myself as no longer unvirgin, because I was three now. And when I would think *Cash* and *Darl* that way until their names would die and solidify into a shape and then fade away, I would say, All right. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what they call them. (173)

Addie's collective rejection of the boys pairs them in Darl's mind also. Darl experiences others in terms of contradictory modes: he often remains detached from their experiences, but he is integrally connected to them. Darl's conceptualization of others comes from his experience of what it is to perceive them. Darl's perceptual metaphors always indicate a deeper sedimentary level, what is his and what is the other. Addie, Jewel, Cash—all contribute to Darl's perceptions of self and the world.

⁷In a remarkably similar fashion, Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*, accounts for desire as a lack of being, so that: "The limiting terms of this relation are first the original In-itself, fixed in its contingency and its facticity, its essential characteristic being that it is, that it exists; and second the In-itself-for-itself or value, which exists as the Ideal of the contingent In-itself and which is characterized as beyond all contingency and all existence. Man is neither the one nor the other of these beings. . . . *He is what he is not and he is not what he is*" (575; emphasis mine).

As complex as Darl's perceptions have been throughout the novel, his final narration poses even greater problems for readers. Critics have generally assumed that Darl's wild imagistic perceptions are indicative of a mental breakdown; thus, these readings tend to justify the Bundrens' decision to ship Darl off to the sanitarium in Jackson. Two narrative points of view come into play, since Darl refers to himself in both the first and third person. Ambiguous passages hardly afford straightforward interpretations. The main passage in question distorts normative narrative perspectives to such a degree that critics have generally avoided analyzing it, out of neglect, dismay, or confusion. When Darl boards the train to be carried to his confinement in Jackson, he describes the scene in a way that seems to confirm his madness:

They pulled two seats together so Darl could sit by the window to laugh. One of them sat beside him, the other sat on the seat facing him, riding backward. One of them had to ride backward because the state's money has a face to each backside and a backside to each face, and they are riding on the state's money which is incest. A nickel has a woman on one side and a buffalo on the other; two faces and no back. I don't know what that is. Darl had a little spy-glass he got in France at the war. In it it had a woman and a pig with two backs and no face. I know what that is. "Is that why you are laughing, Darl?"

"Yes yes yes yes yes." (254)

These seemingly random images are Darl's final, laughing pronouncement upon his world. At this moment the reader is led to question both Darl's and his own perceptions. Here, the tropes are too ambiguous to produce any concrete meaning. What exactly does Darl see? Amorphous shifting figures, faces and backs: men with no real faces or actual backs, a nickel which is not just a nickel, and a woman and a pig engaging in intercourse?

In this passage all the figures—attendants, nickel, and pornographic figures—are represented in terms of faces and backs. Profiles show part of a face while occluding a back; backs occlude faces. Now, Darl's world is made up of profiles and perspectives; its objects exist as incomplete, partial fragments. Like Addie's face in the window frame, Darl sees the visual manifestation of some otherness. Moreover, this text is the verbal representation of that otherness because it forces the reader to perceive faces, backs, nickel, and spy-glass as Darl does. To do so requires that the reader once again read these images as framing devices; they make sense only within Darl's system for structuring his perceptions.

This framing motif can be seen in his admitted affiliation with Cash. When he gazes at Cash on the river bank he sees, without realizing it, his own fetishistic mode of being. In Cash Darl sees not just himself, but an other who perceives as he perceives:

Cash's face is also gravely composed; he and I look at one another with long probing looks, looks that plunge unimpeded through one another's eyes and into the ultimate secret place where for an instant Cash and Darl crouch flagrant and unabashed in all the old terror and the old foreboding, alert and secret and without shame. (142)

This secret place frames both image and perception. Within a womb twins share a past of terror and foreboding. For Cash and Darl, that past is Addie's rejection of her two eldest sons. In Darl's mind, he and Cash are paired so closely that Cash, Darl believes, even shares his masturbatory fantasies: "Then I would wait until they all went to sleep so I could lie with my shirt-tail up, hearing them asleep, feeling myself without touching myself, feeling the cool silence blowing upon my parts and wondering if Cash was yonder in the darkness doing it too . . ." (11). Darl interprets their probing looks as a kind of bond between Cash and himself, as though they understand in a glance the same feelings for each other. He desires this close kinship with his brother, one he does not have with any of his other siblings, because he and Cash share flagrant, unabashed disregard for their mother. After all, Addie vanquished both boys from her life at the same moment. Darl feels that he and Cash share reciprocal and reflexive perceptions.

But this is not the case. Cash rarely considers the sensations, emotions, or passions of his family members. His portions of the novel consist primarily of his coffin-making descriptions; in fact, one chapter is simply a thirteen point list of his craftsmanship. When the first catastrophe strikes the family on their journey, Cash breaks his leg. His subsequent narrative is so matter-of-fact that it supplies comic relief for the tragedy which has just ensued: "It wasn't on a balance. I told them that if they wanted it to tote and ride on a balance, they would have to " (165). Darl often projects his own emotions and sensations onto Cash, but Cash feels no identification with him whatsoever. Of that old terror, that secret realm of obsession which Darl inhabits with Addie, Cash has no idea. No reflexivity exists between Cash and Darl. The image Darl sees in Cash's eyes remains his own reflection. Nonetheless, Darl's justification for burning the barn is insufficient for Cash, because a "fellow cant get away from a shoddy job" (238). He hesitates to call Darl crazy, even though he finds him culpable. The concept of insanity is merely a social construct for Cash and nothing more:

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

Cash's meaning hinges upon perceptual metaphors. Those who view Darl conclude that he is insane, but only because they have forgotten that insanity within themselves. Cash correctly adduces that the normal range of behavior for his family draws a very fine line between lucidity and complete absurdity. He has a chance to save Darl from the sanitarium, but he refuses because he cannot relinquish his concept of one's responsibilities for one's actions, no matter how just those actions be. When the Bundrens besiege Darl to insure his confinement, Cash acquiesces in their madness. Dewey Dell jumps on Darl and Jewel shouts for his death. Jewel despises Darl for destroying his mother; Dewey Dell attacks out of sheer fear that Darl will divulge her pregnancy. Earlier in the novel, Darl and Dewey Dell share a perceptual moment. Dewey Dell

does not know that Darl has any idea of her pregnancy; she merely suspects because of the way he looks at her. As Darl translates it, to perceive in this passage is to know. Dewey Dell, to his mind, would not need to tell Doc Peabody she is with child if he were capable of actually seeing it in her gaze, even though she shows no signs. She fears Darl's perceptions. While both Dewey Dell and Jewel attack Darl out of hatred, it is Cash who confuses Darl.

Darl reacts to this fracas with laughter. He looks imploringly into Cash's face, asking him why he had not told him of the plot against him. When Cash tells him that it's better that he go away, Darl can only laugh at the patent paradox of the entire affair. It was Darl, after all, who tried to save Cash's leg, who did save Jewel and his pride during the knife fight, and who sympathized with Dewey Dell's predicament. The absurd irony for Darl is that all three have now turned against him. He could accept the betrayal of Jewel and Dewey Dell, but not of Cash, with whom he has been convinced he shared some secret understanding, some reflexive perception of the world and of the family. When Cash betrays him, Darl begins his endless laughter which continues as he boards the train for Jackson. Much of his symbolism in the final narration depends upon how Darl now views Cash.

Darl's final narrative begins with his describing himself in the third person. Several times during the course of this narrative Darl questions himself about his laughter. This self-conscious dialogue leads the reader back to the reason for his laughter in the first place—Cash. When Darl asks himself “What are you laughing at?” (253), he desires an answer in the form of an object. Here, the reader must go back to the initial moments of this crazed laughter to understand the objects of his fixation—his family. From the train Darl can see his family's wagon, and he describes it objectively. The family members are arranged in a similar fashion. Jewel does not look at him, but stares up the street “like any other man in town that day, yet there is something different, distinctive” (254). The other family members are the last things Darl perceives on his way out of Jefferson: “There is about it that unmistakable air of definite and imminent departure that trains have, perhaps due to the fact that Dewey Dell and Vardaman on the seat and Cash on a pallet in the wagon bed are eating bananas from a paper bag. ‘Is that why you are laughing, Darl?’” (254). Darl has seemingly attained a new perception of his family, one of indifference to Jewel and mockery of his other siblings. His perceptions of the world, however, are still intruded upon by Addie, Jewel, and Cash.

Without arbitrarily assigning family members to the particular signs Darl claims he sees, the reader can rely upon Darl's perceptual and ontological fixations to divulge their meaning. The totemic images do stand for Jewel, Cash, and Addie. The asylum attendants who ride, with faces and backs, on the state's money represent Jewel. Darl has used the word “ride” to describe Jewel's favorite passion. Of course, the horse comes into play by way of the iron horse that carries them and through the implied reference to Jewel's heroic saving of Addie's coffin from the burning barn. Darl describes Jewel's heroic action in terms that associate Jewel's fixation with his mother and with his horse. Jewel

struggles with the coffin on the saw-horses amid bursts of sparks and fire, until able to turn it end over end, "riding upon it, clinging to it, until it crashes down and flings him forward and clear" (222). Darl envisions the coffin, Addie, in terms of the motion of a struggling horse; the coffin rears, pauses, looms, and crashes and all the while Jewel rides upon it. The suggestions here are, of course, sexual. His movements almost mimic the action portrayed in the pornographic spyglass. Darl construes Jewel's obsession with Addie as incestuous. The second image in Darl's chain of associations, the nickel, has no back, but two faces: one a beast, the other a female figure. Literally, a nickel is a form of currency—it is Cash. This pun befits the Janus-faced image of the coin: to Darl's mind Cash no longer shares that same look which Darl has believed was his own. Darl always believed that when he looked into Cash's face he saw his own reflection. Unlike Jewel, Cash was never an intrusive presence, but a mirror of Darl's own perception of his feelings, passions, and secret thoughts. But Cash's face was not sympathetic to Darl at the crucial moment of his plea. Cash's face has now been distorted into that of a beast; it is no longer human. Cash's betrayal of Darl causes his maddening wail of hysterical laughter. For Darl, Cash is now aligned with his mother's betrayal of him as a child. And that betrayal represents woman. The last image, of a woman having sex with a pig, can only be Addie herself. Her adulterous affair begat Jewel and begat her denial of Darl. Darl expressed his resentment at this exclusion in nearly everything he perceived; Addie was a haunting presence without a face, especially in her death. He says he knows what this is because he has always known, always perceived her presence.

But why is Darl laughing? Darl laughs out of desperation and cynical resignation. Darl laughs because he lacks words to distinguish what he perceives. Darl laughs because he lacks words to contain the chaotic world around him. Darl laughs because he lacks words to express his being. Darl laughs because he knows no word that affirms as it denies simultaneously, that destroys as it creates, save the name Addie.

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