



Death, Mourning and Human Selfishness: Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* Through a Freudian Lens

Liam C. Butchart

Abstract

William Faulkner's classic Southern Gothic novel *As I Lay Dying* is more than just an experiment in modernist techniques: it is a novel that expressly examines its characters' minds, a work containing great psychological depth. This paper will examine the psychological reactions of five members of the Bundren family to the death of Addie, their mother or wife. This examination will utilize Freudian psychoanalytic techniques to address the characters' psychological complexities: developmental stages, defense mechanisms and their mourning processes. Proceeding from that psychoanalysis, this article will argue that Faulkner is using the minds of the characters to impart a message, a comment on the human experience. Faulkner is saying that humans' minds are complex, and that humans, when faced with tribulations, are self-centered.

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With the advent of the twentieth century and the development of modernist literature, novels changed – they began to develop the capacity to be much more psychological. Prominent among the American authors of this style and era is William Faulkner, who wrote one of his most famous novels, *As I Lay Dying*, in 1930. Set in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County, the story follows the Bundren family as they take their mother, Addie, to her native county to bury her. The family includes the deceased Addie, the father, Anse, and their five children: Cash, Darl, Jewel, Dewey Dell and Vardaman. Once Addie dies, the Bundrens commence their journey. When they finally arrive in Jefferson and bury the body, Darl has gone insane and is taken away to an asylum, a symptom of the broken state of the characters and the family. This grotesquely comic story espouses many themes – primary amongst them, the finality of death. Critic Edmond Volpe writes, “In the very process of honoring the dead,

the Bundrens' funeral journey... is a grotesque proof of how dead the dead really are" (130). Death is the central point of the story, and it profoundly affects each member of the Bundren family.

However, critical inquiry has, for the most part, foregone explicitly examining the characters of the work. Benjamin Widiss, in "Fit and Surfeit in *As I Lay Dying*," an exploration of referentiality in the work, touches on the novel's interaction with the psychology of death, saying, "In nominating a new Mrs. Bundren so precipitously on the heels of the old, Anse flouts... the decorum of mourning rituals and the emotional well-being of his offspring" (Widiss 99). However, Widiss does not pursue this point as the main focus of his study – even though he assumes that the psychological level of the text can add an extra dimension, beyond "a superficially formal continuum or... reference[s] to abstract parallels and ironies of theme" (Adamowski 208). Similarly, Faulkner had ideas not just about innovative writing techniques, but also about the human condition – Max Westbrook comments, "[For] William Faulkner, psychological time is central to the human condition" (131). Therefore, critical inquiry can and should be shifted to focus on the psychological aspect of *As I Lay Dying*, to supplement more formalist studies. In William Faulkner's novel *As I Lay Dying*, the characters' different reactions to Addie's death can be psychoanalyzed to show the range of emotions experienced when a family member dies, and these reactions emphasize the intrinsic selfishness of all human beings.

Before embarking on psychoanalyzing the main characters of the novel, however, it is necessary to qualify *why* psychoanalysis (and in particular, what type of psychoanalysis) is appropriate for analyzing Faulkner's work. On a general level, Faulkner's literature is psychologically interesting "because the scope, detail, and philosophical depth of his oeuvre provide[s] ample testing ground" (Hagood 8). A more specific argument for psychoanalysis of *As I Lay Dying* comes from Faulkner's use of stream-of-consciousness narration. This narrative technique "attempts to render the consciousness of a character by recording the flow of conscious thought... in a character's mind" (Rashke 110). By using stream-of-consciousness narration, Faulkner is opening up the minds of his characters, laying them bare – which provides ample ground for psychological inquiry; similarly, this opening actively invites psychoanalysis, because it must have a purpose. For Faulkner, every part of the book has meaning – as many different critical studies have shown. In *As I Lay Dying*, he deliberately decided to emphasize and display the characters' minds, begging the question of what is hidden there and why – which is what this essay tries to unravel.

Even though we have established psychoanalysis as a suitable tool for studying *As I Lay Dying*, the larger question remains: how to engage in studying the text. There are many types of literary psychoanalysis, examining everything from the author's state of mind to the reader's reaction to the text. However, I am going to use a more text-centered approach: using

psychological language to examine the characters and the novel internally, and then extrapolating a meaning. Analyzing the text internally like this does not run the risk of overstepping our bounds as critics and putting words into Faulkner's (metaphorical) mouth; rather, it confines us to an almost New Critical view, where the focus is on the novel, though psychoanalysis is certainly far removed from New Criticism. T.H. Adamowski, in "Meet Mrs. Bundren: *As I Lay Dying* – Gentility, Tact, and Psychoanalysis" pursues this kind of psychoanalytic inquiry, and expounds its qualities quite elegantly. He writes:

If one recognizes... that the problem is to deal adequately with literature, with... a certain form of health, and not with an ill patient, one may recognize that there is no reason to be genteel towards [psychoanalysis] or to refuse to call things by their name, or to pretend that those things and those names pertain only to aspects of pathology. Only imprecision is fostered by a psychoanalytic criticism that shies away from the language of psychoanalysis. (206, emphasis mine)

Adamowski here emphasizes the specific fashion in which psychoanalytic criticism is most potent – by using specific psychological language. Psychoanalytic criticism has been undertaken by many prominent Faulkner scholars, but often without much explicit psychoanalytic theory, which this paper also aims to build upon. Using psychoanalytic techniques on the content of the text, rather than the author or reader, makes sense, especially in a novel like *As I Lay Dying*.

However, even with a strategy for analyzing the novel, we are still a step away from unraveling its secrets – we need a vehicle, a mechanism by which we can examine the text; looking to Adamowski, that vehicle needs to contain specific psychoanalytic language. Therefore, for this paper, that vehicle is Freudian psychology. Freudian psychoanalytic language is useful for analyzing *As I Lay Dying* for a number of reasons. First, Freud is appropriate for Faulkner's time period. They were roughly contemporaries; therefore, there is potential for Freud's work to be expressed in Faulkner's, as often happened with early twentieth-century authors. Additionally, Freud's system deals with psychological ailments, which makes perfect sense for studying the characters' minds. Finally, Freudian psychology is a good organizational system – the developmental phases are clearly defined, as are neuroses and defense mechanisms. And even if some of his ideas have been amended or discredited, Freudian psychology is just the base, the language for describing the phenomena at play in *As I Lay Dying*, a way to structure the psychological discussion. Therefore, the methodology for this study will be psychological analysis in line with many Faulkner scholars, along with Freudian-based psychoanalysis, with the aim to develop an analysis of the characters that probes their minds for messages.

Important to constructing the methodology for this study is to provide some further specifications for what constitutes Freudian psychoanalytic tools. First, many of the characters' psyches utilize defense mechanisms. This is not to say that the characters themselves actively use the defense mechanisms, but, as Anna Freud states, "Were it not for the intervention of the ego, or of those external forces which the ego represents, every instinct would know only one fate – that of gratification" (47). Laplanche and Pontalis, authors of *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, concur; the ego enacts the defense mechanisms, rather than the conscious mind (94). There are many defense mechanisms, and they will be explicitly explained throughout this essay; the only one worthy of note at this point is repression. Repression, in Freud's structure, encompasses two different meanings: first, it is a "universal mental process in so far as it lies at the root of the constitution of the unconscious as a domain separate from the rest of the psyche," and where "the subject attempts to repel, or to confine to the unconscious, representations... which are bound to an instinct. Repression occurs when to satisfy an instinct... would incur the risk of provoking unpleasure because of other requirements" (Laplanche and Pontalis 334). The second meaning, and the one that will be used in this paper, is the defense mechanism – where repression has essentially the same function, but is a discrete psychological defense, used only with the other ego-defense mechanisms, rather than an overarching process.

Separate from the defense mechanisms is Freud's concept of narcissism, which will be used a great deal as we are analyzing Faulkner's characters. Narcissism, to Freud, is a great deal more complex than the popular assertion that it is an "an inflated sense of [one's] own importance" (Mayo Clinic). Freud's concept of narcissism evolved over time, but Laplanche and Pontalis sum up the definition most effective for our discussion, saying:

Freud postulates a seesaw balance between ego-libido (i.e. libido which cathects the ego) and object-libido: 'The more of the one is employed, the more the other becomes depleted...' In this way we are brought -- in the context of an approach based on energy and asserting the permanence of a libidinal cathexis of the ego -- to define narcissism structurally: instead of appearing as a developmental stage, narcissism now emerges as a damming up of the libido which no object-cathexis can completely overcome. (Laplanche and Pontalis 216)

For Freud, narcissism is the redirection of libidinal energy away from an external object and back toward the subject's ego, so much so that object-cathexes are powerless to divert much libidinal strength away.

However, the relation between the ego and the object also connects to narcissistic neurosis; this phenomenon is "a mental illness characterised by the withdrawal of libido from the outside world and its direction onto the ego" (Laplanche and Pontalis 218). Narcissistic neurosis also directly relates to

Freud's concept of melancholia and mourning, which is particularly pertinent to this paper. Both mourning and melancholia evolve psychologically from the loss of a loved person (or, "object"), and both have similar symptoms; however, melancholia is a more pathological condition. Freud writes, "The difference is the inhibition of the melancholic seems puzzling to us because we cannot see what it is that is absorbing him so entirely" (S. Freud 244-245). In order for loss to engender melancholia, rather than mourning, three conditions must be present in the subject: "loss of the object, ambivalence, and regression of libido into the ego" (Freud 258). Freud posits that the lost object, the ego and the libido are all have some relationship to narcissism. First, Freud comments on object-choice as being "effected on a narcissistic basis, so that the object-cathexis, when obstacles come in its way, can regress to narcissism" (Freud 249). Therefore, because of this relationship object-choice and narcissism, he then concludes, "the disposition to fall ill of melancholia... lies in the predominance of the narcissistic type of object-choice" (Freud 250). In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud does not explicitly mention a second connection to narcissism. Freud comments on the various ways a melancholic displays his psychopathology: "extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale... he reproaches himself... abases himself before everyone and commiserates with his own relatives for being connected with anyone so unworthy..." (Freud 246). What Freud is implying with all of these examples is that self-pity is really a form of self-obsession, hidden behind a veil of self-denigration. However, this illustrates the subject's real psychological state – he has undergone a recathexis, where the libidinal energy has passed from the object to the ego, and has become fixed there – which shows the melancholic state to be one of narcissistic neurosis.

What this connection between melancholia and narcissism and the narcissistic neurosis means is that seemingly selfish, self-oriented behavior can be seen in a broader psychological framework. Framing the characters' actions in this framework as we are examining them will allow for a more objective, psychological analysis of their states of mind – as well as showing the commonalities and disparities between the Bundrens' minds.

In order to expose the meaning hidden in the characters' psychologies, it makes sense to examine them one by one; here, we will start with the oldest child first – Cash. Cash reacts to his mother's death in the manner of a well-adjusted person. Cash is the oldest of the Bundren children, and as such, had a special place in Addie's heart. He was also born before Addie's disillusionment with Anse, when she realized that she did not love him. Therefore, he does not have the stain of unfulfilled dreams that marked Addie's relationship with most of her other children. Critic Dorothy Tuck states that Cash had a secure relationship with Addie, and therefore felt secure both in himself and in his mother's love for him (38). This security allows Cash to mourn his mother's death appropriately, as most people do, using words, action and thought; Olga Vickery, in her book *The Novels of William Faulkner*, states

that Cash "... ultimately achieves maturity and understanding by integrating these modes into one distinctively human response..." (51). Cash, unlike the other Bundren children, grows as a person from his mother's death, developing the skills to effectively cope with loss. As Cash mourns Addie's death, he does not delve into existential questions beyond his comprehension; rather, he focuses on his work. Darl sees Cash working on Addie's coffin, "...stooping steadily at the board in the failing light, laboring on toward darkness," showing how Cash devotes himself and all of his time to his work, to manage the psychological pain through labor (Faulkner 48). Hyatt Waggoner, in his book *William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World*, describes Cash as "...the artist and craftsman, maker, and... the committed man" (72). Before Addie's death, Cash defined himself by his work, not by his mother; thus, when she is gone, he is able to handle the loss and move forward in his life.

A Freudian analysis of Cash's reaction to Addie's death further indicates his well-adjustedness. This fact is due to his connection with his mother. Freud thought that "...the nature and quality of the relationship between the child and the primary caretakers [was important]... that stable, warm mothering encourages basic trust in the benevolence of the world..." (DeWolfe 804). Thus, Cash, through his loving connection with his mother, is able to see the world in a good light. Every individual's psyche utilizes defense mechanisms; Cash is no exception, but he uses them in a healthy way. Cash's mind exhibits signs of the libidinal movements that correlate with sublimation and displacement. Sublimation is "[The] Process postulated by Freud to account for human activities which have no apparent connection with sexuality but which are assumed to be motivated by the force of the sexual instinct... The instinct is said to be sublimated in so far as it is diverted towards a new, non-sexual aim and in so far as its objects are socially valued ones" (Laplanche and Pontalis 370). As Cash's libidinal energy is transferred from the object (Addie) to his ego, he begins to sublimate some of that energy into the creation of Addie's coffin. Displacement, on the other hand, is where "one idea may surrender to another its whole quota of cathexis" to another, a substitute, along a chain of associations (Freud 366). This defense mechanism also applies to his focus on his carpentry. When Addie's coffin falls into the river, Cash thinks, "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" [sic] (Faulkner 165). He is blaming his other family members for the accident; his ego is displacing his anger and sadness over Addie's death onto his family members for their apparent disregard for the care and effort he put into building the coffin – which he consciously interprets as his family being at fault. Here, the chain of associations is from the coffin to Addie to his other family members. Because of his strong connection to his mother, Cash does not develop any psychological problems.

Due to Cash's strong psychological foundation, he is able to enter the mourning process without developing any pathological conditions. As Cash works on Addie's coffin, he begins to process Addie's impending death. In this way, Cash starts the process of reality-testing, where "in the case of mourning, for instance—the fact that the subject faced with the loss of a loved object learns to modify his personal world, his projects and his wishes in accordance with this real loss" (Laplanche and Pontalis 329). Cash's efforts to create the best coffin that he can for his mother – or, his reality-testing – are for the most part successful, but up until the episode at the river, they are still incomplete. For example, when Cash is thinking through the way he finished the coffin, he not only notes, "I made it on the bevel," but also that "9. The animal magnetism of a dead body makes the stress come slanting" (Faulkner 82-83). The implication of Cash's thoughts returning to the presence of his mother in the coffin is that he has not divorced his libido from his mother.

However, the scene at the river shows off how far Cash has come. At the river, Cash almost sacrifices himself for the coffin of his mother. Tull, the Bundrens' neighbor, recalls:

... the wagon hung for a long time.... and [there was] Cash leaning more and more, trying to keep the coffin braced so it wouldn't slip down and finish tilting the wagon over. (Faulkner 153)

Cash is trying to save the wagon, but he has another motive: his new tools are in the cart as well. Darl exposes Cash's new object-cathexis when he describes the lengths the others go to retrieve Cash's tools, which Cash supposedly could not do without. Darl narrates, "We submerge in turn, holding to the rope, being clutched by... the cold wall of the water" (Faulkner 159). Cash puts his family in danger, searching for his tools rather than focusing his attention on his mother and her coffin, because he has developed this new libidinal concentration. Thus, Cash's mourning process is coming to a close. As Freud said, "in mourning time is needed for the command of reality-testing to be carried out in detail, and that when this work has as been accomplished the ego will have succeeded in freeing its libido from the lost object" (252). Cash's thoughts in the last scene of the novel reinforce his acceptance of Addie's death. When Anse brings his new wife to meet his children, Cash neither says nor thinks anything to do with Addie – even though this situation would be very likely to trigger those thoughts. Because Cash is able to shift his libidinal energy from his mother to his tools and his work, Cash is able to finish his mourning process. Cash provides an example of a healthy mourning process.

Unlike Cash, the second Bundren child, Darl, does not react well to Addie's death; instead, by the end of the story, he has gone insane and is taken away to an asylum. An example of his condition is when he burns down the Gillespie barn. Darl thinks to himself:

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. Cash broke his leg and now the sawdust is running out. He is bleeding to death is Cash. (Faulkner 206)

Darl's words show a preoccupation with death and desolation, which, at least in part, stems from his relationship with his mother (Adamowski 212). The Gillespie barn burning is why Darl is sent to the asylum, and a product of his obsession with death. Darl commits these acts primarily because he is uncertain of his own identity. Michael Millgate writes, "... Darl's uncertainty as to his personal identity... leads eventually to a total disassociation of his personality and madness..." (105). Darl's uncertainty is because he "... is a reflection of fatherly 'chapping' and is thus denied all intimacy with Addie" (Adamowski 212). Darl is deeply linked to Addie – even though he was denied intimacy, he still identifies with her, as her offspring – so without Addie, he cannot survive on his own.

Olga Vickery provides another reason for why Darl is unable to develop a healthy response to Addie's death: "... he encompasses all possible modes of response and awareness without being able to effect their integration" (51). Darl is a *mélange* of his family members' responses to his mother's passing: intense grief and sorrow, incomprehension and existential contemplation. Thus, continues to disappear, leading to insanity. A tangible sign of Darl's madness, and thus his unhealthy reaction to his mother's death, is when he is being taken to the asylum in Jackson. He speaks in the third person, saying, "Darl has gone to Jackson. They put him on the train, laughing..." (Faulkner 253). Finally, Hyatt Waggoner analyzes why Darl is so uncertain of his identity in the wake of Addie's death. Waggoner writes, "Darl is concerned to establish the line between being and not-being," which he draws from Darl's continual existential contemplation (64). A particularly potent example of Darl's examination of being is when he is about to fall asleep:

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. [sic] (Faulkner 80)

Darl here even articulates his issue: he does not have a concrete sense of identity. Stemming from Addie and her relationship to him whilst she was alive, Addie's death is profoundly important. After her death, Darl is unable to resolve this issue with her and cannot move on to develop his own identity.

A Freudian analysis of Darl's reaction to his mother's death shows him to have a number of psychological nuances. Darl's personality developed from not having a strong relationship with his mother. Freudian psychology posits,

"If caretakers are rejecting or inconsistent, such trust may never be established... secure and insecure attachment styles continue to influence subsequent relationships even into adulthood..." (DeWolfe 805). Addie did not give Darl all of the love and attention that he needed, so he became attached to her in a very insecure way. Adamowski recognizes Darl's rejection by his mother, and notes, "his sense of personal integrity is desperately unstable... he is unsure of selfhood" (213). He connects this to Darl's clairvoyance, as an attempt to "see from afar" into his mother's mind (Adamowski 212). Adamowski finally connects Darl's psychological mixing with his family – the blurring of the lines between their minds – to the oral stage, where "not only are the boundaries missing between objects 'out there' in the external world, but 'out there' and 'in here' are themselves lost in the vast indistinction of orality (Adamowski 214). The oral stage here refers to Freud's stages of psychosexual development, where libidinal energy concentrates on different facets of the mind and body; the oral stage is the first stage. Conversely, Olga Vickery argues that Darl's clinging to his mother is because he is obsessed by his own relationship to her (Vickery 52). At the root of both arguments is the fact that Darl is desperately reliant on his mother.

Darl exhibits signs of two defense mechanisms, namely rationalization and repression, but they seem to not help his psychological state. Rationalization is a "Procedure whereby the subject attempts to present an explanation that is either logically consistent or ethically acceptable for attitudes, actions, ideas, feelings, etc., whose true motives are not perceived" (Laplanche and Pontalis 321). This defense is related to the burning of the barn; the barn holds his decaying mother, so it seems to Darl that it is acceptable to burn it down, for Addie's decaying body is attracting vultures. His ego is rationalizing, but the weakness of its explanation not only endangers the rest of the family, it fails to stave off his descent into madness. Darl's ego enacts repression when confronted with Addie's death, when the libidinal cathexis would be weakened further by thoroughly recognizing the loss of the object of his mother. Darl illustrates this when he asks Jewel, "'your mother was a horse, but who was your father, Jewel?'" (Faulkner 212). Here, the ego has pushed the thought of his mother being both human and dead away. By dissociating himself from his mother and employing dangerous defense mechanisms, Darl's sanity atrophies.

Darl's actions reveal him to be a melancholic with a case of narcissistic neurosis. Darl has all three "preconditions of melancholia:" he loses his mother; his ambivalence with his mother stems from his love-connection to her, even though he is "Banished from his mother's side" (Adamowski 212); and finally, his libido regresses onto his ego. This regression is shown in a convoluted form of self-reproach: Darl, who was not present at his mother's death, shows his internal turmoil over the event by burning down the Gillespie barn. This would, in effect, be cremating his mother, laying her to rest; for him, this would end his lingering guilt over not having been able to be with his

mother at the time of her passing. Darl's melancholia takes a drastic turn when he is taken away to the asylum in Jackson. Darl's ego-libido has grown so strong that it has overwhelmed his sense of reality; Darl says of himself, "Our brother Darl in a cage in Jackson where... looking out, he foams" (Faulkner 254). Darl's commitment to the asylum shows just how pathological his condition is – it has become narcissistic neurosis, because he is no longer able to escape his own mind, his own ego and relate to the outside world; his libido has become "dammed" up in his ego. Darl's inability to refocus his ego-libido turns him into a gibbering idiot, an example of the disastrous possible effects of melancholia.

Dewey Dell has a very different reaction to Addie's death – she does not care. Her apathy is not because she had a poor relationship with Addie, but because she has her own problem: she is pregnant. While working on the farm with the laborer Lafe, she decides that, "...if the sack [of cotton] is full is full when we get to the woods... I cannot help it," meaning she will consent to have sex with Lafe (Faulkner 27). Lafe manipulates the situation by putting the cotton he picked into her sack, leaving Dewey Dell feeling compelled to have sex with him. While it is ambiguous whether or not she truly wanted to, she is still stuck with Lafe's child – without being wedded to him. This unintended predicament of carrying a bastard child consumes her mind and all of her energy; she spends all her time thinking about how to get an abortion or pitying herself. When the family stops at Mottson, rather than grieving over Addie with her siblings, Dewey Dell goes to the drug store and tells the druggist, "Lafe said I could get it [abortion medicine] at the drugstore. He said to tell you me and him wouldn't never tell nobody you sold it to us" (Faulkner 202). When the druggist refuses, Dewey Dell becomes very upset, far more upset than she got at Addie's funeral – exposing her priorities. Similarly, when she starts thinking of her mother's death, her mind quickly shifts to a dream that reminds her of her affair. She thinks:

... I had a nightmare once... I couldn't think... all of a sudden I knew that something was it was wind blowing over me it was like the wind came and blew me back from where it was... and all of them back under me again and going on like a piece of cool silk dragging across my naked legs. [sic] (Faulkner 121 – 122)

Dewey Dell is feeling the psychological repercussions of her unintended sexual encounter. This dream is just one of many times when her mind is drawn back to her run-in with Lafe. Finally, when the family is in Jefferson to bury their mother, Dewey Dell frantically tries to get the drugs to induce an abortion, but shows no emotion during the burial. The affair, and its unintended result, dominates Dewey Dell's mind for the whole story.

The negative experience with Lafe determines Dewey Dell's psychology during the story. Similarly to Darl, Dewey Dell has issues surrounding her

concept of self. Adamowski writes that the scene “In the barn... must also make us feel her sense of abandonment. The seed she harbours within herself has caused her to feel not the synthesis of self and Other... but only a terrible confusion” (213). And, like Darl, the sense of abandonment from the death of her mother and her loss of selfhood due to her coming child raises some lingering oral traits (Adamowski 216). Whilst not necessarily at the level of a neurosis, this de-evolution of Dewey Dell’s psyche can serve to compound all of her other issues. Additionally, Dewey Dell is essentially unresponsive to her mother’s death because of her ego’s use of repression. Dealing with both her pregnancy and the loss of her mother at the same time could push Dewey Dell over the brink of madness – and direct libidinal energy away from the ego to the other object of her mother – so her ego pushes her mother’s death out of mind. Instead of facing Addie’s death, Dewey Dell is also processing how Lafe’s genitals psychologically hurt her, so she remains fixated upon them – but unhealthily. This preoccupation evolves into a dislike of all men, which MacGowan, a drugstore clerk in Jefferson, notices, thinking, “She... [was] one of them black eyed ones that look like she’d as soon put a knife in you as not...” (Faulkner 242). Due to her unfortunate experience with Lafe, Dewey Dell is unable to mourn her mother.

Based on the nature of her reaction to Addie’s death, Dewey Dell is perhaps the most self-centered of all of the Bundren children. This is primarily because she does not care that her mother has died; rather, she solely thinks of herself and her predicament. This is illustrated when she thinks to herself, “I heard that my mother is dead. I wish I had time to let her die. I wish I had time to wish I had. It is because in the wild and outraged earth too soon too soon too soon” (Faulkner 120). Here Dewey Dell thinks of her dead mother (though Addie is still an afterthought), but her mind immediately shifts to herself and her predicament. Because she desperately needs to find a drugstore to provide an abortion, she thinks that she has no time to mourn her mother (Swiggart 113). Because she so desperately needs an abortion, “Dewey Dell’s enthusiasm for the trip is a consequence of her being pregnant and hoping to find something in Jefferson to cure her trouble,” rather than to honor or mourn her mother (Swiggart 110). Thus, her reasons for going on the trip have nothing to do with Addie, but are all for her own gain. On a more Freudian level, Dewey Dell does not actively engage in the mourning process because her object-cathexis is her unborn child, rather than her mother. Adamowski argues that Dewey Dell does not feel a close connection with her mother because she is “bereft of the mother who might have helped her in difficulty” (213). Dewey Dell only thinks of herself and her troubles and does not mourn her mother, because Addie is not a strong object for her libidinal energy. This psychological situation translates into her seeming self-centered and uncaring, and highlights the importance of the mother’s presence in her child’s life.

In contrast to his sister’s apathy, Vardaman’s reaction to Addie’s death is very powerful and infantile. The youngest Bundren child, he is least able to

comprehend Addie's death. "To this end, he takes refuge in a primitive type of reasoning that draws logical and satisfying conclusions from the most implausible of premises..." (Tuck 37). This premise is that his mother is not actually dead, but is instead "...is a fish," because he caught a fish on the same day in which Addie died (Faulkner 84). Thus, Vardaman's childish mind makes the (tenuous) connection between Addie and a fish. But his mind cannot completely accept this weak logic. He thinks to himself, "... she was in the wagon... and I had to keep on running the buzzard away from her," showing an oscillation between concepts of his mother, the object (Faulkner 195). Even while Vardaman is trying to appease his psyche by determining his mother to be a fish, he knows deep down that she is really in the wagon, dead. Vardaman's puzzling over what is in the wagon is just one example of his constant existential rumination. This philosophizing is spurred by Addie's death, and is a very powerful reaction to it.

An analysis of Vardaman's reaction to Addie's death illustrates its strong, negative effects upon him. First, Vardaman is in the oral stage, and is likely to become stuck there. He is clinging to his idea of his mother in lieu of her being alive, but without her actually being alive, he will not be able to separate himself from his concept of her (Gilles 160). Adamowski concurs, noting, "we are invited... to attend to the privileged relationships between mother and children that reveal such oral themes as... fears of the terrible separation from the mother" (209). Vardaman's ego causes him to regress. Regression is "generally conceived of as a reversion to earlier forms in the development of thought, of object-relationships or of the structure of behavior" (Laplanche and Pontalis 332). Vardaman acts childishly, in order to avoid interacting with the coffin. As a child – or at least by acting childishly – he is not given the responsibility of watching over the coffin or saving it from falling in the river; because he does not have to handle the coffin, he does not need to confront the truth about his dead mother. More psychologically speaking, Vardaman, whose mind is dealing with the loss of an object-relationship with his mother, is deconstructing that object-relationship, bit by bit – so his ego is forcing him away from the coffin, which is associated with that object (his mother), in order to keep his libido from recathecting his mother, as he processes the loss. However, Vardaman's ego cannot save him from developing a melancholic condition.

Vardaman succumbs to pathology stemming from his mother's death. He exhibits signs of narcissistic neurosis. With his mother gone, Vardaman runs to visit Tull and Cora, his neighbors, in the middle of the night. They shelter him, but what he really wants is they to verify the existence of the fish, and by extension, his mother (Tuck 37). When this re-affirmation does not come, however, Vardaman begins the mourning process and starts reality-testing. He does this by trying to determine if Addie needs air to breathe:

... the next morning [after putting Addie in the Coffin] they found him in his shirt tail, laying asleep on the floor... and the top of the box bored clean full of holes and Cash's new augur broke off in the last one. When they taken the lid off they found that two of them had bored on into her face. [sic] (Faulkner 73)

When the family covers Addie's air supply with the coffin again, Vardaman's reality-testing breaks down, because he is brought to the stark truth of Addie's death. After that, then, the libidinal energy gets shifted from his mother to his fish, proclaiming, "*My mother is a fish*" [sic] (Faulkner 196). However, because the fish has been killed and eaten already, Vardaman's libidinal drive ends up redirecting towards his ego. For the latter part of the journey, Vardaman does not help the family, and sits in the wagon, musing to himself. This is also symptomatic of Vardaman's development of melancholia, which is more commonly related to the narcissistic neurosis (Laplanche and Pontalis 218). Vardaman's neurotic state becomes particularly visible when Darl gets taken away to the asylum. Vardaman thinks to himself, "*Darl he went to Jackson is my brother Darl is my brother*" [sic] (Faulkner 249). Vardaman does not have any emotional attachment to Darl (or, for that matter, any of his siblings), showing that all of his libidinal energy is now on his own ego. Vardaman shows how the mourning process may be started but then break down. He also shows another pathway to narcissistic neurosis and melancholia, a commonality with Darl; however, his avenue is different, in keeping with Faulkner's examination of the breadth of human psychology.

Unlike Vardaman and most of his other children, Anse reacts to Addie's death in a non-emotional way; he is more focused on his own needs rather than caring for his lost wife. Anse reacts to Addie's death with feigned sadness and resignation. When Addie was alive, she made him promise to bury her in Jefferson; Anse feels bound to that promise, and is resigned to making the funeral trip. Anse keeps saying, "... I don't begrudge her it," showing his commitment to fulfilling his promise (Faulkner 163). Anse feigns sadness because he enjoys having the attention that comes with being a widower. Olga Vickery points out "There is even a sense in which Anse thoroughly enjoys the situation as chief mourner for he is, for once in his life, a person of importance" (52). He seems sad to the others at the funeral because society demands it; however, he is not overly troubled by this loss. This is because he has hopes for personal gain. Just after Addie dies Anse says to himself, "Now I can get them teeth," showing his ulterior motives for making his funeral trip: the desire for material gain, solely for his own benefit (Faulkner 52). Anse even takes Dewey Dell's abortion money to buy the teeth, showing just how self-centered he is: he values a new set of dentures over his daughter's health and emotional well-being. Anse does not really care about Addie or her death, and thus does not have a very strong emotional reaction.

A psychopathological interpretation of Anse shows that he is not a well-adjusted adult. First, Anse rationalizes his selfish actions by claiming to

himself that he has fulfilled his word and laid Addie to rest, and now can treat himself to a new wife. More importantly, he claims that he has suffered from his lack of teeth, saying, "... in fifteen years I ain't et the victuals He aimed for man to eat to keep his strength up..." [Sic] (Faulkner 191). He feels that he can dishonor his dead wife's name because he suffered for all of those years and fulfilled his promise by burying Addie where she asked, and after the burial, she is unimportant. In *A Critical Companion to William Faulkner*, Anse is characterized as "... a selfish man who routinely relies on others, and has hidden motives..." (Fargnoli, Golay, and Hamblin 46). As Anse makes his journey, he takes whatever help others can give him without giving much back, and he is motivated solely by the desire for material gain. Additionally, Anse never helps his family when they need his aid and leadership. "Anse... is always the bystander, contemplating events [Rather than helping]..." (Vickery 51). An unassuming but telling example of Anse's uselessness is how he refuses to sweat, for fear of ill health effects (Faulkner 17). Because of this fear (or laziness), the rest of the family does all the work, and Anse takes whatever meager rewards their efforts produce. Additionally, the one time that Anse acts on his own, it is for his own gain. When the family needed a new set of mules to continue the journey, Anse's promise to Addie could have gone unfulfilled; he would not have been able to get his new teeth and wife, so he goes ahead and makes a deal for the mules with Jewel's horse. Darl saw the moment when the details of the trade came out, when Jewel exclaims, "... you tried to swap my horse?" (Faulkner 191). Anse is sacrificing Jewel's horse to let him get his new teeth. All of Anse's actions regarding the trip are self-oriented, and all result in the suffering of his children: "Vardaman loses a fish; Darl loses his reason; and Cash all but loses a leg" (Adamowski 224).

Anse acts in such a self-centered way because of his narcissism. For Anse, all of his libidinal energy is directed towards himself. Anse shows a developed ego-libido but not a strong object-libido. Freud, in his definition of narcissism, posits a balance between the two, so when the ego-libido is stronger, he develops a state of narcissism. And in this state of narcissism, Anse does not develop a strong object-cathexis around Addie, because his libidinal energy is focused on his ego. Anse's narcissism is evident he pursues his own pleasure with Addie; for example, Adamowski writes, "the all too sudden appearance of another child, Darl, testifies to Anse's insensitivity to his wife's drama of aloneness and violation" (211). Because Anse does not have Addie as an object-cathexis, he does not mourn for her – similarly to Dewey Dell.

The varying reactions to the death of Addie Bundren by members of her family, which show the different ways humans react to death, when psychoanalyzed, illustrate Faulkner's point that humans are innately self-centered. All of the Bundrens have different reactions to Addie's death: Cash reacts calmly, and goes through the grieving process normally; Darl becomes mentally unhinged, because he cannot handle her death; Dewey Dell just does not care, for she has an unwanted pregnancy to deal with; Vardaman reacts

strongly and uses childish logic to try and comprehend the loss, to no avail; and Anse feigns sadness and is resigned to fulfill his promise – and collect his reward. Each of the characters' reactions is different, showing the whole spectrum of human emotions and responses. Each Bundren responds to the loss of the object of Addie differently, from narcissistic neuroses to simple mourning, and much of what lies in between. All of the Bundrens act in a self-centered way, because their egos need to withdraw libidinal energy back to themselves, in order to process Addie's death. And by portraying all of these different shades of self-centeredness – which more often than not includes narcissism, Faulkner is making a point: that in each human, the mind acts in a self-centered way, and that everyone reacts differently to life's circumstances. Therefore, *As I Lay Dying* is a study not just in modernist techniques, but also in the richness of the human experience. It examines one of life's two constants (death – not taxes), and uses it to catalyze the unmasking of the complicated structure and energies that are the human mind. Faulkner is pointing to the fact that humans all react differently to life's circumstances, but, more often than not, are self-centered.

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