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Addie Bundren and Her Linguistic Dilemma

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ADDIE BUNDREN AND HER LINGUISTIC DILEMMA

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment

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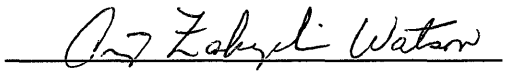

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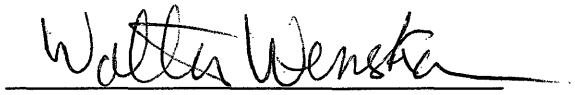

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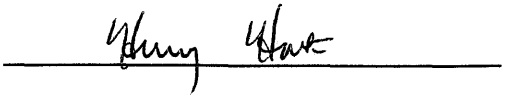

Henry Hart

Dedicated to "Adam Zachary," whose impending arrival provided the impetus to finish.

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ABSTRACT

Addie Bundren, a main character in William Faulkner's novel As I Lay Dying, arguably the central character, invites critical interpretation by virtue of her prominence in the novel and the complexity of her character.

One critical topic concerning Addie is her discussion of language. In her single, eight-page monologue, Addie forms a philosophy about language. She makes a clear distinction between words and acts and emotions, privileging acts and emotions as the true essence of life and condemning words.

Addie condemns words for their inadequacy in functioning as tools of communication. By their very nature, words are a faulty means for interpreting and communicating experience and meaning.

As a result of not being able to communicate adequately with other people, Addie is unable to attain the interpersonal wholeness she seeks, and she finds life a lonely and frustrating journey in which the chief objective is death.

ADDIE BUNDREN AND HER LINGUISTIC DILEMMA

Addie Bundren's section of William Faulkner's novel As I Lay Dying, clearly a focal point of the novel, has invited much critical interpretation with its many tantalizing suggestions and unanswered questions. In her single eight-page monologue, which seems to have little grounding in the storyline that surrounds it, Addie recounts complex thoughts and feelings as they have developed since her days as a schoolteacher, spanning a period of at least twenty years. Though she seems to have developed some rather sophisticated and strongly felt ideas, her discussion is often cryptic and ambiguous.

From the very beginning, Faulkner suggests Addie is the central character by referring to her in the title. All of the action seemingly revolves around her even after she dies. Her single monologue, coming approximately halfway through the novel, also marks her centrality. The fact that she is dead at the time provokes further attention to her monologue.

A number of critics have already established a case for Addie Bundren as the unifying element in As I Lay Dying. Helen Lang Leath, Michael Millgate, Andre Bleikasten, and Joseph Reed have all used geometric imagery, circular in

particular, to argue that Addie is the pivotal point around which the novel turns. Leath further claims that Addie Bundren's is the one voice in the novel that expresses the novel's truth and unifies the fragmented structure into a cohesive and meaningful whole.

Central to understanding Addie's section is the antithetical distinction she makes between words and acts and emotions. Leath observes Addie's "sure knowledge of the dichotomy between words and the acts and emotions for which words stand in the stead" (67); other critics have used Addie's problem with words to serve a number of arguments. Olga Vickery, an early critic of Faulkner, for example, establishes Addie as a focal point in the novel in terms of her relationship to each of the other main characters, her husband and children. They are obsessed with their relationships to her; she permeates their consciousness. Vickery explores these relationships in light of Addie's "conviction that language is a grotesque tautology which prevents any real communication" (53).

Another early critic of Faulkner, Edmond Volpe, who described <u>As I Lay Dying</u> as a series of paradoxes, marks Addie's monologue as the most important and effective device in establishing the "absurdity of human existence" in the novel (131). He identifies Addie's contempt for the "limbo" of words (135) and her proclivity toward "the instinctual forces within her that give her a vital sense of being

alive" (136). For Volpe, Addie's feelings about words establish a climate for viewing the Bundrens as either heroic or idiotic, their funeral journey as either an epic or a burlesque.

Constance Pierce goes further than these critics in exploring Addie's thoughts about language. She argues that Addie cannot find the wholeness in life that she seeks because she is a linguistic animal. This wholeness, this "Being" that Addie seems to long for, Pierce explains, can only be found outside of language; thus, it is always inaccessible to someone who tries to locate it through language.

Although Pierce's argument is persuasive, a more fundamental issue related to language needs to be probed. Addie's struggle seems to be more a search for interpersonal, rather then intrapersonal, wholeness. Throughout her monologue she reaches out to people (the schoolchildren, Anse, her own children, Whitfield), trying to become a part of their "secret and selfish li[ves]" (155). But what Addie identifies as the inadequacy of language continually frustrates her attempts at an integrated wholeness with another human being, making life for her an isolated and frustrating passage.

Addie takes the extreme stand that language is always ineffectual. In an effort to communicate, people try to re-create "reality" through a system of signs. They try to

communicate actions, experiences, and feelings through language--spoken, written, and sign language. But they are only trying. They can never actually re-create the reality that they have experienced. They can only "say at" that experience because words, by their nature, are imprecise and unstable.

Through the structure of the novel, Faulkner establishes the idea of subjective reality--a state defined by the subject. Unlike a traditional novel with numbered chapters, As I Lay Dying is composed of a series of fifty-nine monologues spoken by fifteen different narrators. The monologues are headed simply by the name of the speaker; they range in length from one sentence to ten pages. Although certain phenomena are accepted as facts, such as Addie's death, the structure of the novel suggests that much of reality is actually constructed in the minds of the narrators and varies according to individual perception. Each of the fifteen different narrators, or subjects, lives in his or her own "reality," his/her own separate world. The narrative structure provides a concrete portrayal of this isolated nature of people--sections unto themselves. Except for Addie, and probably Darl, however, the narrators seem unaware of their profound isolation, a suggestion from Faulkner that most people live in but are unaware of their isolated lives.

The different levels of consciousness in the monologues

portray two different kinds of worlds--a social world and a personal world. The characters interact in the social world, which presupposes an external physical reality, conversing and doing things together. But, for most of the characters, the social world is mundane and insignificant when compared with the depth and scope of the personal world. By and large, the characters' dialogue, which represents their interactions in the social world, is kept to a minimum, that which is necessary to get through the day. The vocabulary used in conversation is limited, repetitious, and colloquial. Their thoughts, on the other hand, which represent their personal worlds, soar off in hundreds of directions. Their internal ramblings are often highly poetic, loaded with symbolism, imagery, and lyricism, and their vocabulary sometimes jumps to unexpected heights, especially in the case of Darl and Vardaman. But, except for Darl's unexplained telepathic tendencies, personal worlds are inaccessible to others. Although the family shares social and cultural norms, they live in their own isolated personal realities.

The novelistic structure of As I Lay Dying is similar to The Sound and the Fury in that three of the four sections in The Sound and the Fury are also first-person monologues. The fourth section of The Sound and the Fury, unlike any of As I Lay Dying, is written from the point of view of what seems to be a traditional "omniscient" narrator and appears

to provide an objective viewpoint. Consequently, this final section is often accorded a final authority, is often thought to be the last word on the Compsons. But, in actuality, section four is just as subjective as the previous sections. The only difference between it and the previous sections is that the narrator is not a character in the narrative he recounts. Moreover, from the information we receive in the final section, we have no reason to discount the earlier sections as fantastic or insanely inaccurate or to accept the final section as more "objective" and "realistic." Section four does not contradict any facts of the stories told by the Compson brothers; it just clarifies what they are reacting to. The brothers tell the stories as they know them; no deliberate deceit is involved. Nor does Faulkner allow us to say of the final section, "Ah, now here is the objective truth in the Compson world," because there is no "objective truth" and Faulkner refuses to give the final narrator this false power.

Faulkner fully exploits this idea of subjective reality through his cast of characters in As I Lay Dying. His narrative technique of a series of monologues removes any hint of objective reality. The monologues prevent us from looking for "truth" in an "objective" narrator and force us to accept the monologues as the only reality. Faulkner

never appears to step in, as he does in The Sound and the Fury, with a seemingly "omniscient" narrator to define the "truth" of the characters' experiences because the "truth" varies according to the subject. In As I Lay Dying even the opportunity to accord objectivity to an "omniscient" narrator is withheld.

In a general way we see that despite the Bundren family living and working intimately together, their individual perceptions of reality differ greatly. Anse in his passivity follows the line of fate; he perceives the world as one stroke of bad luck after another, and he spends his life trying to duck it. Cash, a man of action, sees life as a series of tasks that he faithfully performs one after another. To Darl life is a game--a linguistic game. Life seems to be an enemy to Jewel, who lives in a state of unexplained fury. Dewey Dell, unconsciously and effortlessly, gives herself over to the forces of nature. Vardaman, a child, sees the world through a child's eyes; he finds life confusing and sometimes scary. To Addie, life is a lonely, frustrating passage--lonely and frustrating because she believes that the only chance of entering another person's consciousness, or reality, is through words, and words are inadequate in accomplishing this interpersonal union.

Addie clearly recognizes herself as an isolated being, and she links this isolation to language. Addie and Darl

are the only characters who are self-conscious enough about language to discuss it. The fact that Addie is dead when we reach her monologue calls attention to her section. The obvious and sudden change in content--from the vexing trip to Jefferson with Addie's corpse to Addie's recalling her past and her ruminations on life and language--suggests that her monologue has a different, perhaps illuminating, function in the novel. Addie's section might be interpreted as the core of the linguistic theory operating in the novel.

Although Faulkner's ideas were not so progressive as to allow us to say that he anticipated contemporary linguistic theory, a quick look at some of its basic principles helps illuminate Addie's philosophy.

Language is a system constituted by signs that attempt to establish meaning. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, the sign is arbitrary because there is no natural relationship between it and the thing to which it refers (the referent). A linguistic sign consists of two elements: the <u>signifier</u> is the sound-image or written substitute; the <u>signified</u> is the concept. Moreover, the ability of the signifier to convey meaning (its signified) rests on its differential characteristic: we identify words not by virtue of any intrinsic qualities in them, but rather by virtue of their differences from one another. Language is a culturally defined closed system in which the meaning of

each element depends on its position within the whole and its relationship to the other elements.

Consequently, meaning is not readily apparent in signifiers, which mean not in isolation but through a process of deferment. In the differential play of signifiers, as the mind tries to sort out and arrange the meaning of a group of words, meaning is deferred: perhaps until the end of the sentence, until we see how the various sound-images will come together; perhaps until the end of several sentences. According to some contemporary thought, meaning is deferred indefinitely, even continually, since a word always requires more words to define it.

Take, for example, the word "love." "Love" covers extensive ground. Do I mean romantic, brotherly, filial, or some other kind of love? Let's say I mean parental love. What do I mean by parental love? I may not define it the same way that you do. Do I mean responsible, caring, strict, supportive, patient? What do I mean by any of these words? By "responsible," I mean a number of things, such as committed to raising a healthy child. But linguistic answers to these questions only lead to more questions. What is healthy? How do you raise a healthy child? And so on. I must continually qualify what I mean by each word I use if I want to try to communicate my meaning. Still, I will never be able to communicate exactly what I mean. Language is ineffective in transmitting meaning that

accurately. Thus, I can only "say at," but I cannot transmit accurate meaning.

Speech and writing are always at one remove from the subject's consciousness. Because of the relational nature of language, meaning is dispersed along a whole chain of signifiers; in order for the words to have any coherent meaning, each one of them must contain the trace of the ones that have come before it and hold themselves open to the trace of those that are coming after. "Love" is just one word. Consider a whole conversation in light of the impotence of signs. Language is a very unstable affair, a sprawling limitless web where there is a constant interchange and circulation of elements. Nothing is ever fully present in signs because the sign can never <u>be</u> the referent. Therefore, it always takes more signs to try to fully explain the original signs. Further, since we cannot "experience" or think without language, we can never have a pure, unblemished <u>conscious</u> meaning or experience at all.

Western philosophy has been "logocentric," committed to a belief in some ultimate "word," presence, essence, truth, or reality that will act as the foundation of all our thought, language, and experience. It has yearned for the sign that will give meaning to all others and for the anchoring, unquestionable meaning to which all our signs can be seen to point. But there is no centering principle on which a whole hierarchy of meanings may be constructed. As

a result, all conclusions are provisional and therefore inconclusive, "truth" becomes impossible to ascertain, and meaning is forever in doubt.

Addie's section involves a condemnation of words because they fall short of communicating the essence of an experience, action, or feeling. Culturally established norms maintain a reasonably organized system of communication, but language rarely, if ever, carries the precision and clarity from mouth to ear that we may take for granted. It can carry degrees of precision, but never is it a totally accurate transmission of meaning.

In essence, As I Lay Dying is a demonstration of "saying at" insofar as each character is "saying at" the experience of burying Addie as well as Faulkner is "saying at" his theory of reality and language. Addie herself is only "saying at" what she believes. The linguistic philosophy that Addie voices helps to illuminate her character as well as the rhyme and reason behind the book. Addie does not trust words. She wants to get as close to actual phenomena as possible. Actions, tangible objects, and emotions are reality to her; words that describe these are a step removed from reality and can never appropriate it. At the very beginning of the novel, Faulkner presents her as a woman who must see to believe. As Cash builds the coffin, he must periodically raise his work to her window to assure her that the necessary preparations for her death are

being made. Neither being verbally reassured by her family nor being reassured by the sounds of carpentry satisfy her. She must see the physical phenomenon and process that information in her own personal world.

Cora Tull narrates the first description of her: "Her face is wasted away so that the bones draw just under the skin in white lines. Her eyes are like two candles when you watch them gutter down into the sockets of iron candle-sticks" (7). These two sentences emphasize Addie's face, particularly her eyes. Cora compares them to candles that "gutter down," unwittingly implying that her eyes reveal her life force. When the candles go out--when Addie can no longer see--she will be dead, because she is a creature of action and sight. Darl also identifies his mother's life force with fiery eyes when, in his mind, he sees Addie die: "She looks at Vardaman; her eyes, the life in them, rushing suddenly upon them; the two flames glare up for a steady instant. Then they go out as though someone had leaned down and blown upon them" (44). The fire that both Cora and Darl describe hints at the passion in Addie's nature.

As a young adult Addie found true communication only in action. When she taught school, she made human contact, touched a child's awareness, only when she hit a child: "Now you are aware of me! Now I am something in your secret and selfish life, who have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever" (155). Addie believed that action made them

aware whereas words did not. Perhaps the action did make them aware. But the communication was only one-way and doesn't seem to have answered Addie's desire for interpersonal wholeness. Addie's phrase "your secret and selfish life" suggests her awareness of the isolated reality in which people, including herself, live. Later she realized that the isolation results from mankind's inability to fully and accurately convey meaning through words.

By Addie's own admission when Cash is born, she was confused as a young adult: "I knew that it had been, not that my aloneness had to be violated over and over each day, but that it had never been violated until Cash came" (158). As a schoolteacher Addie believes that she "hates" the schoolchildren (155), presumably for violating her aloneness, which she retreats to after the children go home. Yet, she looks forward to the times when she can whip them and mark their blood with her own--a perverse metaphor in which Addie rejoices in her dominion over the children as well as in her bonding with them. She believes that she has broken into their secret and selfish lives. Addie's admission when Cash is born suggests that in fact she yearned for some kind of bonding with another human being, and the children were, in effect, victims of her frustration--her inability to form a human bond because, as she will later understand, of the ineffectiveness of words. Perhaps she does make the children "aware" of her, and maybe

she does become "something" in their "secret and selfish life," but the contact is only one-way and it is hardly the answer to Addie's search for human bonding.

The word "violated" seems a strange term for Addie to use. She initially uses the word according to its generally accepted meaning, as an unwanted intrusion, but after Cash's birth she realizes that a "violation" is exactly what she yearns for--someone who can break through her social persona. This seeming ambiguity results from Addie's process of self-discovery. In the beginning, with the schoolchildren, she wrongly interprets her frustration as annoyance at the children for violating her aloneness. But she realizes with Cash's birth that her aloneness--her psychological emptiness--had never been "violated"--or filled--until then, and she really did long for that "violation" in the sense of psychological union with another person. She wants to enter the "reality" of another person and the other person to enter into hers.

Addie says of Cash, "My aloneness had been violated and then made whole again by the violation" (158). Cash did "violate" Addie's psychological aloneness, her "reality," in the sense that the two naturally understand each other without words: "Cash did not need to say it [love] to me nor I to him" (158). Early in the book we see an example of this mother-child bond when Addie calls "You, Cash" and Cash, knowing instinctively what she wants, pauses in his

labor of love for her, lifts the pieces of the coffin, and wordlessly shows her how they will fit together (43). This bonding, however, still is not the answer to Addie's search. Addie sees Cash--all of her children--as simply components or divisions of herself. After Darl's birth, she says, "I was three now" (159). Thus, mother and child(ren) become a single unit and the aloneness is made whole again: "time, Anse, love, what you will, outside the circle" (158). The children seem to promise a release from her aloneness in life, but, being reproductions of herself, instead they are absorbed into and expand her circle of aloneness.

Becoming pregnant with and giving birth to Cash give impulse to a revelation for Addie: "And when I knew that I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it" (157). This revelation involves words. When Cash is born, she decides "that words are no good; that words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at" (157). With Cash, Addie has a basis for comparison that she did not have before. Cash, a nonverbal infant, is a "violation" whereas no one else, including Anse, has ever been. Thus, she condemns the use of words--the medium through which people make a feeble attempt at "violating," or communicating.

Addie sees words as the reason that she had been alone, even with a classroom of children, even with "Anse in the nights:" "We had had to use one another by words like

spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging and twisting and never touching" (158). The image Addie creates of spiders dangling by their mouths illustrates the precarious nature of language. She and the children swing and twist around one another but never touch. The same analogy applies to Anse. Addie sees herself as locked inside herself, as never making contact. "Living was terrible" because "words are no good; . . . words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at" (157).

Although Addie was not happy about Cash's conception, she was furious about Darl's. She did not blame Anse for Cash; perhaps she was ignorant of the reproduction process at that time and viewed it as an act of nature, or perhaps her hostility grew out of Cash's birth. But she does blame Anse for Darl: "Then I found that I had Darl. At first I would not believe it. Then I believed that I would kill Anse. It was as though he had tricked me, hidden within a word like within a paper screen and struck me in the back through it" (158). In this analogy Addie views words as tricks, and in the end she blames words: "But then I realised that I had been tricked by words older than Anse or love, and that the same word had tricked Anse too" (158-59). The "word" or "words" Addie blames are not clear. Perhaps she is referring to sex drives, which are as old as the first sexual organism; perhaps to the idea of family and, as the Bundrens are learning, all the responsibilities that go

along with it. What is clear, however, is that Addie is beginning to lose control over her life.

Up to this point Addie appears to have been in control of her own life. She was a schoolteacher with no living relatives; thus, she was an intelligent, self-supportive, self-directed human being. She appears to have been in control in her classroom, well prepared with disciplinary measures. She controls the courtship with Anse, the conversation, and the marriage proposal: twice she says, "So I took Anse" (156-57). But, now, with these surprising, unwelcome births, Addie begins to realize how little control she has, and how little words help.

Addie is characteristically vague (an expected part of her character given her evolving attitude toward words) when she says, "And when I knew that I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it" (157). In the literal contextual sense of the word, "this" seems to refer to giving birth: the answer to life, the reason for living, was to propagate life. This is probably an absurd notion to Addie and certainly terrible in the sense that birth only creates more people to participate in this chaotic, uncommunicable world.

Addie's quarrel with words is twofold. First, people use words without any experiential basis for them: "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. . . . fear was invented by someone that had never had the fear; pride, who never had the pride" (157-58). According to Addie, people who have never experienced these conditions--motherhood, fear, pride--fill the voids with words. They try to create an understanding of a condition by labeling it. But that label is simply a "shape to fill a lack" (158), an empty sign; they have no actual internal knowledge of "the thing," the referent.

Second, even people who do have experiential understandings of things cannot use words to communicate accurately since, as described earlier, meaning is continually deferred by the very nature of words. Addie sums up this point with her statement "words are no good; . . . words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at" (157). Note the extremity of the words "dont ever." The "say at" contains a sophisticated perception of the inadequacy of language. Words cannot ever appropriate reality; they can only attempt to "say at" what we mean.

Words cannot reach the essence of an experience, action, or emotion. Addie suggests this idea with her statement about motherhood: mothers don't need a word for what they do; they just feel it and do it. Without allowing for any value as a communication tool, Addie seems to believe that words are "just a shape to fill a lack." Addie may be overstating her case here, especially in light of her

own use of words to define her thoughts. Her thoughts, however, are far from complete in her monologue; she seems to hold back on verbalizing some critical points--things that she understands but will not allow the reader access to or cannot articulate. According to her own philosophy, saying them would, after all, enmesh them in the very problems she attacks.

Addie demonstrates her theory with the word "love." She says, "when the right time came, you wouldn't need a word for that anymore than for pride or fear" (158). The experience, the actual phenomenon (the referent), was the meaningful component; the word itself was only a meaningless sign. Thus, the meaningful mother/son relationship between Addie and Cash has no need for the word. But, by indifferently allowing Anse to use the word and by paralleling "Anse" with "love"--"it was Anse or love; love or Anse: it didn't matter" (158)--Addie marks the meaninglessness of her marriage.

After Darl is born, Addie asks Anse to promise to take her to Jefferson when she dies. Anse's initial answer completely disregards her request and her feelings: "Nonsense . . . you and me aint nigh done chapping yet, with just two" (159). Not only does he not answer with an affirmative, but he also suggests the desire for more children, a desire Addie does not seem to share. At this point Addie seems to understand that Anse, far from being

the soulmate in marriage that she had longed for, is actually the antithesis to her character--a man of stasis; he is content to continue in the life fate has laid out for him. From this point Anse no longer has life in Addie's eyes. Addie starts to ask herself "Why are you Anse," and the name becomes a shape, a vessel, a "pure" signifier. She imagines the physical person of Anse flowing into the shape --the signified into the signifier--but there is no longer a referent. The vessel becomes "a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame" (159). Addie forgets Anse's humanity and even his name--"I couldn't think Anse, couldn't remember Anse" (159)--and he becomes simply a shape that violates her body. When she thinks about Darl and Cash in the same way, the names die, solidify into a shape, and fade away; however, it does not matter. The names do not matter. "It doesn't matter what they call them," because the boys are living, breathing extensions of her--"I was three now" (159)--and she does not need names to appropriate the reality of the boys.

Addie metaphorically relates her philosophy about words: "Words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terrible doing goes along the earth, clinging to it" (160). Again, doing is reality; it clings to the earth affecting change, creating phenomena. Words go harmlessly away from the earth; they are ethereal and have less effect on human life. According to Addie, people who

will not or cannot do something, say it. You need to forget the words and the concept and just do it. Sensation and intellect are incongruent in Addie's philosophy--"sin and love and fear are just sounds that people who never sinned nor loved nor feared have for what they never had and cannot have until they forget the words" (160). Her example, seemingly a non sequitor in the text, is Cora's not knowing how to cook.

We recall that Cora's first monologue is suffused with self-praise for some cakes she recently baked. But Addie's one line--"Like Cora, who could never even cook" (160)--completely undermines Cora's culinary claims. Cora had, in fact, named Addie as one of the best cooks in the area--"There's not a woman in this section could ever bake with Addie Bundren" (7)--in effect giving Addie the authority to pass judgment on Cora's abilities. According to Addie's philosophy, Cora should have spent more time cooking and less time talking about it.

Addie's is an all or nothing philosophy: "after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle from one to the other" (160). Perhaps to make her point most forcefully and most clearly, Addie takes the argument of words vs. action to an extreme, isolating the two components of the dichotomy and not allowing for any legitimate function of language. Yet, her attack on language can only be framed in language and thus is subject

to the same limitations that she is criticizing. The imprecision of her language, therefore, might be a deliberate attempt to circumvent these limitations as well as a technique used by Faulkner to support Addie's refusal to ascribe a legitimate function to language.

Olga Vickery recognizes "Addie's intense desire for life and . . . her conviction that language is a grotesque tautology which prevents any real communication" (53). She defines Addie as a character who parallels "empty and significant" with "the word and the act": "She [Addie] concludes that any experience--love, marriage, motherhood, bereavement--can be either an intensely felt reality or a mere conventional form of speech and behavior." Vickery adds, however, that words are not necessarily empty for Addie if they are grounded in nonverbal experience: "There are, as Addie realizes, both 'the words [that] are the deeds, and the other words that are not deeds, that are just the gaps in people's lacks'" (53). Vickery interprets the first use of "words" as human articulations. But, once again, Addie uses a word (i.e., "words") to mean something other than its accepted meaning. She does not mean human articulations. According to Addie, "the words [that] are the deeds" are lodged in a "dark voicelessness" of the land: "I would lie by him in the dark, 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, coming down like the cries of the geese out of the wild darkness in the old terrible nights" (160). With the first use of "words," Addie does not mean a part of conventional speech, for they are in a "voicelessness"; "words" are sensations--smells, sights, tastes, touches, and inarticulate sounds, "like the cries of the geese out of the wild darkness"--from nature that affect Addie and thus are deeds.

Addie places great importance on nature. The first paragraph of her section introduces her as an earth mother and also foreshadows other insights. Here is Addie in what seems to be her most self-assured, most content persona. She is alone and "quiet," a word she uses four times in her opening paragraph. The fact that she is alone foreshadows the psychological isolation that she discusses. The repetition of the word "quiet" reinforces this isolation but does even more. It is words that distort reality for Addie, so only in silence can reality be found. And only with reality is Addie content.

Actually, Addie's haven is not quiet, as we would understand the meaning of that word out of context, out of its "chain of signifiers." Her use of this word, like her use of "violation" and "word" discussed earlier, is an obvious example of words meaning different things to different people, and it clearly provides a reason to

distrust language. We must define the word as Addie does in order to understand her meaning. She hears the water bubbling, she sees the sun slanting, and she smells the rotting leaves and new earth--three sensations that she characterizes with the word "quiet" but which, as we see, are not quiet, that is, in terms of affecting her senses. However, the arena is wordless--Addie's true silence. She has left the schoolhouse and words behind her and experiences nature in its pure, nonverbal state. Addie highly prizes nature as reality. Her hatred of the children might be interpreted at least partly as an expression of her discontent with her job as a teacher--a person who, at least at that time, attempts to relay knowledge almost exclusively through words. Perhaps Addie envies the nonverbal natural world.

The first paragraph also immediately marks her sensuality, a likely counterpart to a personality that values action and sensation over words. The first hint of her passionate nature is, of course, her communion with nature and appreciation of the earth. The second hint is her ability to sit and "hate." Conclusively, the final line in the first paragraph--"especially in the early spring, for it was worst then" (155)--strongly implies lusty yearnings. An important point to note in terms of the linguistic philosophy that she soon espouses is that she does not name the "it"; to do so would invalidate it. She uses the

pronoun "it" as well as "this" without clear antecedents at other times as well.

Twice Addie seeks to escape her psychological isolation through her sexuality--one of the most natural facets of man and woman. The first couple of pages in her section clearly mark Addie's need for sexual gratification. But in addition to satisfying her physical yearning, Addie is looking, unself-consciously as yet, for a way to break the interpersonal barrier between herself and another human being. Paragraph one attests to her sensuality; paragraph two to her need to communicate without words. In paragraph three she attempts a solution: "And so I took Anse" (156). But Addie is disappointed, disillusioned, angered that by "taking Anse"--a phrase that implies both marriage and sex--she gains only a child and the realization that her aloneness "had never been violated until Cash. Not even by Anse in the nights" (158).

As Doreen Fowler explains in Faulkner's Changing Vision: From Outrage to Affirmation, the nature of human existence is an outrage to Addie. She feels herself being helplessly swept along by natural forces and is kicking furiously against the "continuous and inevitable movement toward death" (23). Fowler fails to recognize, however, that even more outrageous to Addie is that she feels that she is alone in her struggle. Addie could be much more content if she could communicate her thoughts and emotions

and live, if not in harmony with nature, at least in harmony with other people.

Sex, and the possibility of an interpersonal wholeness, lures Addie once again through Whitfield. Addie's account of her affair with Whitfield suggests passion, romance, and danger. But again she is disappointed that their intimate sexual relations do not result in the intimate psychological relations that she seeks. Releasing her anger and frustration, she resigns herself to what she believes is the inescapable isolation of the human psyche. She says that she knows at last what her father meant.

Central to Addie's monologue are her musings on what her father meant when he said that "the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time." When she first mentions this thought--early in the second paragraph--she interprets it literally: "And when I would have to look at [the schoolchildren] day after day . . . and think that this seemed to be the only way I could get ready to stay dead, I would hate my father for having ever planted me" (155). She mentions her father again toward the middle of her monologue when she feels like she has been tricked by Darl's conception: "I knew that father had been right, even when he couldn't have known he was right anymore than I could have known I was wrong" (159). What Addie was wrong about is ambiguous. It seems likely, though, that she means that she was wrong in her initial interpretation of her

father's aphorism. A couple of pages later, in connection with her lover, she again thinks that she has found the meaning to her father's words: "I believed that the reason was the duty to the alive, to the terrible blood, the red bitter flood boiling through the land" (161). Her language, however--"I believed"--suggests that she does not yet understand his words. Finally, near the end of the monologue, after her affair with Whitfield and with Jewel's birth, Addie expresses a definitive understanding: "I knew at last what he meant and that he could not have known what he meant himself, because a man cannot know anything about cleaning up the house afterward" (162). Addie's final understanding seems to be connected with the natural succession of life, the processes of being born, giving life, and dying. She "says at" her final understanding of his words, but in an elusive metaphor. Addie leaves the reader puzzled just as her father left her.

Although Addie's comprehension of her father's words is unclear, it is, inevitably, different from her father's. She has arrived at her own understanding through the events of her life, which were undoubtably different from his. She rejected several interpretations of his words and finally settled on one that was clear only to her. Since this "understanding" cannot be put into words, she does not try to communicate it.

In relation to her understanding of her father's words

of wisdom, Addie's final preparation for staying dead is "cleaning her house." "Cleaning her house" seems to consist of two things: releasing her "wild blood," or passion, and reparation to Anse. After Jewel is born, "the wild blood boiled away and the sound of it ceased" (162). Her natural passion was released; from Jewel's characterization, it seems to have been transferred directly to him. In atoning for her infidelity to Anse, she bears two more 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. And then I could get ready to die" (162).

Without calling herself a sinner, Addie recognizes her sin against Anse and atones for it. She is fully aware in her concluding paragraph, then, of the irony of Cora's beseeching. Addie doesn't use the words of prayer as Cora does for reparation; she actually identifies her sin and tries to repair the damage that she has done to another. "Sin" <u>is</u> just a word, and so is "salvation."

Addie came closest to the interpersonal wholeness she sought in life during her nonverbal experiences: her whippings of the children, giving birth, her relationship with Cash, her sexual encounter with Whitfield. She may have even experienced a wholeness during one or more of these encounters. As a linguistic animal, however, she cannot recognize or understand this achievement. She would

have to access such a recognition through words, and words are inadequate in appropriating the essence of the experience.

With Addie's death comes her freedom. She leaves behind her the linguistic web of communication that was so necessary and yet so inadequate in life. With her interment, her body becomes part of the earth, probably a restful place for a woman who seemed to yearn for the nonverbal natural world. If life was lonely and frustrating for Addie, at least it was temporary, and now she can "stay dead a long time" and never have to sort through linguistic mazes again.

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