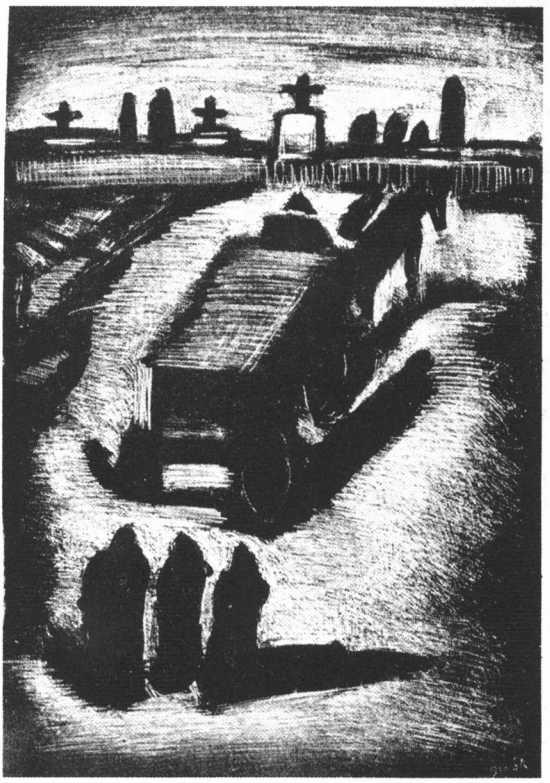
"Sin, Salvation and Bananas": *As I Lay Dying*



By JOSEPH GOLD

> *Hopeful*: But it must needs be a comfort to him that they got not this jewel from him.
> *Christian*: It might have been great comfort to him, had he used it as he should;

As I Lay Dying is, of all Faulkner's novels, the most taxing of the critic's ingenuity. If this seems like an excuse by way of preliminary, it is also an explanation of the extraordinary range of ingenious interpretation that has so far accumulated. By virtue of its structure, that is, both its plot development

[1]This essay was written with the continuous assistance of my former graduate student at the University of Waterloo, Judith Miller, who not only prepared the bibliography, but also acted as sounding-board and devil's advocate whenever she was needed. I am indeed grateful for her help and patience.

and its multitude of viewpoints; by reason of its wealth of allusion, its style and extreme ranges of diction; and because of its variety of tone, its irony and seriousness, it has produced an almost complete critical confusion. It is indeed the "tour de force" that Faulkner claimed it to be in his famous pronouncement. The novel is compressed, elliptical, enigmatic and ambiguous. It is replete with allusion and suggestion. God, religion in general, the Old and New Testaments, Greek mythology and even, as one critic at least has pointed out,[2] John Bunyan, are all present in greater or lesser degree. The critical dilemma has been to find, in the face of this *embarras de richesse*, a reading that brings all these features into focus, to produce coherence out of disparate materials. The treasure is spread around all right; everyone seems agreed that we can stop digging, but what can we now make of it? One is reminded of pictures of those frighteningly painstaking archeological reconstructionists who, surrounded by hundreds of pieces of numbered fragments, spend weeks (months? years?) putting together an urn. The critic of this novel it seems, like these other diggers and menders, is driven on by the faith, the indefinable yet strong conviction, that the parts do indeed fit. In looking at this novel once more, I also am compelled by the belief that a series of observations is no longer sufficient.

In many respects, and in spite of its quantity, the criticism addressed to *As I Lay Dying* is probably the most unsatisfactory corpus of response to any of Faulkner's works. It fails, as I have said, to provide the reader a sense of the novel as a whole and might, on the contrary, provide an impression of considerable confusion. Others have expressed their frustration at this state of affairs. Robert W. Kirk claims that "Among Faulkner's major novels *As I Lay Dying* is the one critics and scholars seem most frequently to misunderstand."[3] Calvin Bedient felt sure in 1968 that no interpretation would open for the reader a cohesive vision of the novel's meaning: "at any rate, there is clearly no Ariadne's thread that will lead one through the novel."[4] Presumably, nothing written since would lead to a change in this view. Mr. Bedient explains that this is not the failure of criticism itself, but the nature of this novel, which is resistant to analysis of the "Ariadne's thread" kind. "The novel has a wonderful immunity to schematization; it is innocent of both a moral and morality, and it seems to breathe out rather than posit a world view."[5] Finally we are told that this critical resignation is the only proper response, that we had better relax and enjoy the novel's kaleidoscope of effects and not torment ourselves with trying to explain the inexplicable. "*As I Lay Dying* is to be 'seen,' not understood; experienced, not translated; felt, not analyzed."[6] It is not surprising, in the light of this critical surrender, to find many widely disparate interpretations of the novel and its parts and the critical canon reveals an extraordinary array of sugges-

[2]Michael Millgate, *The Achievement of William Faulkner* (London: Constable, 1966), p. 110.

[3]Robert W. Kirk, "Faulkner's Anse Bundren," *Georgia Review*, 19 (Winter 1965), 446.

[4]Calvin Bedient, "Pride and Nakedness: *As I Lay Dying*," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 29 (Mar. 1968), 63.

[5]*Ibid.*, p. 61.

[6]*Ibid.*, p. 62.

tions. In 1957, Carvel Collins claimed to have discovered, in characteristically inconsequential fashion, a profound parallel between *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*.[7] Both novels, we are told, are built on a trilogy, or trinity, in which three characters become one—Benjy, Quentin and Jason together compose Christ, and Addie, Dewey Dell and Cora become Demeter-Persephone-Kore. Naturally these Faulkner versions invert their supposed originals. We are not told what all this means and how it helps and one can only regret that instead of providing illumination, Collins has merely made darkness visible. Since Demeter, Persephone and Kore are three different names for two goddesses, their threeness hardly seems relevant. In spite of the unsatisfactory nature of this kind of reading, it apparently struck sympathetic chords in Mary Jane Dickerson, who, unwilling to let sleeping goddesses lie, repeated Collins' main arguments nine years later, adding a reference to *The Golden Bough* and observing, "here, Faulkner uses a myth of rebirth and fertility to tell a wasteland story of sterility in human relationships."[8] This last critic also notes a "strong vein of irony" in the novel but this does not carry us far. More interesting is the wasteland idea, which Miss Dickerson makes the centre of an earlier reading. In 1964 she wrote that Eliot's poem and this novel shared, somehow significantly, a concentration on Spring as a bad time, life coming out of the dead land, fire and water imagery and vegetation myths.[9] Clearly none of this satisfied the critic and she put her money on fertility at the heart of the matter, which presumably led to the later article mentioned above.

If Faulkner has led more than one critic to comparisons with T. S. Eliot, others have ranged far and wide in their comparisons for *As I Lay Dying*, without, in my view, shedding anything like light on the novel's force, vitality or structure. Robert W. Weber lumps Faulkner's characters with those of Dostoievsky's *Crime and Punishment* and those of Camus' *L'Etranger*, all of whom somehow derive from Byronic origins.[10] It might be hoped that out of this wide selection of parallels something stimulating should emerge—something good from so much togetherness. Alas, Faulkner's novel remains as elusive as ever. John K. Simon finds that not only is Darl the "author surrogate," but he is rather like Hamlet, a perceptive madman,[11] which may be an unintentionally amusing observation, but not more helpful to the reader than it is flattering to the Nobel Prize-winning author. Perhaps a more interesting comparison, though again it tells us nothing of what Faulkner has made of his sources if sources they are, is pointed out by M. Thomas Inge.[12]

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[7]Carvel Collins, "The Pairing of *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*," *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 18 (1957), 114-23.

[8]Mary Jane Dickerson, "Some Sources of Faulkner's Myth in *As I Lay Dying*," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 19 (Summer 1966), 135.

[9]Mary Jane Dickerson, "*As I Lay Dying* and *The Waste Land*—Some Relationships," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 17 (Summer 1964), 129-35.

[10]Robert W. Weber, "Raskol'nikov, Addie Bundren, Meursault: Sur la Continuite d'un Mythe," *Archiv. fur den Studien den neueren Sprachen* (Herrig.), 202 (1965), 81-92.

[11]John K. Simon, "What Are You Laughing At, Darl?" *College English*, 25 (Nov. 1963), 104-10.

[12]M. Thomas Inge, "William Faulkner and George Washington Harris: In the Tradition of Southwestern Humour," *Tennessee Studies in Literature*, 7 (1962), 47-59.

George Washington Harris, whose writing Faulkner undoubtedly knew, wrote a story called "Well, Dad's Dead!" which also recounts a funeral journey replete with mishaps. So far, so good, and now, what next? As with so many of these influence-and-comparison critiques, things are left in a terrible state of stasis. Even Cleanth Brooks sees profound resemblances to ancient material as we see from the title of his essay "Odyssey of the Bundrens," but when we look for the significance of such a parallel we find only a general respect for the power of the novel—"beneath the surface there are depths of passion and poetry that are terrifying in their power."[13] Richard Bridgman likewise found some interesting parallels with Hawthorne's work.[14] Jewel finds his antecedent in Pearl and Whitfield in Dimmesdale. Both cuckolded husbands are humpbacked. It is all very interesting. Indeed one might add that if one is looking for humpbacked prototypes the best is Christian Pilgrim, a journeying figure burdened (Burden-Bundren-Bunyan?) by his hump until he is lightened in the country ruled over by the King of Heaven, the city or capital to which this Pilgrim is headed. Michael Millgate points to tempting comparisons with the Bunyan novel, with Jefferson as the celestial city and heavenly rewards in the form of new teeth and a gramophone and Darl being sent down the path to Hell, at the moment of nearing the seat of bliss. One might extend these provocative associations by pointing to how much is made of the "jewel" owned by one Little-Faith in *Pilgrim's Progress* and how little he values it, for this jewel it is which will get him into the Celestial City and he hardly knows its significance. But I am distracting myself from my survey of the critical views of Faulkner's novel, a survey necessary to my own interpretation, for in all this volume of criticism one has a context to acknowledge, a setting in which new responses take their place and must of necessity re-use old ones. Some of the criticism is not especially helpful on other grounds, zeroing in on recondite aspects of details of the novel and stretching the reader's credulity without enlightening his understanding, as in Rosemary Franklin's theory that the entire coffin-building preoccupation derives from Faulkner's knowledge of and passionate interest in animal magnetism and phrenology.[15] It is all rather depressing and esoteric, as is Roma King's Janus symbol study, which while it has the ring of some real pieces of truth, and while it has the virtue of bravely attempting a coherent rendering, ends up making one feel a long way from the novel instead of closer to it.[16] Horse and fish imagery do indeed relate to Jewel and Addie, life and death, etc., but these images are only embellishments, not foundations of the main theme. And what can one do with the claim that *As I Lay Dying* is "Faulkner's most revealing comment on parental influence"?[17] Another critic is upset by the second Mrs. Bundren who, while bringing goodies like the gramo-

[13]Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 165.

[14]Richard Bridgman, "As Hester Prynne Lay Dying," *English Language Notes*, 2 (June 1965), 294-96.

[15]Rosemary Franklin, "Animal Magnetism in *As I Lay Dying*," *American Quarterly*, 18 (Spring 1966), 24-34.

[16]Roma A. King, Jr., "The Janus Symbol in *As I Lay Dying*," *University of Kansas City Review*, 21 (1955), 287.

[17]Charles Allen, "William Faulkner: Comedy and the Purpose of Humour," *Arizona Quarterly*, 16 (Spring 1960), 64.

phone, brings also an "aura of hard and grasping materialism," a sad come-down, we are led to believe, from Addie.[18] I think I prefer the second Mrs. Bundren to the first.

There is, of course, a great deal of commentary on the style, structure and technique of this extraordinary novel. The experiment in point of view, the progression through indirection by various narrators, later to be used with very much more sophistication in *Absalom, Absalom!*, necessarily calls for analysis and discussion. Faulkner's ingenuity and control here is a landmark of twentieth century writing. One of the interesting points made by two critics is that *As I Lay Dying* was subject to considerably more revision than Faulkner led readers to believe by his account of a six-week composition, virtually unaltered. James A. Winn and long before him George P. Garrett[19] both compared manuscript pages to the published text to make the claim for Faulkner as a careful revisionist, whose alterations were purposeful and reinforced the central themes and ironies of a particular work. The urge to prove this to be the case arises in a special way with this novel through the author's describing it as a "tour de force," probably Faulkner's most famous single comment on any of his work. My own view is that this description applies, not to the details of composition, the choice of words, the structure and language, but rather to the concept itself, the overall force and dynamics of it. I will turn to this later.

Not all critics have avoided venturing at the meaning of the novel as a whole, and the most recurrent term for categorizing its outlook has been "Existential." Robert M. Slabey does not hesitate to call this an Existential novel, saying that it is concerned with the "contrast or valuative distinction between appearances and reality, death and life, non-being and being, negation and affirmation, pseudo-existence, emptiness and fulfillment, the prose of moral tags and poetry of action."[20] Robert Hemenway's title, "Enigmas of Being in *As I Lay Dying*,"[21] indicates that he too sees the novel as about modes of living, about the vitality of the present, and James M. Mellard, who finds Cash the novel's hero, sees it as a philosophical work, and implies an Existential reading by his commentary on the antithesis between the "nominalism" of Addie and the "idealism" of Darl and the need to find a place somewhere between them, which Cash, speaking for Faulkner, does, according to the critic.[22] These are useful terms though they seem an imposition on the poor-white character and atmosphere of the novel itself. I suppose that one might argue that Addie's section and Darl's many lucubrations themselves violate the setting in which they occur and that Darl at least is a philosopher whose one-room schooling hardly seems adequate to his unspoken

[18]David F. Sadler, "The Second Mrs. Bundren: Another Look at the Ending of *As I Lay Dying*," *American Literature*, 37 (Mar. 1965), 65-69.

[19]James A. Winn, "Faulkner's Revisions: a Stylist at Work," *American Literature*, 41 (1969), 231-50; and George P. Garrett, "Some Revisions in *As I Lay Dying*," *Modern Language Notes*, 73 (June 1958), 414-17.

[20]Robert M. Slabey, "*As I Lay Dying* as an Existential Novel," *Bucknell Review*, 11 (Dec. 1963), 20.

[21]Robert Hemenway, "Enigmas of Being in *As I Lay Dying*," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 16 (Summer 1970), 133-46.

[22]James M. Mellard, "Faulkner's Philosophical Novel: Ontological Themes in *As I Lay Dying*," *Personalist*, 48 (Autumn 1967), 509-23.

language-mastery. Similar styles of response run through much of the other criticism of the novel. Finally there is a wide range of judgement as to Faulkner's intention, all the way from Edward Wasiolek's view that "Faulkner's tone is bitterly ironic, resigned, and masochistically insistent not only on the bitter condition of man's life, but also on the obtuseness of man's awareness of it,"[23] to Richard Hauk's glowing adultation for the Bundrens as examples of heroism and sacrifice.[24]

This survey of the typical range of critical response is not merely of passing interest, a casual, annotated bibliography. It is revealing of the persistence of certain attitudes to which critics must return again and again, for however distorted the actual rendering of an insight one should respectfully recall Faulkner's contention at Virginia, that whatever the critic finds is probably there. At the least there are grains of truth in the discovery of myth and impressions of loneliness and the problems of communication that the novel conveys by its structure of isolated viewpoints. Welding all of this together is, however, another matter and at this point in time any criticism which fails to attempt such a reading can hardly justify its publication.

One of the strange effects of the novel's arrangement into a series of subjective viewpoints is that only the whole, the total effect of the novel, can represent the author's view. Although Addie, Peabody, Cash and Darl have all been contenders for the role of Faulkner spokesman, no character in the book functions in the way that Dilsey's section of *The Sound and the Fury* does, where the technique itself has been altered to convey a shift from subjective or interior perspective to objective or external commentary on preceding events. Every viewpoint in *As I Lay Dying* is true to its own character source and this control is never violated. Thus Peabody, the good-humoured though cynical physician-materialist, the curator of the flesh, is shaken out of his assurance by the amazing persistence and endurance of his Bundren patients and their capacity for suffering. This being so we cannot trust his earlier philosophizings and must bring to bear our own external judgement rather than submit to his. Similarly each character is imprisoned in his or her own perception and only by careful, comparative viewing and by finally submitting to our impression of the totality, after having "thought long and deeply" can we approach a coherent view that we can render coherently.

It is the novel's very control, its internal truth to itself, that has led to the huge collection of fragmentary and conflicting critical commentary. Nevertheless, the critical survey is valuable and is where we ought to begin, for certain themes recur, as the critics persistently unveil them, however juggled and reinterpreted they appear in close-up. Echoes from Greek mythology and fertility myth and ritual, the burial of the god, resurrection (Mrs. Bundren II), Christian symbolism and ontological and existential themes, all abound. Can they all be reconciled? Can Cash be Hephaistos, as Elizabeth Kerr has pointed out,[25] and can Dewey Dell be Persephone while at the same time

[23]Edward Wasiolek, "*As I Lay Dying*: Distortion in the Slow Eddy of Current Opinion," *Critique*, 3 (1959), 23.

[24]Richard B. Hauck, "The Comic Christ and the Modern Reader," *College English*, 31 (Feb. 1970), 498-506.

[25]Elizabeth M. Kerr, "*As I Lay Dying* as Ironic Quest," *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 3 (Winter 1962), 5-19.

Anse is an ironic Noah (cf. Blotner[26]) and Jewel is an inverted Saviour? The answer is assuredly yes. By way of apology for what follows, I can only say that it is not more unlikely than what others have said and that the critic cannot always, or perhaps ever, discover "the" truth but only give some views which may help the reader of fiction to his own better understanding. The novel, this novel, is not a jigsaw puzzle and the pieces may not in the end fit together. It is a vision forged out of the imagination of an extraordinary intelligence and requires imaginative response.

> In contrast to the three men, Cora Tull and Whitfield see the Bundrens solely in terms of their own ethical systems. It is fitting, therefore, that Addie's soliloquy, with its emphasis on the separation of the word and the act, should be flanked by their moralizing and empty rhetoric.[27]

This remark of Olga Vickery's, in her celebrated essay, seems to me a good starting point. If there is any heart of the novel it is in these three sections, placed just about halfway through and containing two viewpoints heard once only, Addie's and Whitfield's. All three speak of the same subject, Addie's adultery and character and marriage and each gives it a special rendering that constitutes one of three possible readings. All three have one thing in common, a solipsistic view of man and God and the unbounded self-indulgence that gives rise to it. It is tempting to play with the names of the novel (always a desperate critical move) as Collins does in making Cora into Kore, a rather obscure Greek name, and as will shortly be seen I am not free from a yielding to the same temptation—is Anse an anagram for Sane?[28] Only Whitfield has a precise, unaltered historical namesake, Whitefield or Whitfield, the eighteenth century evangelist preacher. Their names, their professions, and much else is the same and yet disturbingly, other critics do not find this a point of significance. This is not very reassuring, yet I am fascinated by the idea that by beginning here, much else falls into place. If the Whitfield of the novel is indeed a parody of Rev. George Whitefield, we should not be surprised. The links between Faulkner and the great English tradition of thought and literature have by now been well illustrated, with ample evidence of the influence of Shakespeare and Dickens.[29] Faulkner himself placed Fielding in this tradition, when speaking of those whom he read often and whom he regarded most highly. Speaking of the modern writer, Faulkner said,

> His characters do not function, live, breathe, struggle, in that moil and

[26]Joseph L. Blotner, "*As I Lay Dying*: Christian Love and Irony," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 3 (April 1957—Jan. 1958), 14-19.

[27]Olga W. Vickery, "The Dimensions of Consciousness: *As I Lay Dying*," in *William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism*, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (New York: Harcourt, 1960), p. 233.

[28]I am more seriously tempted by Anselm, a saint whose two most famous works were a lengthy argument to prove the existence of God, and a treatise justifying the existence of the clergy. As I hope will become clear, both subjects have a relevance to the novel.

[29]See, for instance, my article: "Dickens and Faulkner: The Uses of Influence," *Dalhousie Review* 49 (Spring 1969), 69-79.

> seethe of simple humanity as did those of our predecessors who were the masters from whom we learned our craft: Dickens, Fielding, Thackeray, Conrad, Twain, Smollett, Hawthorne, Melville, James; their names are legion whose created characters were not just weaned but even spawned into a moil and seethe of simple human beings whose very existence was an affirmation of an incurable and indomitable optimism—[30]

In regard to *As I Lay Dying*, the quotation is interesting in many ways, but for the moment I am concerned only with the mention of Fielding. For Fielding, Whitefield was an arch-enemy. Parson Adams says in *Joseph Andrews* that the doctrine of faith over good works is Satanic.

> "Sir," answered Adams, "if Mr. Whitefield had carried his doctrine no farther than you mention, I should have remained, as I once was, his well-wisher. I am, myself, as great an enemy to the luxury and splendour of the clergy as he can be . . . But when he began to call nonsense and enthusiasm to his aid, and set up the detestable doctrine of faith against good works, I was his friend no longer; for surely that doctrine was coined in hell; and one would think that none but the devil himself could have the confidence to preach it."[31]

Fielding and Whitefield both were at the centre of the great eighteenth century debate on Faith and Works and on opposite sides. It was a theological conflict then, a political conflict in the nineteenth century and a philosophical one in the twentieth century, but it has never disappeared. From what one can learn of George Whitefield, the Faulkner character is a perfect thumbnail parody, albeit a hostile rather than a friendly one, for Faulkner is undoubtedly on Fielding's side of the argument. Whitfield has the characteristic and absolute assurance in his own pipeline to God; the same belief that the world has been constructed and arranged to test his virtue; the same belief in his powers of moral rightness and the same assurance in faith over works—"the will for the deed." What a superb bit of satiric irony on the entire pseudo-Methodist position!

Seen in this way, and having made these links with the earlier faith-works debate, one can see that Addie's monologue on words and deeds is essentially the other side of the same coin. Her union with Whitfield, the faith man, of all people, is a hugely grotesque joke. But more of this later. I mention it now only by way of saying that the entire novel seems to me to be on this subject; it is Faulkner's version of, his contribution to, the great debate. The twentieth century form of this argument is without benefit of theology, and if one could imagine the issues presented as though God were dead, they would appear in the shape of Existentialism versus Nihilism or despair. We may thus account for the strong accompaniment of existential criticism surrounding the novel. In fact, however, the people in this fiction do have an incipient belief in God and are well equipped with the rhetoric of traditional Christianity. For this reason the existential responses of the Fifties and Sixties

[30] *Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia 1957-1958*, ed. by Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (Charlottesville, Va.: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1959), p. 243.

[31] *Joseph Andrews*, Bk. I, Ch. 17.

seem somewhat distorting. It would be more in keeping with the novel's spirit to shed the philosophical terms and to speak of Faulkner as presenting the struggle of viewpoints as that between the forces of life and those of death. In this way he has broadened and deepened the theological argument into a kind of modern metaphysic. His subject is ways of living versus ways of dying. The novel, indeed, takes on more of the atmosphere of the Old Testament (Faulkner's favourite book) than of the New. In fact, the New Testament and its accretion of theology and rhetoric that is part of the author's background, emerges as the source of a deathview, putting its emphasis on "after-life," a concept abhorrent to Faulkner, even in the version it takes in Addie, whose corrupt physical presence and brooding psychological presence give a macabre irony to "after-life." The three sections, Cora, Addie and Whitfield, represent the "Christian" view of the novel, a rejected view, and their trilogy of attitudes brilliantly covers the range of historical Christian thought as Faulkner chooses to see, or to present, them.

There can be no doubt that religion functions centrally in the novel as part of the lives of these people and that God is a principal character. Anse's "Old Marster" continues to be important right into *The Mansion* and He certainly plays a significant rôle in determining events if the people of the fiction regard Him as determinant. Aside from Cora and Whitfield, who speak of little else, Anse depends heavily on God for some kind of support.

> I have heard men cuss their luck, and right, for they were sinful men. But I do not say it's a curse on me, because I have done no wrong to be cussed by. I am not religious, I reckon. But peace is my heart: I know it is. I have done things but neither better nor worse than them that pretend otherwise, and I know that Old Marster will care for me as for ere a sparrow that falls. (AILD p. 364)[32]

Not only here, but in other pronouncements, does Anse recall the long-suffering Job, whose suffering is finally justified, whose comforters are shamed and who has all restored to him, including a new wife (and perhaps even some new children), new possessions and if he had needed them would probably have received new teeth.

> It's a hard country on man; it's hard. Eight miles of the sweat of his body washed up outen the Lord's earth, where the Lord Himself told him to put it. Nowhere in this sinful world can a honest, hard-working man profit. It takes them that runs the stores in the towns, doing no sweating, living off of them that sweats. It ain't the hard-working man, the farmer. Sometimes I wonder why we keep at it. It's because there is a reward for us above, where they can't take their motors and such. Every man will be equal there and it will be taken from them that have and give to them that have not by the Lord.
>
> But it's a long wait, seems like. It's bad that a fellow must earn the reward of his right-doing by flouting hisself and his dead. We drove all the rest of the day and got to Samson's at dust-dark and then that bridge was gone, too. They hadn't never seen the river so high, and it's

[32]References in the text are to the Modern Library Edition of *The Sound and the Fury*; *As I Lay Dying* (New York: Random House, 1946).

> not done raining yet. There was old men that hadn't never seen nor heard of it being so in the memory of man. I am chosen of the Lord, for who He loveth, so doeth He chastiseth. But I be durn if He don't take some curious ways to show it, seems like.
>
> But now I can get them teeth. That will be a comfort. It will.
>
> (AILD pp. 414-15)

True, this is a comic Job, but I cannot see in him the villain that others have so often described. The theme of saying and doing, of faith and works, is echoed continuously and the reader is never allowed to forget it, either in the action or in the commentary on the action. Tull, for instance, who is both participant and commentator, says,

> Now and then a fellow gets to thinking. About all the sorrow and afflictions in this world; how it's liable to strike anywhere, like lightning. I reckon it does take a powerful trust in the Lord to guard a fellow. . . .
>
> (AILD p. 388)

These mentions of the Lord and Old Marster are augmented by other echoes such as New Hope Church on the signpost, which has distinct overtones of *Pilgrim's Progress* allegory in it, including the hazards of the straight and the narrow path which lead to Jefferson, the local Kingdom of Heaven, so to speak.

> It turns off at right angles, the wheel-marks of last Sunday healed away now: a smooth, red scoriation curving away into the pines, a white signboard with faded lettering: New Hope Church. 3 mi. It wheels up like a motionless hand lifted above the profound desolation of the ocean; beyond it the red road lies like a spoke of which Addie Bundren is the rim. It wheels past, empty, unscarred, the white signboard turns away its fading and tranquil assertion. (AILD p. 413)

The background of religions is a framework and more, indeed a pervasive part of the picture itself. What of the picture? Someone has died, someone with a common enough story, and has left a family not only with their own human problems but also with the task of carrying her putrifying corpse through twenty impossible miles to a casual burying with her ancestors in Jefferson. All the cost, danger, discomfort, pain and humiliation of this journey are foisted onto the family by a promise exacted in revenge by the living woman. Why does she want this revenge? Addie wishes to impose herself, to force her presence on those whom, she believes, have never really become part of her, seen her, been one with her, pleasured her or understood her. Addie is a curious case and one who ought to be fitted into the catalogue of tormented women in the Faulkner canon, if she is to be understood at all.

At Virginia, in his famous public dialogues, Faulkner answered a question about Addie, which was:

> Q. Mr. Faulkner, what are some of these other things which create the hostility in Addie Bundren besides the attitude she seems to inherit from her father about life?[33]

[33] *Faulkner in the University*, p. 112.

and the great author then did something which must have embarrassed his professorial audience. As the footnote puts it, "Mr. Faulkner here confuses Addie Bundren in *As I Lay Dying* with Joanna Burden in *Light in August.*"[34] Of course, they are right and Addie did not have any New England ancestry or concern herself with Negroes as did Joanna Burden—features mentioned in Faulkner's mistaken answer to the question. Yet the answer intrigues me. Was Faulkner merely befuddled, had he been into the bottle before this ordeal or had he written so much that it all merged into a confused mass or was his memory going? Or was he in a sense right? Is Addie like Joanna, is a Bundren like a Burden? Let us think of these two women and of Emily Grierson and the fathers of all three. Think of Mr. Compson and his version of life as presented to Quentin. Think of Rosa Coldfield. They are all genteel, they are all father-dominated and they all have a strongly Calvinist background that is presented as crippling, even dehumanized. Faulkner's imprecise answer might be turned to good critical purpose. He has unwittingly shown us that Addie is not only pathetic but like Joanna and Emily and Rosa, who all derive from the tradition of Havisham and Mrs. Dorrit in Dickens' work, she is in love with death and thus a self-condemned martyr. Whatever the excuses for her, she is an anti-life figure. Let us look at Addie more closely, for she is important enough to give the novel its title.

Addie's soliloquy is provided in the midst of the journey to explain the journey. It begins with Addie's statement of hate, that as a teacher she hated the children. Her sense of loneliness, frustration and isolation is worst in the spring. This has sexual overtones rather than echoes from T. S. Eliot in it and seems somehow linked with her sadism which expresses itself both in beating the children until they are severely marked and in the posthumous revenge she takes on Anse. Her second paragraph immediately links her father to her frustration and loneliness. We know only one thing of her father, the first thing she thinks of, that he "used to say that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time" (AILD p. 461). Now this statement is deliberately ambiguous in the context of the novel, being on the one hand a perfect statement of evangelical Methodist faith over works, the George Whitefield variety of belief, and on the other hand a statement of despair. We know it is the latter only because of its consequences in Addie. It strongly suggests the outlook of Mr. Compson who said "nothing is even worth the changing of it" (S&F p. 97), and "watching pennies has healed more scars than jesus" (S&F p. 196), typical Compson sentiments which are, of course, anathema to Faulkner. Addie's father has likewise given her little reason to say anything but "I would hate my father for having ever planted me" (AILD p. 461). While no one, not even the name-players among critics, has done anything with her name, Addie certainly sounds like Caddy, a coincidence that may very well be more than a chance association in the author's mind.

Addie, then, hates her father, hates the children, and in fact hates life, or living itself in which she feels she has no part. Since we are dealing in the novel with isolated viewpoints there is no reason to place Addie's thoughts in any special category, no reason why her ideas should be a more "truthful" rendering of life than anyone else's. Strange then that she has somehow been

[34] *Ibid.*

treated differently, more sympathetically, for instance by Olga Vickery, and strange that her pathetic torments should be read as excuses rather than explanations of her behaviour. I believe she must not be sentimentalized. Addie, in beating the children is reminiscent of Emily Grierson who must keep her lover dead because she cannot keep him alive. Out of despair, we learn, she "took Anse." Her social superiority, her faded gentility, looks down upon Anse who is used from first to last. Indeed, Anse's final comic triumph cannot be understood unless we remember that Addie "took" him, then cuckolded him, then killed him—"Then I believed I would kill Anse," and "then he died." Since her fantasy has arranged everything, Anse of course "did not know he was dead." All things are dead for Addie. Her kin are in the cemetary and it is natural for her to spend her life wanting to join them. When Anse speaks of her living kin as being different from her dead, she says that dead ones are all she knew, "I never had any other kind." Addie wants total and perfect control, wants in fact to be God. As one of the wordiest people in the book she comes to mistrust words because they do not overcome her separateness. Having Cash is the answer to "living is terrible," but having Darl is not at all the same, is in fact the reverse because it is not a decision she has made and her life is a struggle with life. There is never any sense of submission to it and in this she is the antithesis of the Job-like Anse. While Cash violated her aloneness and then made it whole again, so she was in fact never unalone, Darl is merely a trick, a trick of words. The promise that Addie extracts is also made up of words and will trick Anse. Using words she does not trust boomerangs on Addie and it is Anse who turns out to be bigger than the words, fulfilling not only the promise but forcing Mrs. Bundren back to life, as it were, resurrecting her against her will, playing out in fact the fertility rite in earnest, fulfilling the terrible promise of the spring and submitting to forces that transcend the words which Addie exacts from him. Addie's discussion of Cash's birth and her aloneness "made whole again" suggests that she in fact does not wish to have it, her aloneness, violated. In spite of her being its mother, Addie's family seems to have gained little from her to sustain it and it is left to its own devices. Cash is her coffin-maker, Darl is mad, Jewel sees her as a horse and has no father, Dewey Dell is busy about being a mother herself and a mother to Vardaman. Addie herself has calculated her child-production with devilish exactitude, "giving" Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel and Vardaman to "replace the child I robbed him of," that is the one he would have had, had Whitfield not taken his place, and since Darl was never hers in a sense, that is he was never accepted, there are three children whom she does not regard as hers. Cash and Jewel are hers and of these only Cash, being a wanted, first child and having both father and mother, has the kind of calm and integrated personality that makes him for many critics, the "hero" of the tale. One out of five does not seem like a very good percentage.

Addie sees Jewel as "my cross and he will be my salvation" and Cora naturally thinks she is speaking in the traditional mode of the believer about Jesus. Jewel, with his name suggestive not only of Bunyan's use of the term but of the long tradition of grace, the pearl of great price (hence the comparison to Pearl of *The Scarlet Letter*) is an inverted rendering of that tradition. He is pure passion, unintegrated and undisciplined and Addie's belief

in him is a heresy, not only in the theological sense that causes Cora to pray earnestly for Addie's soul, but in the sense that she celebrates death in conceiving Jewel and conceiving of him as her saviour. Her saviour seems to have been "created" by her for the express purpose of getting her to the grave. This obviously requires further explanation. Addie is a witch, the kind of witch that celebrates the black mass and worships God's enemy. Such a concept, with all its very ancient associations, has a parallel in the human psychology that Addie presents in her early account of herself. She is opposed to life, unable to live in or accept the world as God, Anse's God for instance, has made it. People are alone and joined in their living by their common mortality. Addie, however, sees this inversely with living as dying (the novel's title) and death as a reunion with her dead family. Here is the link with the Whitfield evangelical eighteenth century celebration of death, and life as a preparation for it. Addie then, like the goodwife in "Young Goodman Brown," goes to the woods to meet the preacher who turns out to be "dressed in sin" and "coming swift and secret" to his worshipping bride, the witch communicant at the anti-life orgy. Who is the devil, if not "the instrument ordained by God—to sanctify that sin He had created?" (AILD p. 466) Addie then is as much a believer as Cora, but she is an inverted believer, having reversed life and death, God and Devil, goodness and sin. The final stroke of comic genius in the rejection of Addie's death-view by the living is her being placed in reverse in the coffin itself. The pragmatic women, not wanting to crush her dress, place her head where her feet should be. Not only is her burial in her wedding dress (another echo of Miss Havisham?) suggestive of a second and final marriage, as the bride of death, but her reversed position suggests also a reversal of traditional Christian burial thus augmenting the sense of poetic justice rendered to the heretic, the witch-like outcast. In short, then, Addie's death affinity, her yearning for the grave, parodies the whole after-life preoccupation of the evangelical tradition that opted for faith over works, the next life over this and later rewards for present suffering. After-life becomes here that terrible and grotesque presence of the burdensome dead, troubling the living. Getting Addie put underground becomes a matter of survival for others in more senses than one.

When Faulkner was asked about the reasons for Jewel's purchasing a wild horse he made the following reply:

> Now there was the need to use symbolism which I dug around, scratched around in my lumber room, and dragged out. That was an indication, a simple quick way to show that he did not belong to that family. That he was the alien there. *Now just exactly what the connection is between the desire to buy a dangerous untamed horse and to be a country preacher I don't know*, but that was the reason for the horse—to show quickly that he did not belong to the rest of the family. (my italics)[35]

I don't believe that Faulkner is saying that Jewel wanted to be a country preacher, but he is saying that his mind, Faulkner's conscious, unconscious, what you will, at any rate his own whole creative imagination was forging a link between the outcastness, the alienation of Jewel and his being sired by

[35] *Faulkner in the University*, p. 109.

a country preacher, a preacher whose name happens to be Whitfield. My contention that there is a link between Whitefield's eighteenth century Methodism, Addie's adulterous union with Whitfield, and the whole meaning of the novel is not really so odd as might first appear. In his book, *The Eighteenth Century Pulpit*, Professor Downey writes, "Both in his own time and since, Whitefield has been regarded as a Calvinist,"[36] and he goes on to quote the preacher himself:

> "I frankly acknowledge, I believe the doctrine of reprobation, in this view, that God intends to give saving grace, through Jesus Christ, only to a certain number, and that the rest of mankind, after the fall of *Adam*, being justly left to God to continue in sin, will at last suffer that eternal death, which is its proper wages." To Whitefield it was imperative for a man to recognize that he could do nothing to save himself, that no amount of pleading or good works could avail.[37]

This feature of Calvinism, that took so strong a hold in America, and on which Hawthorne and Faulkner both concentrate, produced a concentration on sin and the devil that had not been seen since the Middle Ages. Whether it was the making of sin and Satanism a fascination by its continual, haunting mention, it is true that it produced a self-searching and a level of enthusiasm and passion that was sometimes hysterical. It was treated in one way by Arthur Miller in *The Crucible* and is represented by Faulkner as producing at one extreme McEachern (*Light in August*) and at the other Joanna Burden, from the same novel, and I believe, Addie Bundren.

We have seen that the Whitfield section might be characterized and explained by reference to his eighteenth century namesake and by seeing the "will for the deed" statement as a satiric rendering of the entire creed of faith over works which permits the preacher all the illusion, self-indulgence and self-justification he needs. Playing at the Hand of God he has unwittingly let himself be cast in the role of devil and used by Addie to generate her wild offspring who will be her saviour. We have seen how Addie's section is placed before Whitfield's, juxtaposed and elaborating an anti-life view which leads her to death. She believes in actions over words, a parody of the faith-works debate and she opts for a system of action that could hardly be called good works, being entirely self-motivated, self-oriented and self-gratifying. She sees Anse as dead and her children as pawns in her own chess game in which she plays God. Everyone else is seen as an object of contempt (Cora, the school children) excepting Whitfield whom she regards as a figure of worship, the devil raised to eminence. She is, like other Satanists, excessively romantic and the prose she is given reminds me of the expressions of romantic madness used by Labove in *The Hamlet*. The third section of this central trilogy is given to Cora.

Cora, like the other two (and all three are in this unlike any other figures in the novel) is certain that she knows the truth, that she has a direct knowledge of God's ways and wills and that if everyone were like her, everyone would be saved. She too is long-suffering, righteous and awaiting her rewards

[36]James Downey, *The Eighteenth Century Pulpit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).
[37]Downey, p. 158.

in Heaven. Carvel Collins, as I said before, wants to explain Cora by turning her into Kore, a shift that for me explains nothing. I, too, want to see her in terms of someone else, not because it is even remotely possible to claim that this is Faulkner's intention but because it helps, I think, to understand how she functions. There is in the Old Testament a character called Korah who comes to Moses leading what is tantamount to a rebellion and saying that since all men are holy, since God is among the people now, there is no need of intermediaries. For Moses this is a blasphemy and he calls upon God to bear witness as to who is holy and who is not. Moses tells Korah that "ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi." Korah, it seems, had some minor priestly task connected with the Tabernacle and his jealousy of Moses is what motivates him. Now Martin Buber contends that this argument between Moses and Korah is central and has lasted to the present.

> It was the hour of decision. Both Moses and Korah desired the people to be the people of Yhvh, the holy people. But for Moses this was the goal. In order to reach it, generation after generation had to choose again and again between the roads, between the way of God and the wrong paths of their own hearts; between "life" and "death." For this God had introduced Good and Evil, in order that men might find their own way to Him.[38]

Circuitous though it may be, and at the risk of being accused of mere ingenuity, I am forced to see a link between eighteenth century enthusiasm in religion, between the self-righteousness and mere energy of belief of Faulkner's Cora and the humility, submission and discipline of Faulkner's best characters, best morally that is, his genuine heroes, the most outstanding of whom is Dilsey. The arrogance of Cora, her pride, her assurance of election, is one version of the endless struggle between Moses and Korah. Korah and his band are swallowed up in the earth by an act of God. Cora, along with Addie and Whitfield, represents those who have stepped outside the world of the hill country of Mississippi, outside the bounds of birth and mortality, crop-failure, broken legs, toy trains and false teeth, and deal only in the grand, the "eternal," the causes of sin, redemption and theological salvation. They are in command of the truth of God's wishes, as it seems to them, and they are above the mere mortals of the rest of the novel. They deal in abstractions, they are at the centre of the debate on faith versus works, misinterpreting both terms, and they continue the struggle of Korah against Moses, everyman his own saviour, his own interpreter, his own God in the end. This last division is the heart of the split between Wesley and Whitefield, between the former's scholarship and the latter's enthusiasm and self-generated teaching.

No novel, not one of Faulkner's or any other, is richer in irony than *As I Lay Dying*. The novel's structure lends itself particularly to the exploitation of this effect and Cora, more than any other character, is given to producing irony by virtue of the reader's awareness of the distance between her own unquestioned assumptions and the truth. She tells us that Brother Whitfield "singled out" Addie and "wrestled with her spirit." She tells Addie that "God

[38]Martin Buber, *Moses; the Revelation and the Covenant* (New York: Harper, 1958), pp. 189-90.

gave you children to comfort your hard human lot" and she tells Addie this because Addie "took God's love and her duty to Him too much as a matter of course, and such conduct is not pleasing to Him." Marvellous! Cora, of course, not seeing herself as guilty of the sins with which she charges Addie (presumption, arrogance) fails also to see that Addie's wavelength is utterly different. No one could be more at cross purposes than Cora, and when she says that Whitfield "strove" with Addie, "strove as never a man could except him," the sexual *double-entendre* becomes a broad joke at Cora's expense. She follows immediately with "it is not us that can judge our sins" and goes on to pray, having judged completely. Cora is like Worldly-Wiseman or Presumption in *Pilgrim's Progress*, a recognizable Christian casualty, filled with the scraps of theology and fragments of rhetoric that substitute for understanding. Her husband, describing her refusal to explain her contradictory feelings to him, paints this picture:

> Then she begun to sing again, working at the wash-tub, with that singing look in her face like she had done give up folks and all their foolishness and had done went on ahead of them, marching up the sky, singing. (AILD p. 449)

Earlier he has commented that Cora is so perfectly righteous, so near to her own God and so sure what is good for others, that God really doesn't need to bother Himself about the world at all, as long as Cora is there.

> I reckon she's right. I reckon if there's ere a man or woman anywhere that He could turn it all over to and go away with with His mind at rest, it would be Cora. (AILD p. 391)

Cora is in some ways the most remarkable and clearest achievement in the novel. The reader can almost sense Faulkner's pleasure in creating her, in explaining and teasing and cultivating her sanctimony, her disguised self-pity. The complex irony of her thought, as she watches Darl watching the dying Addie, that "his heart" was "too full for words" is tantamount to sheer bravado on the author's part.

Cora then is a version of religion, the Korah of self-righteousness, the self-appointed dispenser of God's judgement. Addie is the inverted, the corrupted believer, who in her despair with life, has opted for death and damnation. Whitfield is the form and face of religion, the priestly habit, who is so preoccupied with the form and word-shape of belief that his spiritual function is divorced from his human presence and he and sin have nothing to do with each other. He can cross from sinning to salvation as surely as he crosses the swollen stream. For the living he is utterly useless. What then is left? Clearly, I am suggesting that religion is in a real sense this novel's subject. It is everywhere in the novel, in every character's mouth, in the names, in the plot. From the presence of death, the burial journey, the cry of Dewey Dell that she believes in God, to the three sections analyzed above, religion speaks more forcefully than any other theme. Even Moseley—whose name means to me only the English fascist leader of my childhood and the period of this novel's composition—has religion in his mouth: " 'Me, a respectable druggist, that's kept store and raised a family and been a church-member for

fifty-six years in this town' " (AILD p. 487). With all the satire on church, tradition, rhetoric and hypocrisy, does Faulkner suggest any mode of being that may somehow accord with a religious spirit, suggest good works, or represent the optimism of which he speaks in his public pronouncements?

The neighbours, the chorus to the ritual burial progress, are freed from the kinds of large, corrupting, spiritual ambition of our trilogy of pseudo-priests. Samson and his wife Rachel, surely names to be conjured with, are eminently kind, compassionate, dutiful and charitable without any suggestion of rhetorical compulsion or self-congratulation. It is no accident that theirs are Old Testament names. Tull is the good neighbour. The other children, that is other than the mad, identity-less Darl and the wild, outcast Jewel, are merely, like Anse, trying to be what they are and must be, and to do what fate decrees for them. Dewey Dell is trying to be a mother to Vardaman and a woman and having little luck in trying to get freedom and love at the same time. Her plight is surely realistic, recognizable, especially in Mississippi, especially in 1930. Vardaman is trying to be a child. Cash is trying to be a craftsman, a homely mixture of Jesus and Hephaistos. Anse is trying to be a farmer. He wants teeth to eat with and a wife to sleep with.

It is Anse's teeth that bring me to my conclusion. To use the philosophical terms that some critics have is not so far off Faulkner's own seriousness. Indeed, Peabody himself speaks of "Nihilist" and "Fundamentalist" and Faulkner clearly knows what he is about. I have said elsewhere that Faulkner's basic attitude, his dispostion of spirit never really altered, that the author of *A Fable* is discoverable in the author of *The Sound and the Fury*. In rejecting formalism in religion, the rhetoric of Christianity and the fundamentalism of the Baptist, Methodist, Calvinist background of New England and the South, Faulkner opted for a view of humanity that is essentially modest, apparently anti-heroic and without grandeur at all. It is what he calls endurance, and what I call the heroics of the hearth. Strangely enough, to me at any rate, the characters who have the grandest views, who make the most sweeping claims, who see themselves as the centre of their universe, emerge as the smallest figures, having the least significant perceptions, and this is true of Cora, Addie and Whitfield, who in the end, do not really seem to matter. The humblest characters, on the other hand, the least presumptuous, whose desires and ambitions are the most modest, seem to me to emerge as the largest figures, dominating the actual local, geographical scene, and for me these characters are Anse and Cash, Dewey Dell, Vardaman, Tull, Samson and Rachel.

In the end, the maniacal schemes of Addie, the private and tortured plans and views she concocted, come to naught, are ironically reversed by the private needs of her children. Anse turns the tables on her. It is he who has his revenge, for by carrying through the letter of her promise, he is able to accomplish his private purposes. Anse sees a kind of divine destiny in being able to get his teeth; is this merely a Faulkner joke? Could teeth really matter, could an author celebrate the acquisition of false teeth? What about Minnie's gold tooth in *The Reivers* or Beauchamp's gold toothpick, or Isaac's first real gun? Faulkner, like Dickens, sees the large in the small. Heaven is obscure, false teeth are real and they symbolize survival, endurance, the capacity to eat God's victuals. Indeed, the more one thinks about it, the more powerfully

significant do small things in Faulkner's work become. It is easy enough for the intellectual critic, surrounded by, inundated by, the bric-a-brac of culture, with his ears on the hi-fi, his eyes on his library, his car in the garage, his subscription to the *Saturday Review* just comfortably renewed, easy for him to sit back and say of the Bundrens that what they have accomplished, oh horrors!, is only to bring fragments of a meretricious civilization into the pristine wilderness of the hills farm. The electric train, the phonograph, mail-order records and false teeth are the emblems of a new crass materialism! Surely not! For Anse the teeth are real enough, not false at all, and only a man with a mouth full of his own teeth could scorn Anse's desperate desire for manufactured ones. Cash has wanted music in his home from the beginning, indeed has planned to see if he could purchase such a machine long before the journey starts. Dewey Dell has badly needed a woman to talk to about her female plight, and Vardaman has tasted his first banana. While the new Mrs. Bundren has not provided the bananas, she seems to have provided everything else. Surely Anse has a right to grin at the end, for his selection of a new woman is a stroke of genius, fulfilling all the promises at once, even to the extent that she has provided the means whereby the stinking corpse of her predecessor can be put underground where it belongs. Pa is "hangdog and proud too," and I for one see nothing but Faulkner's admiration in this kind of pride which he has so often mentioned, the pride in the accomplishment of the unbelievably difficult small venture. After their journey it is back home to the winter evenings with the gramaphone, but without Darl. Jewel and Darl are interesting cases. Jewel has been shed of his horse and in losing it and in burying his mother he seems calmed, more integrated and perhaps is now able to be a part of the family. Cash has the last word. It is Cash who tells us that Jewel observes "He got them teeth" and it is Cash who tells us that Darl is better off away from them, carrying his insane laughter off into another world for "This world is not his world; this life his life." So the family is now stronger than it was, stronger in "this life" and it is this life about which Faulkner writes. Cash, with his nice balance of words, action and suffering is a fitting commentator on this life, which he understands. One craftsman is much like another, a carpenter like the writer of the novel, and it is at the very end that the words "Meet Mrs. Bundren" bring into precise alignment Faulkner, Cash and Anse. The work of art has forged into being a subtle rendering of human values.

What we have witnessed is the *tour de force* indeed of Faulkner's claim, the refining process of intensely integrated fiction, the precision of highly wrought image sustained in a long narrative with all the conservation and coherence of a James Joyce short story, surely a remarkable achievement. With glances at Greek and primitive systems of ritual, with an intensive analysis of the Christian background of the Bundrens' setting, with a simple plot that contains all the elements of fertility rites, Faulkner has hammered them all into a simple celebration of life itself, the old virtues, the old values renewed in his art. For this novel is finally to be viewed as a celebration. Those critics who see its theme as existential are basically right, but not in the sense that Faulkner is presenting any systematic philosophical view, not in the sense that ontology is its subject. Peabody is given to philosophic speculation yet cannot use his learning to overcome his amazement at the actual events

as he sees them. It is this amazement that is Faulkner's subject, this awe at the human capacity for suffering and endurance and extremely modest victory in the face of overwhelming odds. Life is the victor, the hero, of the novel. An unfriendly reviewer of earlier criticism might be tempted to describe the novel's effect as having been to cast false teeth before real swine. Happily I am not so tempted, yet the reader of the novel could do worse than to begin by understanding that a great novel might put false teeth and bananas before sin and salvation.

Faulkner took whatever he could find in the lumber room of his memory and imagination in order to expand, elaborate, extend the universality of his characters' suffering and courage and capacity for life. All of their striving, across time and space, comes for him to be aimed at the same endlessly powerful attempt to live, in the face of death, as meaningfully as possible. It is this power that causes him to marvel at people, as he has said. This very cohesiveness, this vision of the unity of man's striving to live is what enabled him to rightly call the novel a *tour de force*, an actual stroke of genius as it were, in merging disparate materials in a single metaphor.

> . . . a writer don't have to consciously parallel because he robs and steals from everything he ever wrote or read or saw. I was simply writing a *tour de force* and as every writer does, I took whatever I needed wherever I could find it, . . .[39]

The result, in its tightness, its compactness, its very success has baffled readers and critics alike; it is awesome. But I believe Faulkner when he claims, again and again, that for him this novel was relatively easy to write. He saw it so clearly, everything fell into place so naturally, that its unravelling is curiously that much more difficult, perhaps impossible. Faulkner makes light of it, even seems surprised that it puzzles the reader, as it puzzled one questioner at Virginia, to whom Faulkner replied:

> . . . I was writing about people again. I took these people, and—that's a simple *tour de force*. I took this family and subjected them to the two greatest catastrophes which man can suffer—flood and fire, that's all. That was simple *tour de force*.[40]

That's all!

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[39] *Faulkner in the University*, p. 115.
[40] *Ibid.*, p. 87.