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"My children were of me alone": Maternal Influence in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*

ADDIE BUNDREN, THE TITLE AND PIVOTAL character in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, remains for most readers a perplexing and vexing figure. How are we to view her? How do the other characters view her? How does she view herself? Numerous and varied opinions attempt to define her position and influence in the novel, and for many critics in the past decades her importance has centered around her identity as a mother. David Williams, for example, sees her as an incarnation of the mythical mother of death; Doreen Fowler describes her as an instance of the matricide that Luce Irigaray claims lies behind the patriarchal myth of the murdered father; and Jill Bergman explains her as a woman frustrated in her sexuality and forced into biological essentialism.[1] While cases can certainly be made for each of these interpretations, a startling similarity among them must be noted: in all instances Addie's positive identity as a mother to and role model for her children is denied. It is possible, I would argue, to read her instead as an active force in their lives, teaching them (especially the male children who might be more vulnerable) to combat the oppressive and ultimately negative philosophy of the patriarchy in the book. Though she dies early on and receives only one opportunity for direct speech, the importance of intuitive love and of language's inadequacy to express it that she instills in her sons maintains Addie's place at the novel's core.

Like other of Faulkner's female characters (Caddy Compson of *The Sound and the Fury* springs most quickly to mind), Addie functions as the

[1]See, respectively, David Williams, *Faulkner's Women: The Myth and the Muse* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977); Doreen Fowler, "Matricide and the Mother's Revenge: *As I Lay Dying*," *Faulkner Journal*, 4 (Fall 1988/Spring 1989), 113-125; and Jill Bergman, "'this was the answer to it': Sexuality and Maternity in *As I Lay Dying*," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 49 (Summer 1996), 393-407.

almost absent center of the novel. Figuratively, she is the impetus behind the trip to Jefferson since it is her dying wish to be returned to her people and buried alongside them that forces the venture. Literally, she is centered by reason of her single monologue and its placement, though admittedly her chapter falls somewhat after the true midpoint and so does not neatly divide the book in two. Most importantly, as Diana York Blaine notes, "the title informs us that this is *her* story."[2] At least part of that story is the demonstration of Addie's influence on her sons, her training of them to fight the patriarchal world view embraced and exemplified by their father, Anse.

Through the process of Addie's monologue and the combined actions and thoughts of her children, the dynamic feminine and maternal principle which she maintains negates the stolid and unmoving male principle, and Addie herself becomes a possible source of female power in the book. Minrose Gwin explains: "From inside the coffin in which patriarchy has sealed her, Addie Bundren rethinks subjectivity as a female space. . . . Her woman's voice and woman's desire emerge out of that space, resisting the image of the phallus, the language of the father and its appropriative gesture, the symbolic authority of the word."[3] By making her children extensions of herself, she refuses to validate the masculine dominance which attempts to silence her. The trip to Jefferson thus becomes for her boys a form of education in her ways. By mourning her and contemplating their relationships with her, Cash, Darl, Jewel, and Vardaman learn to emulate her and adopt her suspicion of patriarchal constructs. Indeed, Williams partially explains the procession to Jefferson as a sort of learning experience: "the funeral cortége . . . is motion-transformation for both the bereaved and the 'departed,'" (p. 103). In other words, a new order is being established by the taking of Addie's body to be interred, one based on her teaching rather than Anse's.

Actually, Faulkner sets up the dichotomy between masculine and feminine world views early on through Addie's relationship with Anse. When we first see him, Anse is sitting almost motionless, rubbing his hands

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[2]Diana York Blaine, "The Abjection of Addie and Other Myths of the Maternal in *As I Lay Dying*," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 47 (Summer 1994), 438.

[3]Minrose Gwin, *The Feminine and Faulkner: Reading (Beyond) Sexual Difference* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), p. 154.

together and wondering whether the middle two boys can make a wood-loading trip before Addie dies. He is worried that if they do not come back with the wagon quickly it will spoil Addie's plans to start the trip to Jefferson as soon as she dies. Anse knows that "she'll want to start right away," that "she'll be impatient" to begin.[4] Part of the worry, though, is based on Anse's natural dislike and suspicion of the dynamism which he credits to his wife, and which is juxtaposed to his own tendency towards entropy. Although he warns the boys to be swift because he "would not keep her waiting," most of his married life, as we later learn, has been spent doing just that, stymieing Addie's growth and keeping her still (p. 14).

With this example of ill-matched partners in place, Faulkner goes on to broaden the categories beyond the personal. In Anse's first monologue the difference between masculine stasis and feminine process is being defined. The always shiftless Anse curses the road which comes "right up to [their] door, where every bad luck that comes and goes is bound to find it." In Anse's speech, roads, horses, and wagons are always symbols of feminine motion which challenge masculine authority. He believes that man was meant to stay put, not roam the earth, that God never "aimed for man to be always a-moving and going somewheres else." If He had, Anse asks, "wouldn't He a put him longways on his belly, like a snake?" (p. 24). As far as Anse is concerned, since man was made on the vertical axis like trees and houses, God must have meant him to remain stationary. Thus when he "told Addie it want any luck living on a road when it come by here, . . . she said, *for the world like a woman*, 'Get up and move, then'" (p. 24, emphasis added). The confluence of divinity, serpents, and the evils of motion begins to make clear the vehemence of his hatred of the feminine principle which he attributes to Addie. To his mind, the argument between moving or acting and staying still is one which the male side should always win.

However, Anse fails to realize that his symbology is based on the primacy of the female image, that, without the feminine body (land or woman) out of which they rise, men and trees could not exist. What this means is that Anse inadvertently privileges Addie's position, or, as Fowler describes it (albeit in connection with Darl not Anse), "Addie concretizes

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[4]William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, in *Novels: 1930-1935* (New York: The Library of America, 1985), pp. 12, 13.

how the patriarchal order depends on her" (p. 121). "For if the earth-bound symbols of motion are feminine in being," Williams notes, "the static masculine images are feminine in origin" (p. 99). And surely, this is a novel characterized less by trees and houses (or perhaps by men, for that matter) than it is by roads, wagons, and horses. It is important to note, for example, that even after her death Addie continues her activity by forcing the trip. More to the point, though, her activity will continue through the example she has set for her children and which they emulate throughout the journey.

The dichotomy between female activity and male inaction that is sketched out at the book's beginning is more fully fleshed out and reaches even higher stakes by the time Addie's monologue arrives. No longer merely a dispute between action and passivity, between uprooting lives and putting down roots, it is now a battle between life and death. For the most part, Western society envisions life as a movement from womb to grave, an active development which devolves into stasis only at death. However, the masculine ideal in *As I Lay Dying* inverts this generally accepted wisdom by linking inertia not only with death but also with life. More than just being a refutation of activity and living, the patriarchal philosophy questions even the possibility of meaningful existence, claiming, in the words of Addie's father, "that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time" (p. 114). It is of course Anse who is the most obvious example of this theory in practice. As an emulation of or training for death, life is static for Anse. Thus it is only a dogged adherence to duty (not least because it offers him living martyrdom) and not love or marital honour which makes Anse so quick to comply with Addie's final wishes. Essentially, by accepting Addie's ultimatum, he is rehearsing the male idea that life is deathly.

Needless to say, Addie's fidelity to an active understanding of existence causes her to resent and defy such a philosophy. This is due to her intuitive knowledge of the real dangers of such an outlook. To be sure, the patriarchal life view negates female power out of hand. More importantly, though, it negates the importance of human relationships. As Anse's example suggests, the life-as-death model denies the need for interaction. This is the reason Addie claims that Anse is already dead, even if he is not aware of it (p. 116)—for her death means the absence of heartfelt communication and relation to other people. That Anse trades her corpse for a new wife and new teeth in Jefferson reflects the paucity of emotion in

the male system and the effective emptiness of the relationships developed under it. As a possible escape from this static living death, as a way of finding meaning in life, Addie tries various methods of relating to others, first through her career as a teacher, then through her marriage to Anse.

It is only with motherhood, though, that Addie discovers the lie which, both her father and Anse tell her. While her other attempts fail, she is able to find life and union through her children. Perhaps retaining certain of her father's notions, she still believes "that living was terrible." However, she realizes that motherhood "was the answer to it," a palliative for existence, or at least for the male view of existence, and it provides Addie with knowledge she did not have before about life and about language: "That was when I learned that words are no good; that words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at" (p. 115). Maternity gives Addie the sense of union which she sought elsewhere but failed to find because motherhood seems to be the only possible relationship that is not necessarily mediated by linguistic communication.[5] Words do not fit because they are inadequate to the task; motherhood is more than *mother*, more than the verbal sign of a woman who has children. For instance, even before his birth, Addie knows there is an inarticulable bond between Cash and her, and with his birth her knowledge is further honed: "When he was born I knew that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn't care whether there was a word for it or not" (p. 115). From a maternal standpoint, it is the relationship itself of mother and child and not the way this bond is described that is of supreme importance. Just as *fear* and *pride* are for Addie words invented by those people who do not actually ever feel these emotions, so motherhood was christened by non-mothers. Though she does not state so explicitly, it seems safe to assume that she is thinking of men, that it is men who have created the verbal category of motherhood in an attempt to quantify and know what is foreign to them.

These thoughts on maternity and language return the novel to the dichotomy of verticality and horizontality which Anse earlier explained.

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[5]It is of course arguable that fatherhood, generally speaking, shares in this silent bond. As far as the novel is concerned, however, fathers take little interest in forging meaningful bonds with their children. In any event, the fact that childbirth entails the literal development of one human from another (two) endorses Addie's view that mothers share a closer bond with their children than mere words can capture.

Addie knows that "words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless," while "terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it" (p. 117). Words are not hurtful to Addie because they do not actually capture what they pretend to. Acting, doing, and living are terrible—and perhaps terrifying—because they entail change and consequence. Life only really begins for Addie with motherhood, and the Bundren family only really starts moving and working (albeit haltingly) as a result of her death and the promise she exacts from Anse. The problem with words and actions, though, as Addie sees it, is that they can never coincide. They are axes that continue to move away from each other at right angles, "so that after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle from one to the other" (p. 117). So far divergent are they, in fact, that people aligned to each have difficulty reaching one another, as Addie's alienation from Anse proves.

Words are "just the gaps in people's lacks," she muses. They cannot capture experience, and so Addie sees that "the shape of [her] body where [she] used to be a virgin is in the shape of a " (p. 117). This blank space provides Addie with room to move within the confines of a naming and linguistically bound patriarchy, a space from which Anse is notably barred. Addie wonders to herself why Anse is who he is and discovers that the reason is his inflexibility, isolation, and reliance on words:

> 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. (p. 116)

Anse's fealty to linguistic determinism, the equation of idea and word, means precisely that he cannot be anything other than Anse. So, while Addie knows that she can be freed from this terrible life with him by asking him to give her "not-Anse" (presumably by means of his not forcing sex on her), she also knows that he cannot ever *be* "not-Anse," that he will always be "the shape and echo of his word" (p. 117). She, on the other hand, determines that "I [will] be I"—not a name to be spoken or a shape to be filled but an identity comprised of being rather than saying.

This decision helps to explain why she is unworried about the naming of her sons. As the children of Addie Bundren they are partly immune to the

patriarchal linguistic machine because they will inherit her disbelief in it. More than that, though, the fact that they are a biological part of her means that any name given to them will not interfere with how she sees them or interacts with them: ". . . 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" (p. 117). The qualifying and quantifying of the boys is left to others, to the masculine language of patriarchy. What is left over is the unspeakable, the joy of maternal love which need not speak its name in order to be felt. As Addie says: "Cash did not need to say it to me nor I to him" (p. 116). Words are not necessary for emotion to pass between mother and son. Instead there is a bond which is communicated through action, such as Cash's building of the coffin or Jewel's anger at the slow progress to Jefferson to inter her.[6]

Addie's understanding of motherhood's power and blessing is furthered by her realization that multiple children do not divide a mother's love but that each successive child is subsumed into the loving union. As Addie soon perceives, despite her initial anger at Anse for impregnating her again, the bond between her and Cash is not weakened by Darl's birth: "I was three now" (p. 117). Far from breaking the dyadic bond between Addie and Cash, then, Darl's birth reconfigures the relationship to create a triad. This idea of proliferation without division is an important element in Addie's construction of identity. Paul Nielsen agrees that "[h]er larger meanings seem to be carried by repetition and association."[7] In a sense, each child becomes Addie writ small, and it is through each that she is reincarnated in the novel, so to speak. As her name implies, Addie is redoubled by each new child, to the extent, even, that the three children whom she claims belong solely to Anse (Darl, Dewey Dell, and Vardaman) remain hers and emulate her views. Through their individual characterization, as well as through their interaction, Faulkner provides a composite Addie, a set of maternal ideas and ideals to counter and perhaps

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[6]This sense of inherent, almost empathic, emotion between Addie and her children forecasts also the intuitive bonds that develop among the children themselves, most notably between Darl and the others.

[7]Paul S. Nielsen, "What Does Addie Bundren Mean, and How Does She Mean It?" *Southern Literary Journal*, 25 (Fall 1992), 35.

overcome the negative patriarchal view that Anse and Addie's father embody.

It is this distinction between fatherly and motherly love on which the fate of the children hangs. Will they, especially the male children who would seem likeliest to fall victim to the lure of words as they grow older, be able to avoid the trap of language, or will they immerse themselves in it? It is precisely this question which the trip to Jefferson is meant to answer. The blackly humorous chain of events which precedes Addie's final rest is, in addition to being Addie's revenge on Anse, a trial of sorts—a doing, in Addie's words—which must be undertaken. Even Anse knows the journey is a necessary one, though his limited insight precludes any real knowledge of why this is so. He sees only that Addie wants it and so accepts it as his fate. After she dies, then, he plods along in the sort of unthinking manner in which he sat dormant in the house before her passing, consummately lazy and stubbornly proud. As one of the neighbours remarks, Anse's shambling, unstoppable movement is as uncompromising and foolish as his inertia was initially:

> . . . it takes a lazy man, a man that hates moving, to get set on moving once he does get started off, the same as he was set on staying still, like it aint the moving he hates so much as the starting and the stopping. And like he would be kind of proud of whatever come up to make the moving or the setting still look hard. (p. 73)

It is such an outlook that Addie helps her sons avoid by instilling her values in them and forcing them to undertake the journey alongside Anse.

It is arguable that Vardaman, the youngest child by some years, learns least from the trip, given that he is the least able to accept his mother's death. The only son present in her final minutes, he is also the only one who cannot believe it. Indeed, Vardaman is unable to express the loss of his mother in words at all. After her final breath, he peeks around Anse's leg, "his mouth full open and all color draining from his face into his mouth, as though he has by some means fleshed his own teeth in himself, sucking" (p. 33). Though it is the focal point, his mouth remains unable to articulate his emotions, and he backs out of the room quickly and silently, the horror of his loss more poignant perhaps for its inarticulability. Yet while the funeral procession itself teaches him less about Addie than it does the others, Vardaman may be said to learn most from Addie's death. His inability to

command language, for instance, mirrors Addie's scorn of the patriarchy's belief in the necessity of words. For both mother and son, language cannot identify or define either love or existence, a notion addressed by his non-vocal answer to Dewey Dell's repeated calls of his name early on in the novel: "I am not crying now. I am not anything. Dewey Dell comes to the hill and calls me. Vardaman. I am not anything. I am quiet. Vardaman. I can cry quiet now, feeling and hearing my tears" (p. 38). The repetition here of his denial of being ("I am not anything") is important to the feminine view of language which Addie presents. When spoken the first time, after Vardaman's denial of the act of crying, it is implicitly a denial of action: "I am not crying now. I am not [*doing*] anything." However, the reiteration of the phrase after the imperative cry by Dewey Dell transforms the sentence into an ontological negation: "Vardaman. I am not anything [*i.e. there is nothing that is Vardaman*]." With his mother dead, he means nothing and the name holds for him no clue to his identity. Only relation and not language can create existence or make it livable, Vardaman is unwittingly arguing. The experience of mother loss for him, much like the experience of motherhood for Addie, cannot adequately be expressed in words. Thus Vardaman becomes a spokesman for the pre-linguistic love of mother and child by being what Nielsen calls a "failed speaker," a designation, incidentally, which Nielsen applies to all of the Bundrens, including Addie herself (p. 38).

The reason Vardaman is a failed speaker lies in the fact that words are powerless for him because they are arbitrary. Faulkner underscores this arbitrariness for us through Darl's repeated taunt later in the novel that "Jewel's mother is a horse" and Vardaman's inability to understand how brothers can have different mothers. If Jewel's mother is a horse, Vardaman begins to quiz his brother, "then mine can be a fish, cant it, Darl?" However, the capriciousness of symbols starts to worry the boy. He knows that Jewel is his brother, and therefore assumes his own mother "will have to be a horse, too" (p. 65). Obviously, language's fluctuations are too much for a boy so young to understand, and he decides, in the book's most memorable chapter, that "[his] mother is a fish" (p. 54). A logical bond is still necessary, though, and that might help to explain his fishing of the slough: if he can catch the fish which he believes is his mother, then he can know she is not nailed into the coffin and can free her by throwing the fish back. The arbitrary pathology which links Addie to the fish solidifies into fact for

Vardaman, so that, unlike Darl and the older children, he cannot so easily give up his hold on logic, flawed though that logic might be.

Ultimately, though, Vardaman's puzzlement over language, his birthright from Addie, is perhaps less important than his propensity for action, something he holds in common with his brothers. His attempts to save Addie by catching the fish and, more tragically, by taking Cash's augur to her coffin lid are similarly based on his love for her. Just as Darl tries to burn down Gillespie's barn to prevent any further humiliation of Addie's corpse and Cash carefully constructs the coffin out of concern for her comfort, Vardaman tries to express his emotions through actions rather than words. Addie's example of non-linguistic love becomes the basis of Vardaman's actions, and the confusion expressed by his words and thoughts lends credence to the conclusion that, in this novel at least, actions speak clearer if not louder than words.

Jewel's love for Addie may also be said to be based more on doing than on saying. Certainly his feelings are more complicated than Vardaman's, not merely because of his age but also because of the barely submerged knowledge of his paternity. Of course, the dynamic feminine principle which Addie espouses is as much his inheritance as it is Vardaman's. Like her, Jewel dislikes inaction; just as her mind is set on beginning the journey immediately after her death, so is her son's. That eagerness, as well as his own inarticulable grief, emerge in Jewel's impatience with Darl and with Cash's slowness in carrying the coffin to the wagon, which prompts him to attempt to maneuver it singlehandedly. As Darl describes it, Jewel

> will not wait. He is almost running now and Cash is left behind. . . . I am not even touching [the coffin] when, turning, he lets it overshoot him, swinging, and stops it and sloughs it into the wagon bed in the same motion and looks back at me, his face suffused with fury and despair. (pp. 63-64)

It is between precisely these emotions that Jewel vacillates for most of the novel, furious at the circumstances in which he finds himself, despairing of any escape. Much the same might be said of Addie, angry at her father's philosophy of encroaching death and, before discovering motherhood, hopeless of finding a method of nullifying it.

It comes as little surprise, then, that Jewel has such a fierce attachment

to his horse (another of Anse's symbols of female movement). Indeed, there is a similarity between Jewel's treatment of the horse and his treatment of Addie. Towards both he exhibits a gruff, almost abusive, love. Early on he calls the animal a "sweet son of a bitch," and, while trying to calm it before feeding it, he stands "with dug heels, shutting off the horse's wind with one hand, with the other patting the horse's neck in short strokes myriad and caressing, cursing the horse with obscene ferocity" (p. 9). There is a similar coarseness in his calling Addie's grave "a damn hole in the ground" (p. 154), but one which stems more from despair at her death and the ensuing indignity of the trip than from a true animosity toward her. The fact that Jewel refuses Anse's order to leave his horse behind becomes a powerful reminder of the complex relationship that he and Addie shared and of his denial of his father's views. Certainly not "a deliberate flouting of her" (p. 65), as Anse calls it, Jewel's decision to ride his horse seems appropriate to the sort of relationship the mother and son shared.

All of this is not to say that Jewel is any less wary of the problem of language than Vardaman or Addie's other children. His anger at Darl's goading him about the horse's being his mother underscores the insidiousness of language for him as much as Anse's devious reliance on the words of love does for Addie. In the end, Jewel is no more able to articulate his feelings than Addie or the others, letting his actions speak for him. His decision to sell his beloved horse to Snopes to procure a mule team to replace those animals drowned in the river by Anse's foolhardy attempt to ford the flooded river is as eloquent a testament of love as Addie might hope for. His further decision not to discuss this with the family either before or after the fact also proves the inability of words to fit what they are trying to say, and this tendency in Jewel truly makes him his mother's son, championing her ideal of speechless but heartfelt communication.

Addie's second-eldest child, Darl, seems rather removed from his male siblings and his mother on this point. He is, for instance, the most articulate speaker in the novel, a trait which would at first appear to distance him from Addie and her denial of language's potency. As André Bleikasten notes, "not only does he express himself with amazing correctness . . . but his vocabulary is also infinitely more varied and more learned than that of those around

him."[8] Yet Darl is the most complex of the children and has perhaps the most complex relationship with Addie. Despite being the book's most prolific narrator, and having a seeming flair for language, he is more notable for his extra-linguistic communicative ability, a propensity which marks him as his mother's son and helps save him from a seduction by Anse's patriarchal model. His awareness of the uselessness for words reflects Addie's own mistrust. For example, he knows of Jewel's illegitimacy, just as he knows of Dewey Dell's pregnancy, without the need of words. Indeed words might taint the knowledge, as Dewey Dell implies: "then I saw Darl and he knew. He said he knew without the 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" (p. 18). This connection, while difficult to define (both for Dewey Dell and for us), is remarkably similar to Addie's construction of maternal love, which knows without speaking. Darl exhibits similar abilities with his brothers as well: he and Cash share an unspoken memory of Jewel's infancy when they remember him lying on a pillow longer than he is, and he and Vardaman seem attuned to each other in their discussion of horse-mothers and fish-mothers.

Yet this insight into his siblings does not lead Darl to a sensitivity toward them. Indeed, his knowledge of Dewey Dell and Jewel is openly hostile. However, his maliciousness almost matches Addie's in her desire to revenge herself against Anse for making her pregnant with Darl. The initial betrayal she feels at Anse's destroying the dyad of mother and only child is mirrored in Darl's feeling of betrayal by a mother who seemingly refuses him love. This similarity of temperament is underscored by Cora Tull's belief that Darl is "the only one of them that had his mother's nature, had any natural affection" (p. 15). Cora's statement is not wholly accurate, of course. Darl is often less than affectionate to his family, and, as we have seen, the other children also retain much of Addie's nature. What is more, his own statement that "it takes two people to make you" denies Addie's claim that "[m]y children were of me alone" (pp. 27, 118). Darl's obsession with paternity stems from his bitterness that even an illegitimate child like Jewel seems more loved by Addie than he is. Yet in truth he might be the child who gains most from being Addie's son and suffers least from being Anse's,

[8]André Bleikasten, *Faulkner's As I Lay Dying* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 26.

his eventual incarceration in the Jackson asylum notwithstanding (though even this might be considered a sort of blessing in disguise). In many ways, then, he is the child most like Addie, as Cora imagines. Certainly Faulkner takes pains to confirm some bond between them in the form of their shared attachment to the earth.

Addie's earthiness is echoed most obviously in her alignment with the horizontal principle of movement and its corollaries, like the road which lies "flat on the earth" before the Bundren home (p. 24). The kinship goes deeper than a mere propensity toward activity, however. As she points out in her monologue, Addie considers herself to be a part of the land; not only does she cling to it by doing but she also becomes it, or rather it becomes her after she gives birth. She lies beside Anse in bed, "hearing the land that was now of [her] blood and flesh" (p. 116). In a way, then, Addie indeed is the earth-mother that some critics have dubbed her. At least part of the reason for living as far as she is concerned is "the duty to the alive, to the terrible blood, the bitter red flood boiling through the land," and she begins to view her children as also being products of this junction of earth and woman: "My children were of me alone, of the wild blood boiling along the earth" (pp. 117, 118).

Darl is the child who most manifests this connection, as even the other Bundrens make plain. Early on in the novel, he is twice characterized in terms of the landscape surrounding him. Dewey Dell describes him sitting "at the supper table with his eyes gone further than the food and the lamp, full of the land dug out of his skull and the holes filled with distance beyond the land" (p. 18), almost as if he is himself made of the earth around him and somehow projects out of it. Anse, too, in a rare moment of insight, figures Darl as linked to the earth, "his eyes full of the land" (p. 25). Like Addie, Darl is both encompassing the land and enthralled by it (or in thrall to it, Anse fears), and it is just this connection which begins to steer him away from his father's teaching: ". . . he was alright at first, with his eyes full of the land, because the land laid up-and-down ways then; it wasn't till that ere road come and switched the land around longways and his eyes still full of the land, that they begun to threaten me out of him" (p. 25). Like Addie—and, it seems fair to add, because of her—Darl finds a way of evading the stifling and deathly model of existence that Addie's father posits and Anse lives out. His banishment to the Jackson sanatorium might thus be

viewed as the patriarchal response to the supra-linguistic (and thus mystifying) love which he expresses for Addie by the novel's close, a view which Fowler at least partially defends (p. 123).

Cash's acceptance of Addie's ideal develops similarly slowly. In many ways he is the most Bundren-like of the siblings, despite Addie's description of the bond between the two of them. While he understands the need for action, he clings at first to a certain rigidity. Much as Anse does, he seems unfazed by the succession of events leading up to and following Addie's death. He sits outside her window planing her coffin with the same slow plodding with which Anse awaits her death, the inevitability of circumstance and the weary progression of time affecting him no more than they do his father. Even his acceptance of the cement cast for his broken leg during the journey seems indicative of the inaction at the Bundren heart. Yet, neither of these points can wholly sever Cash from the maternal influence which works on him and through him in the novel.

The structure of his first two narrations presents a condensed view of the metamorphosis Cash undergoes. His first section is a logical and clear list of thirteen reasons why he bevels the coffin edges. Complete with numbers, the chapter is a record of masculine ideas of linguistic adequacy:

> 1. There is more surface for the nails to grip.
> 2. There is twice the gripping- surface to each seam.
> 3. The water will have to seep into it on a slant. Water moves easiest up and down or straight across. . . . (p. 53)

It is through this ordered use of language that he will explain his actions. Indeed, his next section begins in a similarly logical way; however, the logic of words quickly breaks down and their power is lost. Before Jewel tries to lift the coffin by himself, Cash attempts to explain that since Addie has been placed toe to head in a box meant to fit her head to toe "it wont balance. . . . I'm telling you it wont tote and it wont ride on a balance unless—" (p. 62). His explanation is cut off by Jewel in his eagerness to get under way. Cash repeats his warning, but, significantly, this time he only thinks it to himself: "It wont balance. If they want it to tote and ride on a balance, they will have." More significantly still, Cash cuts himself off at the same point in the explanation as Jewel has just done.

There are two possible reasons for this coincidence. On the one hand, the self-interruption could be a way of denying the words to come—"they will have [*to take her body out and rearrange it*]." It would thus be similar to Vardaman's self-denial that "*My mother is not in the box. My mother does not smell like that. My mother is a fish*" (p. 132). This would also mirror Jewel's refusal early in the novel to name the thing Cash is building, as if keeping the word at bay allows him to ignore the reality of his mother's impending death: "Cash [is] all day long right under the window, hammering and sawing at that—" (p. 13). On the other hand, Cash's refusal to speak could be taken as a slow realization on his part of the necessity of change, of the fact that whether he argues or not the box will be lifted and that only by ending his rigidity will he be able to cope. For the remainder of the novel, we witness Cash's change from a defender of the patriarchy, arguing for logic and fixity, to a true son of his mother, a man able to catalogue the ever-progressing world and attempting to progress with it. By the end of the novel, Williams explains, Cash "has abandoned the unfeeling world of 'things' and of rigid logic" (p. 117). It comes as no surprise, then, that it is he who narrates the last chapter of the book and brings us its absurd, illogical conclusion, with Darl shipped to the sanatorium in Jackson and Anse sporting new teeth and supported by the "duck-shaped woman" who replaces Addie as the new Mrs. Bundren (p. 177). As it is to Addie, language is useless to Cash in terms of emotion, and so he presents the final scene to us without any real emotional impact behind his words. It is as if language cannot encompass the feelings of a man who has lost his mother doubly, first through death and then through almost immediate replacement.

The numbness which Cash feels and which colours his narration of the novel's close is indicative of his strong and unspoken grief over Addie's death. From the first pages of the book as he silently works on her coffin, we witness the depth of feeling which Cash has for his mother. Admittedly a child's building a coffin for his dying mother is somewhat ghoulish; however, the love which Cash planes into the boards is undeniable. Darl himself admits that "Addie Bundren could not want a better one, a better box to lie in. It will give her confidence and comfort" (p. 4). This comfort will come not merely from the coffin's sturdy construction but also from the fact that it has been meticulously prepared for her by her son. Jewel is angered by Cash's methodical slowness and imperturbability, but, even in scoffing at it, he too underscores the importance of the task Cash is

performing, both for Addie and for himself:

> . . . every breath she draws is full of his knocking and sawing where she can see him saying See. See what a good one I am making for you. . . . It's like when he was a little boy and she says if she had some fertilizer she would try to raise some flowers and he taken the bread pan and brought it back from the barn full of dung. (p. 11)

These are the actions of a loving if misguided child seeking maternal acceptance. Not a morbid deathwatch or a prompter of Addie's death, Cash's carpentry is instead a silent testament of his love.

Anse's very censure of his son's carpentry also aligns Cash with his mother. Like Addie and Darl, Cash is conditioned by the horizontal. Anse complains that it is the road that is

> making [him] pay for Cash having to get them carpenter notions when if it hadn't been no road come there, he wouldn't a got them; falling off of churches and lifting no hand in six months and [he] and Addie slaving and a-slaving, when there's plenty of sawing on this place he could do if he's got to saw. (p. 24)

He cannot understand Cash's diligence for his craft, does not see it as anything more than merely necessary work. He is therefore left outside the relations which Addie and Cash perpetuate through their respective building and overseeing of the coffin because their bond is a non-linguistic one, a union forged outside words and signs and thus inscrutable to masculine categorization:

> He looks up at the gaunt face framed by the window in the twilight [,] . . . a composite picture of all time since he was a child [,] . . . [and] drops the saw and lifts the board for her to see [,] . . . while . . . she looks down at him from the composite picture, neither with censure nor approbation. (p. 32)

Addie need not make her emotions visible to her son, to the first born whom she uses as a defense against the deadening philosophy of her father, for him to feel the return of his love.

Following their mother, the male Bundren children eschew the patriarchal model, presented in the figure of Anse, in favour of the emotionally active feminine principle. Addie has taught them the importance not of language but of feeling. Anse claims of them that "you all

dont know . . . the somebody you was young with and you growed old in her and she growed old in you, seeing the old coming on . . ." (p. 158). Yet, surely it is Anse who is unknowing, and surely it is the children who have grown old in Addie and in whom, more importantly, Addie has been allowed to grow. It is her example which Cash, Darl, Jewel, and Vardaman follow, refusing the constricting and stagnant model of their father and grandfather. Though she has died, Addie lives on in the figures of her children, and her belief in the female ideal of intuitive and intense relationships, as well as her suspicion of language's inability to describe them, is able to outwit and outlast the rigid and obdurate male model. "We know that she is the most important figure in their lives," according to Blaine, "not just because the book spins out from her centrifugally, but because each child's identity is profoundly related to his . . . relationship to the mother" (p. 433). So, while it is arguable in a literal sense that Addie dies out of the novel rather quickly, her story is not the attestation to "the finite nature of woman" that Bergman posits (p. 407). Instead, through the example which she offers to her sons and which they provide to us, Addie's notions of emotional attachment and linguistic inadequacy come through to us even to the end of the book. Ultimately, her physical death means less perhaps than the survival of her active view of life. She fulfills her own prophecy of life's meaning by dutifully passing on her message to her children so that they may remain true to the blood boiling through the land.