

FAULKNER'S AS I LAY DYING: THE EVOLUTION OF ADDIE'S
VIEW OF LIFE AND DEATH

by 7214

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B. A., Gustavus Adolphus College, 1969

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1971

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Faulkner's As I Lay Dying:
The Evolution of Addie's View of Life and Death

I. The Two Basic Conditions of Life and Death

Each man carries the two forces of life and death in him from the time he is born until he dies. These forces play against each other for an entire lifetime, and their play and changing balances influence that lifetime in several respects, in forming attitudes, philosophies, senses of self-identification and existence. There is life and death for him on many levels physically, from specific times of sickness and health, old cells dying, new ones taking their place, to the total time span of his life from birth to death, his body beginning to die from the time of birth. Mentally and spiritually man is continually being born if he more fully realizes his potentials, and if he doesn't, he moves closer and closer to a spiritual deadening--blinded to his own possibilities and to their complements in others. Man lives his entire lifetime with the possibility of spiritual death and the inevitability of physical death.

As this play of life and death goes on, man can see there are only two basic conditions that face him. One condition is that since he is alive and is growing and changing, he must continually discover and establish for himself, his existence and identity. He must keep interpreting his times alone, with people, and with other living forms, discovering his place within these contexts and then using these discoveries to determine his partial and total identities. Through this he defines his personal unique characteristics as well as those qualities which relate him to the total growth of all man. The times spent alone, with other

people, and with other life forms are not always so easily separated, however. Sometimes there is a necessity to satisfy two opposite needs simultaneously, the need to be alone, and the need to be part of other people, other forms of life. Man needs to be able to stand by himself, to be his person independently. And in order for that kind of strength to develop, there must be association with others. The two needs work together, but struggle for their own single satisfaction. So man suffers isolation or a smothering group absorption sometimes, and, if he is lucky, at times he feels strong and complete as one person and enjoys acceptance and fellowship with others.

The second condition is that since he is alive, he will die sometime. His inevitable death must be dealt with, certainly not absolutely or conclusively, but he must decide for himself what happens at death and after. If he can't accept the idea of his mortality, how does he choose to overcome it? What theories will satisfy him so he won't have to think about it, and can live his lifetime concentrating on living instead of dying? It is easy to see man is concerned with both life and death in his consideration of one or the other.

Various views of life and death in the novels of William Faulkner have been discussed by R. M. Slabey, B. M. Cross, and Roma King, Jr., who study As I Lay Dying as an existential novel or view it through the effects of birth on life; and by Cleanth Brooks and Hyatt Waggoner,¹ who

¹R. M. Slabey, "As I Lay Dying as an Existential Novel," Bucknell Review, XI (December, 1963), 12-23; B. M. Cross, "Apocalypse and Community in As I Lay Dying," TSLI, III (Summer, 1961), 251-258; Roma King, Jr., "The Janus Symbol in As I Lay Dying," University of Kansas City Review, XXI (June, 1955), 47-51; Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner, The Yoknapatawpha Country (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963); Hyatt Waggoner, William Faulkner, From Jefferson to the World (Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 1959).

include in their studies, interpretations of the Bundren family emphasizing either one or the other of those two basic conditions described previously. In this paper, Faulkner's As I Lay Dying will be considered in light of the three views of death Peabody gives at the time of Addie's dying and death. These three views are represented in the novel by Addie Bundren's father, Cora Tull, Peabody, and Addie Bundren. After briefly having discussed these views of death and the views of life inherent in them, Addie Bundren's life has been used to show more explicitly one person's approach and solution to the two basic conditions that face each man, and the other two views of death have been used as contrasts to further clarify Addie's approach.

The first two views perhaps belong to people Peabody has met during his medical practice, and the third view is his own. "The nihilists say it is the end; the fundamentalists, the beginning; when in reality it is no more than a single tenant or family moving out of a tenement or a town."² The nihilists say death is the end, or, as Addie's father said, "the reason for living was getting ready to stay dead a long time." (161) That line not only holds the relationship of life and death, but also, in this case, it shows an end to the play of those two forces. Death has overpowered life, in a spiritual sense now, to be completed in a physical sense later. Life, then, is just a vehicle to death, a biological function, a time to live through until death ends it forever. Addie's father has established his existence in that he knows he has a life that will

²William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 161. All subsequent quotations from this novel will be cited by page number in the text of the paper and will be drawn from this edition.

end at death. And if he has bothered to establish his identity, it is probably no more than that he is one man in a long line of mankind who waits for death.

The fundamentalist view is exemplified by Cora Tull, who accepts the traditional Christian view of death, literally interpreting the scriptures. In Cora's view, death is not an end, but a "consciousness of her. . .reward to come," (22) for all the good works she has suffered to do on earth--with joy. She believes her life, that all life, carries on as it does and that "things stand the way they do because God's wisdom saw fit to deal it that way." (74) Her existence and identity are established by her belief that she is a human manifestation of God's wisdom and plan.

Peabody's own view of death is a little more difficult to interpret and define. Death is a function of the mind, (42) a moving out. With each death, there is that movement, over and over again, until, with the succession, there is a feeling of continual motion. That continual motion is the emphasis in this interpretation. When death comes, it is not an end because it is part of an ongoing life/death cycle. Life is lived and death is met as a matter of course when it comes. This view is an acceptance and belief in an eternal movement of which each lifetime is a part. When death comes, life continues, in the movement on to another part of the life/death cycle as well as in the new lives being born. Death is not an ending or a beginning, but rather, part of an ongoing movement. Peabody's identity and existence are emphasized with each patient, with each encounter, but from his thoughts and his statement of the three views, he has found his place in life and death, as part of the continual movement, as part of the cycle.

What is similar about Cora's and Peabody's views is that force, for

Cora, the force of God planning, guiding, and calling his faithful children home to eternal life after death, and for Peabody, the force of the continuing motion of the life/death pattern. And in Addie's life, as it will be seen later, although she becomes a nihilist, she still has an intuition or sense for something that is common to her life and to the life outside her. The fact she has that sense and that she realizes it and the need for unity with these life forces, suggests that whatever it is she senses, could be the same as Cora's God or Peabody's continuing motion.

The progress or reconciliation that Addie achieves in coming to terms with the two basic conditions of realizing her life potentialities, of establishing her existence and identity alone and with others, and of meeting the fact of her eventual death can be seen clearly in the context of these three views of death.

II. The Growth of Addie's View of Life and Death

Addie Bundren's lifetime is emblematic of a person's dealing with three major points, the first being the two basic conditions described previously. Inherent in this dealing is the second point, the play of life and death forces, each trying to overpower the other--with the person trying to achieve a balance in the play. There are four main contexts of nature, sex, birth, and words in Addie's life, and it is in these contexts that she works particularly with these basic conditions. Through the four contexts, it can be seen how the evolvement of her view of death becomes the solution for her difficulties in establishing her existence and identity, alone and with others, so that she eventually balances the life and death play. In having discussed Addie's attempts

to find herself and to relate to others, the third point, the sense of violation she feels in the experiences of these four contexts, will be discussed.

More specifically, the violations are the crux of the inconsistency or paradox in the first basic condition, the paradox of wanting a closeness or a oneness with others and at the same time wanting independence and a preservation of uniqueness and particularity.³ It is as if each man is inside a circle. Sometimes he needs others to break in and other times he must break out. Sometimes neither happens and he is isolated. Sometimes others break in, but not for purposes of union. This violation is a breaking in on that independence, a breaking in at the wrong time or a breaking with only a momentary fulfillment, a breaking with a sense of stealing. It is this violation that caused Addie's nihilist view of death.

Nature, then, is the first context to be dealt with. Within her experiences with nature, as well as with sex, birth, and words, Addie is involved with people--struggling for some kind of sense of community or unity. At first consideration, Addie's encounters with nature would seem to be times of the most positive kind of union which would help her believe the fact of her existence, and would help build her identity. And it would seem that certainly these encounters would not be a violation. These encounters occur at two general time periods of her life, one while she is teaching, the other when she is married. While she is teaching school, her experience with isolation in the classroom makes the call or invitation from nature all the more powerful and com-

³Erich Fromm, Man For Himself (New York: Rinehart, 1947), p. 96.

elling. In school, she tries in the only way she knows, to force a breakthrough of her own isolation as well as the isolation she feels is between her school children. "I would look forward to the times when they faulted, so I could whip them. When the switch fell, I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it was my blood that ran, and I would think with each blow of the switch:. . .Now I am something in your secret and selfish life...." (162) She succeeds for a while, but perversely, with a whip. But after everyone leaves the school house and another day is over,

. . .instead of going home I would go down the hill to the spring where I could be quiet...It would be quiet there then, with the water bubbling up and away and the sun slanting quiet in the trees and the quiet smelling of damp and rotting leaves and new earth; especially in early spring. . . .
(161)

Sun, water, smells of new earth of a new spring season, and

In the early spring it was worst. Sometimes I thought that I could not bear it, lying in bed at night, with the wild geese going north and their honking coming faint and high and wild out of the wild darkness, and during the day it would seem as though I couldn't wait for the last one to go so I could go down to the spring. (162)

There is no aggression here, no beating. Instead there is a relief, a release, and so far there is a positive, healthy oneness and not a violation. There hasn't been a breaking in, but rather, a calling or an invitation. Addie's school children held a potential union but she was unable to work through to them satisfactorily. In her experiences with natural life forms, she has found a quiet, kind, lively joining with no effort on her part but to go to the spring. In this calling is a necessity, a pulling for Addie to go to the spring where the water bubbles freely in the midst of quiet sunlight and quiet natural smells, and in the ordered life cycles represented in damp and

rotting leaves and new earth. The strength of that pulling is in accordance with the life spirit that is within her--the spirit she has tried to match or join with her family,⁴ her school children previously, and has failed to do.

The feeling of order and natural cycles is re-enforced in the feeling of regularity of wild geese migration. The "faint and high and wild" honking "out of the wild darkness" (162) is part of the call and experience that is beyond that barrier man must break through to feel the order, the freedom and wildness, and the strength to cry high and wild. Without force, Addie has gone beyond that barrier instinctively. By the nature of her make up, because she is a natural life form, the life spirit in her has an automatic kinship with this different form of life spirit, seasons, migration cycles, earth smells, sun and water, etc. Outwardly, at first, these times with nature would seem glorious, times of strength, renewal, and unbinding, free union. However, the fact of Addie's being touched or called is not itself the violation, the breaking. The invitation comes, she answers, and then the violation comes, in the subsequent fleeting of the natural spirit that called to her. Because of the satisfaction and fullness of the meeting, the momentariness, the inconstancy are all the more obvious and disappointing, and the feelings of order, freedom and strength are gone.

Later, still within the context of nature, when Addie is married, and she refers to "the land that was now of my blood and flesh," (165) she can hear "the dark land talking the voiceless speech," (167) and she

⁴ Although Faulkner gives little about Addie's childhood, there is an intimation that Addie experienced isolation and loneliness even as a child. J. L. Roberts states, ". . . Addie was born an isolated and lonely soul, openly unloved by her family. . ." in "The Individual and the Family: Faulkner's As I Lay Dying," Arizona Quarterly, XVI (Spring, 1960), 26.

says she "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. . . ."

(166) The sun is gone here, and the bubbling stream and the smelling of new earth are replaced with an inner brooding voice, a speaking and listening in darkness. According to the definition of violation in this paper, there really isn't a sense of violation in this second encounter with nature. There is union in the dark voice of the land speaking within her. It is as if this relationship is the shadow of what Addie once experienced when she was teaching. The fullness and beauty invited her, she followed, there was a matching of her life spirit with the life spirit in the natural forms, and then it ended. Perhaps this darkness and the voice she hears are the impressions that cannot leave.

Besides the two separate kinds of encounters with nature that Addie has had, the passage of time between the encounters is important, and should be considered. This time period is important because it is during this time that Addie shifts the emphasis of her concern from life to death. Her nihilist background does not give her a basis of hope, so it must be by the strength of her individual inner life spirit that she is able to hope for union with others, to think there might be a chance to break the isolation she knows, and to discern what she brings to such a union once it does happen. Addie is not yet concerned with the fact of her inevitable death by the time she is a teacher. She is still struggling to establish herself alone as a complete person as well as in union with other life forms. She is

trying to discover what it is that calls her and what it is that answers from within. Her experiences of unity with the life spirit in nature is a step unlike any other that has happened to her so far. Her first encounter as a teacher is a beginning, a way of strengthening hope for further experiences. And the temporality serves to jerk her back, forcing her to look at what has happened. Addie knows that common life spirit, and beyond that, with her school children, she can be seen sensing her own isolation from people and also sensing that same isolation in the children. She even tries to help, the only way she can, by whipping. What has happened in this context of nature is that Addie has realized some of the possibilities and potentials in herself that might come forth even more in a more consistent and constant uniting.

What she has learned from the kind of union she has with nature when she is a wife, reaches into the second context of sex, sex in marriage and outside of marriage. The two people who are involved with Addie sexually are Anse, her husband, and Whitfield, the preacher, her partner outside of her marriage. It is in her marriage that she begins to think of her physical death and the relationship of her life with death.

Anse comes into Addie's life in an old wagon looking like "a tall bird hunched in cold weather," (162) an adulteration of the beautiful wild geese on warm spring nights. He is a scrawny imitation that eventually proposes marriage to Addie. Anse represents another solitary person. Externally, he is more alone than Addie. He has no one and is alone on a poor, small farm. "I aint got no people. . .I got a little property. I'm forehanded; I got a good honest name." (163)

Anse may not look desirable or promising, but to Addie, although

Anse is no dashing knight, he does hold a promise which she is willing to believe and accept. She is thoughtful and steady in her response to him and she isn't hesitant to try marriage with Anse. She is, after all, a country school teacher, dissatisfied and frustrated in her relations with the students and she probably rooms and boards with a farm family, which doesn't necessarily provide much chance to meet other people close to her age and interest. Loneliness and a growing need for companionship and a promise of a secure future, or at least a future with someone, can make almost any interested party seem attractive. She has seen him pass the school house three or four times and maybe has wondered about him, and when she finds he has been driving four miles out of his way to pass, she begins to look at him more closely. When he stops one day, he very simply speaks with her, states what he has to offer and doesn't seem to ask anything from her in return. He has property, an honest name, and he says he is thrifty and thoughtful of the future. What could seem more solid and secure?

What he offers is solid. But in the kind of desperation Addie may have felt at that time, she forgot other needs to be fulfilled in companionship or marriage, her spiritual needs or the need to unite with the life spirit in someone else. It has been mentioned that externally, Anse is more alone than Addie, but it seems his sense for needing others is much less than Addie's, making her more of a solitary figure than he. She is more aware of what could be. "So I took Anse," (163) Addie says, and there is mechanical, physical union. Perhaps she felt that in the sexual act, in the force, in the joining, there could be a fight against her condition of singularity, a violence again.

Maybe it is in the difference in that sense or awareness that made

a spiritual union through sex, within marriage in this case, impossible for Addie. It is through these negative experiences, these times of failing, that Addie continues to develop an idea of who she is or what she can do. Her life so far is disappointing and is bearing out what her father said all his life, and it is confirming what she seems to believe the burial ground in Jefferson bears witness to and affirms. The conversation between Anse and Addie when they talk of marriage and relatives shows Addie's attitude when she says:

' . . . I have people. In Jefferson. . . They might listen. But they'll be hard to talk to. They're in the cemetery.'
 'But your living kin,' he said. 'They'll be different.'
 'Will they?' I said. 'I don't know. I never had any other kind.' (163)

Through nature and possibly through sexual union, for a while anyway, although times of union have been temporary, she has experienced that coming together of life spirits and she knows it is possible. In these experiences she can see herself as very much alone, and also very much in tune with something outside herself that has the life spirit, no matter what intensity. With each time of trying or answering a call for union, and with each ending of such times, the awareness of how great that isolation is, increases.

Wasiolek states that Anse seems to have "called Addie back from this awareness with the false promise of love and unaloneness. After the mistake of Anse followed the mistakes of childbirth, and with each mistake, a deepening awareness of man's inexorable aloneness and his eternal illusions. . . ." ⁵ He is not right calling it a false promise. It is a true promise for Anse but, as stated before, because of that

⁵ Ed Wasiolek, "As I Lay Dying: Distortion in the Slow Eddy of Current Opinion," Critique, III (Spring-Fall, 1959), 19.

difference in sense, awareness and need for different depths of relationships and union, such a promise from Anse could hardly meet the spiritual needs of Addie. She hopes that with Anse there can be a more constant, reliable coming together, something more than temporary. This also fails, and it is in the failure that her awareness is deepened further.

When the promise of love and unaloneness goes unfulfilled, we come to the sense of violation. Addie says, "My aloneness had been violated and then made whole again by the violation: time, Anse, love, what you will, outside the circle." (164) What Addie might mean here is that sexual union with Anse which at first violated her privacy and need for being alone actually helped to heal the disgust of being violated, by pushing her farther inside herself, inside her circle and by forcing her to protect herself further. Addie has tried with Anse to work past her isolation and in the physical sense, there is someone to live with, she has a place to live, but she is still isolated spiritually, unable to feel that union or sharing with Anse. Sex remains just an act, just "chapping," only physical. At this point in her life, since she has been unable to maintain the kind of spiritual fulfillment or unity that she needs, she has, as a result, become stronger as one person alone. She is getting used to the isolation and is almost ready to resign herself to it and to accept it. Also, at this point, she has established her existence to herself and is moving inward more tightly within her circle, to gather her strength to be alone.

After Addie has been disappointed in marriage and disgusted with "chapping," it follows that whatever good relationship she had with nature, no matter how short, it could have darkened into the shades and tones of her hearing the dark voicelessness of the land, outside

her as well as inside since the land was now of her blood and flesh. Her life is getting darker; her spirit is losing that fight to keep trying. And eventually she simply refuses Anse. (167)

But it isn't only within her marriage with Anse that Addie tries sexual union as a means to work past her isolation and to further establish and identify herself. She also has sexual relations with Whitfield, the preacher. It is difficult to tell how the relationship began, but it may have begun when Whitfield "wrestled with her spirit, singled her out and strove with the vanity of her mortal heart. . . ." (158) one summer at a camp meeting. So Addie becomes secretly involved with Whitfield. There may be another reason besides sex in this case. Whitfield is certainly a different kind of man compared with Anse, and he is perhaps farther reaching and deeper than Anse and he could possibly bring more spirit to a physical joining. But the other reason could be that he is a preacher, that by profession he is supposed to be concerned with matters of larger spiritual realms, and that by physically joining with him, she may come closer, not only to another human being, but also to a still greater spiritual force, a force both are a part of.

This experience with Whitfield seems a failure, too, both physically and spiritually. And the violation is similar to the first in that hope has been raised by something or someone outside herself, and the hope has gone unfulfilled. The only way that that experience or attempt, with both Anse and Whitfield, reaches beyond its actual time is that Addie becomes pregnant as a result.

And so the third context, childbirth, can be dealt with. Just as we might have expected her to find a sense of union or sharing in her

family, with her school children, or with Anse and Whitfield in the contexts of nature and sex, so we might expect her own children to be a source of physiological as well as spiritual unity, and a definite proof of her existence and identity. But this is not so for Addie. She feels "that through the act of giving birth she becomes part of the endless cycle of creation and destruction."⁶ At this point it seems logical to mention the evolution of her view of death. The kind of creation and destruction Addie probably means is the creation of a possibility to be destroyed during life in trying to deal with the basic problems in man's existence and then the final destruction, the final end, his death. It is bad enough to have been born into that struggle, but to put someone else through it is even worse. She is then the violator, and she knows it, and it angers her.

Cash is her first born, and giving birth to another life has fragmented her instead of making her stronger as one person as well as a sharer of life with the newly born. Addie says her aloneness "had never been violated until Cash came. Not even by Anse in the nights." (164) At the time of giving birth it would seem that the needs for singularity and unity would be felt simultaneously, and, beyond the needs, that there would be actual simultaneous singularity and unity. Addie places herself inside the circle and again she is untouched, and no longer violated by Cash.

But it isn't long before Addie is fragmented further with another violation named Darl. This time there doesn't seem to be the struggle

⁶ Olga Vickery, "The Dimensions of Consciousness: As I Lay Dying," William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. F. J. Hoffman and O. W. Vickery (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1960), p. 236.

between wanting and not wanting unity. Addie is mad. "At first I would not believe it. Then I believed that I would kill Anse." (164) Two things happen after Darl's birth. She is three now, Addie, Addie-Cash, and Addie-Darl. It is at this point that Addie completes the shift of her emphasis from life to death. She starts giving thought to her death and place of burial and decides she will go back to her family in Jefferson and be buried with them. But Anse is hardly aware and says, ". . .you and me aint nigh done chapping yet, with just two." (165) Immediately thereafter, Addie thinks, "He did not know that he was dead, then." (165) He is not physically dead, but rather, he is a kind of machine body with no spirit or feeling inside. Any possibility of finding a unity in marriage or in the children fades in that death. She realizes now the impossibility of being part of something or someone, of sharing that life spirit, and she accepts it, which strengthens her stance alone, and she will continue to think of her death. Addie later says, "My children were of me alone, of the wild blood boiling along the earth, of me and of all that lived; of none and of all." (167) That "wild blood boiling along the earth" could be the force that she felt in her first encounter with nature and that she felt was possible to become part of in her relationships with the people already discussed. At any rate, she refuses now to include dead Anse in this life-giving process.

Jewell is the third child, the further violation of fragmenting Addie. Her preparations or thoughts of death go farther with each new birth. Now she says, "My father said that the reason for living is getting ready to stay dead. I knew at last what he meant and that he could not have known what he meant himself," (167) because men do not

give birth. If there are degrees of nihilism, she is perhaps more of a nihilist or more than she realizes she is, than her father. And this feeling comes from her being more active in the process of living and trying to establish herself singly and with other life forms, and also from giving life to others, furthering that process of creation and destruction, making others live what she has come to believe is a nihilistic life.

This violation in the context of giving birth is three-fold; she has been violated by having been born, she is violated in the fragmentation of giving birth, and her children are violated by her having given birth to them. She is doing to them what she curses as having been done to her. ". . . I would hate my father for having ever planted me." (161)

But then Addie goes on with the fourth child, "I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewell. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of. . . And then I could get ready to die." (168) If there was an element of horror before concerning the first three children, it hardly compares to the blatant, horrid unconcern for giving birth and life to more people, the very situation she has just damned. Addie gives birth to two more children to make up for the illegitimate Jewell, one to "negative" and one to replace. It seems that the unconcern that follows Jewell's birth is a kind of damnation on the union with Whitfield, making that union a far reaching failure. This is so in the ways the failure reaches into the lives of the children. J. L. Roberts sums up the group of children, showing how the circumstances of their birth affect their lives.

Cash was born first and is at peace with the world and earth as he works on one level of consciousness, performing one task at a time, slow and calculating; unwanted Darl, born second,

constantly inquires into the intricacies and awareness of life; violent Jewell, born fatherless, responds to all events with violent and impetuous actions, without an interceding thought process; Dewey Dell moves in an orbit of egoism, sees each action only as it immediately affects her; and finally, Vardaman born not from love, but to replace another child, reflects this by replacing his dead mother with a dead fish.⁷

Since Addie feels nothing for Anse and considers him dead, there seems to be nothing in that relationship that would warrant her thoughtlessly bringing these children into the world to "negative" and to replace, for Anse's sake anyway. That situation seems as absurd as the situation Addie has found herself in, and that she should perpetuate it is ridiculous. So perhaps it follows that she should get ready to die. She has spent much of her life trying to break away from her family's spirit of nihilism, but after her attempts and subsequent failures, and being so absolutely involved and responsible for giving more life, she gives up her active attempts for solving that first basic condition and prepares to die.

However, before examination of her preparation for dying, Addie has some particular feelings about words, the fourth context, and their use in opening or tightening people's circles. Generally, words are the best means man has to reach other people, to let him out of his own circle or to invite others in. There is a good potential in this context as has been found in the previous three contexts. However, Addie does not use words very much during any part of her life. There is very little known about her childhood, but a whip seems to be her means of communicating with her school children, and in her encounters with nature, there is no need for words. There is little or nothing between

⁷Roberts, p. 28.

Anse and her, just "chapping" and chores. With Cash, and maybe Jewell, there is more than words. (They act.) When Addie thinks of love, "Cash did not need to say it to me nor I to him, and I would say, Let Anse use it, if he wants to." (164)

Addie sees words as a means of separation keeping people apart and isolated, "swinging and twisting and never touching." (164) She feels tricked by words, violated by words. (164) Words are deceiving, being of no relation to the actions and feelings they are supposed to represent.

I would think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it, so that after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle from one to the other; and that sin and love and fear [all words that indicate a close relationship with poeple] are just sounds that people who have never sinned nor loved nor feared have for what they never had and cannot have until they forget the words. (165,166)

"Actions or engagement [which implies meeting--going beyond self] is part of the earth, holding to it, fruitful, while words are substanceless."⁸ One reason Addie may have gotten along well with Cash is that he acted and did not rely on words to be his actions. In contrast to that relationship and to what Addie has just said about words, is the clatter that surrounds Cora Tull as she hurries nowhere singing hymns and carrying out her Christian duty. Cora's words go up in a thin line and are just sounds to accompany her movement, "shapes that fill a lack." (164) For the length of four pages, Cora hardly pauses for a breath while speaking of her Christian honor and family respect. The following passages exemplify her chatter:

⁸Eric E. Larsen, "The Barrier of Language: The Irony of Language in Faulkner," MFS, XIII (Spring, 1967), 27.

I have tried to live right in the sight of God and man, for the honor and comfort of my Christian husband and for the love and respect of my Christian children. So that when I lay me down in the consciousness of my duty and reward I will be surrounded by loving faces, carrying the farewell kiss of each of my loved ones into my reward. (22)

And she goes on later

. . .and I said 'Who are you, to say what is sin and what is not sin? It is the Lord's part to judge; ours to praise His mercy and His holy name in the hearing of our fellow mortals' because He alone can see into the heart, and just because a woman's life is right in the sight of man, she cant know if there is no sin in her heart without she opens her heart to the Lord and receives His grace. . . 'It is our mortal lot to suffer and to raise our voices in praise of Him who judges the sin and offers the salvation through our trials and tribulations time out of mind amen. Not even after Brother Whitfield, a godly man if ever one breathed God's breath, prayed for you and strove as never a man could except him,' I said. (159)

And parenthetically here is what Tull has to say about Whitfield's funeral sermon. "Whitfield begins. His voice is bigger than him. It's like they are not the same. It's like he is one, and his voice is one, swimming on two horses side by side across the ford and coming into the house. . . .(86) The sense of separation is here, separation of person and words, of actions and words. . . Mr. Tull would understand what Addie has to say about words.

It is after Cora's harping about Addie not being a true mother that Addie thinks "how words go straight up in a thin line. . . 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." (165, 166) Language is not life itself, and life itself is what Addie has been working and striving for.

Later Addie says, "And I would think then when Cora talked to me, of how the high dead words in time seemed to lose even the significance of their dead sound." (167) The depth and extent of Addie's perception

easily outpowers Cora's. (Addie's talk at this time "is filled with bitter awareness of the inexorable conditions of man's life and of bitter irony toward those who do not share this awareness.")⁹ Addie and Cora discuss sin and salvation and Cora blankly preaches the dead words. Addie says, "She prayed for me because she believed I was blind to sin...." And Addie continues to observe that Cora is one of the "people to whom sin is just a matter of words" and that to such people "salvation is just words too." (168)

Words then, the fourth violation, are a violation in the sense that they separate man from himself and from others. They trick him into living an empty, inactive, false life. He thinks he believes a certain way because he has verbalized the conviction, and actions that should follow and speak, are forgotten. . .in the words. Words and talking keep him from recognizing the true situation, that his fellowship or union with others might be false and superficial. Believing the unity is true because of words, is the violation. And further, Addie is violated by words through Anse and Whitfield, in promises. She may even feel that she has tricked herself with her own words in making herself think it was possible to solve or satisfy being both alone and united with other life forms, joining with the life spirit that is in all living forms.

Looking at Addie's experiences with nature, sex, birth, and words, it can be seen that each one of the four contexts has its own kind of violation. The main frustration in experiencing these senses of violation comes from the partial vision of the beautiful potential man

⁹ Wasiolek, p. 19.

has, to solve the simultaneous needs of singularity and unity. Nature, sex, birth, and words all have possibilities to bring each person to himself and to other persons, as well as into realms beyond human dimensions. But each of these possibilities is only partial and does not last.

What has been emphasized so far have been Addie's attempts at solving the first basic problem, trying to establish herself within a life pattern and trying to establish a certain identity to herself with a certain way of fitting into relationships with other people. And this first basic condition has been dealt with in light of Addie's sense of violation. It is through these experiences of violation that she has established herself as one single person and that she has accepted and affirmed nihilism as her way of viewing life and death to make life and death at least in a small way tolerable. She has consciously accepted hopelessness in life and accepts that in life there is no possibility for overcoming isolation. Only through dying can one solve the matter of singularity and unity, and simultaneously be comfortable and satisfied with the approach of death. Dying allows Addie's establishment of herself singly and allows her into a community or unity with others, and death brings a welcome end to a life that isn't worth the trouble. The two basic conditions that face each man are taken care of for Addie in her decision to prepare to die, and in the belief that death is the end.

III. Death as Addie's Solution for Life

Addie has already established and accepted her singularity and

isolation through her experiences in various contexts but has not been able to establish a unity with other life forms for any length of time. When Addie comes to terms with the second basic condition, with her inevitable death, she is able at the same time, to establish a unity with other life forms. There is an ironic twist in Addie's solution by death because death solves the condition of establishing a unity with a life spirit in people or other life forms, and that unity seems to be realized by her after death. There is a kind of life after death, or a life in death that can be felt in Addie. Her presence is far more than that of a rotting corpse. This section deals with Addie from the time of her dying to her death, at which time this ironic twist can be seen more specifically in action, this achieving and realizing of the unity after her death.

After Addie makes her decision that she is ready to prepare for death, it doesn't take long for her to begin the actual process. Before long, Cash is sawing and building the coffin. Darl speaks of Cash and the coffin, "Addie Bundren could not want a better one [carpenter and coffin] a better box to lie in. It will give her confidence and comfort." (4,5) And it gives her confidence and comfort as she dies, propped in bed, fanned by Dewey Dell, to look out the window and see such a fine construction. And it is intimated that whoever she will be inside the coffin, she will still feel that confidence and comfort and will probably continue to feel that way after being lowered into the ground.

Cora describes Addie's dying,

The quilt is drawn up to her chin, hot as it is, with only her two hands and her face outside. She is propped on the pillow, with her head raised so she can see out the window,

and we can hear him every time he takes up the adze or the saw. If we were deaf we could almost watch her face and hear him, see him. 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. But the eternal and the everlasting salvation and grace is not upon her. . . Under the quilt she makes no more of a hump than a rail would, and the only way you can tell she is breathing is by the sound of the mattress shucks. Even the hair at her cheek does not move, even with that girl standing right over her, fanning her with the fan. (8)

This soon, it seems very clear that the body form of Addie is already dead ("only way you can tell she is breathing is by the sound of the mattress shucks") and that the light spirit in her eyes is the only life left. "If we were deaf we could almost watch her face and hear him, see him." It is as if the actions of Addie and Cash are superimposed on each other, the actions of Addie's dying and Cash's preparing of a new form to hold her spirit, as her body decays. Jewell says, "every breath she draws is full of his knocking and sawing where she can see him saying See. See what a good one I am making for you." (14) "Sawing and knocking, and keeping the air always moving so fast on her face that when you're tired you cant breathe it, and that goddam adze going One lick less. One lick less." (15) The action of the sawing and the breezes from the fan, in a way, provide the intermediate life movement for Addie before she physically stops breathing and dies.

For a long time Addie has seemed dead bodily and it has been only the flickering light and life power in her eyes that have told of a life still inside her husk of a body. Peabody again observes,

She looks at us. Only her eyes seem to move. It's like they touch us, not with sight or sense, but like the stream from a hose touches you, the stream at the instant of impact as dissociated from the nozzle as though it had never been there. She does not look at Anse at all. She looks at me, then at the boy. Beneath the quilt she is no more than a bundle of rotten sticks. (43)

Dying is the final struggle. Peabody and Anse go to Addie again, and Peabody thinks as he watches,

She looks at me. Her eyes look like lamps blaring up just before the oil is gone. . . I can feel her eyes. It's like she was shoving at me with them. I have seen it before in women. Seen them drive from the room them coming with sympathy and pity, with actual help, and clinging to some trifling animal to whom they never were more than packhorses. That's what they mean by the love that passeth understanding: that pride, that furious desire to hide that abject nakedness which we bring here with us, carry with us into operating rooms, carry stubbornly and furiously with us into the earth again. (44, 45)

And then Addie raises herself and looks out the window at Cash. Her harsh voice, strong and unimpaired shouts, "You, Cash!" (47)

She lies back and turns her head without so much as glaring at pa. 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. (47)

They go out, and her lifetime is over. The quiet action continues softly.

He is looking down at her peaceful, rigid face fading into the dusk as though darkness were a precursor of the ultimate earth, until at last the face seems to float detached upon it, lightly as the reflection of a dead leaf. (49)

The change from dying to death takes a long time, and even after death comes, there is still a kind of dying happening. After Peabody has taken a look at Addie and has talked with Anse about his having waited so long to call for help, he looks around and thinks, "That's the one trouble with this country: everything, weather, all, hangs on too long. Like our rivers, our land: opaque, slow, violent; shaping and creating the life of man in its implacable and brooding image." (44)

The leave-taking, the process of dying is not only difficult but also awkward.

There is evidence that Addie is very much alive spiritually while

dying and after she dies. Pa's words hint that after death, Addie will still be able to respond and remark on the conditions of her burial trip. In fact, "her burial is symbolically almost a final action, a final fulfillment of her life. She does, after all, still speak even though ostensibly dead."¹⁰ "She's counted on it," pa says. "She'll want to start right away. I know her. I promised her I'd keep the team here and ready and she's counting on it." (17) And in another place, "She wanted that like she wants to go in our wagon," pa says. "She'll rest easier for knowing it's a good one, and private. She was ever a private woman." (18) And finally, "By sundown, now," pa says, "I would not keep her waiting." (19)

Besides the evidence Pa gives, Darl describes in another section, the heaving and clumsy shuffling while picking up, carrying, and loading Addie and the coffin into the wagon outside. This description provides the second way we can feel this eerie life spirit still in Addie after her death.

He heaves, lifting one whole side so suddenly that we all spring into the lift to catch and balance it before he hurls it completely over. For an instant it resists, as though volitional, as though within it her polethin body clings furiously, even though dead, to a sort of modesty. . .Then it breaks free, rising suddenly as though the emaciation of her body had added buoyancy to the planks. . . .(91,92)

In a different way, in a more passive way, if that is possible, Addie seems alive and very much established as part of other life forms. It is the preparation and wait for her death which make her the center of everyone's activity. The uncertain time of her death keeps everyone close (except Darl and Jewell who are off making a quick three dollars

¹⁰Larsen, p. 27.

at the last minute), and the death itself then activates the trip to Jefferson, and, of course, the family cannot manage the trip alone because of the weather and the flooding river, so the actual departure, the trip itself, and the neighbor-musings that must continue after she is gone and buried keep Addie more alive than she was in actual physical life.

While private and unviolated inside that coffin, she is, at the same time, in the midst of returning to the family burying ground in Jefferson to "them of her blood waiting for her there." (18) Going back to her family in Jefferson represents less of a violation on her part than if she would be buried with the Bundrens. Although Cash is a tie between the families in that Addie has "her own flesh and blood make her coffin," (19) "her return to her early home is a rejection of her married life, a denial of the violations which destroy privacy and death itself."¹¹

The development of a community with her at the center continues to move outward in spiralling circles from the particular members of her family to the family as a corporate group, to the neighbors in the farm community, all the way to Jefferson forty miles away. Addie has remained passive, but that passivity has caused an active response that has placed her in a position where she is a member and relates, no matter how strangely, to those around her.

Her life after death can also be felt in the references to her dead body in the coffin, not as a corpse or dead body, but by name, as "Addie" or "her." Before lowering into the river to cross, Cash lifts

¹¹ B. M. Cross, "Apocalypse and Community in As I Lay Dying," TSL, III (Summer, 1961), 254.

"his box of tools and wedges it forward under the seat; together we shove Addie forward, wedging her between the tools and the wagon bed." (140)

Vardaman watches as they become part of the river current, "Cash tried but she fell off and Darl jumped going under he went under and Cash hollering to catch her and I hollering. . . ." (143)

Addie changed from an active to a passive existence, and it is apparent that in giving up her life she has solved the dilemma of living. Her existence has been firmly established and during the last days and on into her death trip to Jefferson, she continues to relate to members of a community where she is the center and will remain so for some time. But so far, the time of death itself has not been dealt with fully enough.

There is a respect for Addie's life and for her death felt in Peabody's reflections, a respect shown by his letting Addie die so she can be free,

When Anse finally sent for me of his own accord, I said 'He has wore her out at last.' And I said a damn good thing, and at first I would not go because there might be something I could do and I would have to haul her back, by God. I thought maybe they have the same sort of fool ethics in heaven they have in the Medical College. . . But when it got far enough into the day for me to read weather sign I knew it couldn't have been anybody but Anse that sent. I knew that nobody but a luckless man could ever need a doctor in the face of a cyclone. (40,41)

Peabody comes, Addie passes into death, the proper funeral service with the hymn singing follows, and then the awkward clambering begins with noisy human efforts that are often mistaken and incomplete, as an inept father and a disjointed family with some of the neighbors try to ready her for the burial trip to Jefferson. She will continue to be at the center of the community's attention because of the promise having

to be fulfilled, and this is a reaffirmation of her existence.

Even though there are ulterior motives beyond the promise to Addie (Anse--teeth; Dewey Dell--abortion; Vardaman--red train engine in the store window; Cash--gramophone; Jewell--accomplishment of the trip), still, the family goes through much discomfort and agony to get her to Jefferson. Certainly they aren't so scrupulous as to feel they have to do that for appearance's sake, or for honor.

Addie is eventually placed in the well-built coffin, with the air holes bored on top, and the rattling, bumbling Bundren group start off to Jefferson. "Addie's death and decomposing body becomes a cohesive force holding the family together in the journey; the fact of Death overshadows and sublimates their own petty selfishness and dissensions; they can endure as a unit only until the moment when the last spadeful of sod has covered her coffin."¹²

In her death and during the trip to Jefferson, Addie has achieved her own unity and she has also made that unity possible for those around her on that trip, even if it is only for the length of that trip. (This is something she had tried to do many years before, with and for her school children when she was a teacher, and had failed.) She dies believing "that men are forever strangers to each other, that the bonds of kinship, love, trust, and even fear and sin are but words. And words for Addie are the "gaps in people's lacks, coming down like the cries of the geese out of the wild darkness in the old terrible nights, fumbling at the deeds like orphans."¹³ Because of the difference in awareness

¹²R. M. Slabey, "As I Lay Dying as an Existential Novel," Bucknell Review, XI (December, 1963), 22.

¹³Wasiolek, 18.

between Addie and the Bundren family, they probably will never realize how isolated they are, or what strangers they are to each other and to themselves.

Addie's awareness and her times of being violated, and in the context of giving birth--of violating, help bring forth a belief and affirmation of the nihilist view of death, and for her, nihilism is the answer; it gives her peace. She has come to terms with the two basic conditions that face each man; the play of life and death is balanced.

IV. Addie's View Compared with Cora's and Peabody's Views

Perhaps it is in the difference of awareness and in not experiencing or realizing the violations, that people form different views, different ways of achieving the balance of the life/death play. Now that the evolution of Addie's view of death has been seen alone, in this section, her view is seen within the context and brief development of Cora's and Peabody's views.

There is a contrast between Addie and the Bundrens, but there is a more definite contrast between Addie and Cora. The tone of Cora's fundamentalist view in her response to Addie and the Bundrens is described by Olga Vickery,

. . .everything about Addie, her family, and her death is but another moral lesson to be interpreted by Cora Tull as she elbows her way to heaven. . . .Cora is totally unaware, in any real sense, of those agonizing and exalting human experiences which stand outside her rigid system of ethics, resisting and disrupting its smooth simplification of existence.¹⁴

The difference between Addie's and Cora's views comes mainly in how

¹⁴Vickery, 246.

these views influence their lives. Death is desirable for both Addie and Cora, an end to a miserable, absurd life for Addie, and the beginning of a heavenly life of songs and rewards for Cora. But considering their lives on earth, it is a matter of superficiality and unawareness in Cora that contrasts with Addie, who is, indeed, aware "of those agonizing and exalting human experiences," and finds herself in the midst of them throughout her whole life. Addie lives a long time, through violations in various contexts of her life, before she deals with the condition of death and finds it to be her solution. When she does decide that death is her solution, her life changes from an aggressive, active series of tries, to a passive rest. There no longer is a need to strive, to establish or unite. Even in her wait for death is a severe awareness and assertion of her self.

Cora is a different case. Predicting, chattering, judging--words, words, words. . .pat Biblical formulas, or songs of "I am bounding toward my God and my reward," (86) Cora's presence and her view of death are obvious and loud and continuous, clattering through Addie's slow, steady dying. "Then she begun to sing again, working at the washtub, 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." (46) Cora's marching ahead, emphasizing her life to come after death, gives a kind of superficiality to her life. It also comes because of her confidence that she is part of God's will, carrying out his plan in her actions. . . .No matter how burdensome the task, it is just part of her "Christian duty." "If there's ere a thing we can do," (31) she keeps reminding the Bundrens. And then a bit later we can find her saying, "Why, for the last three weeks I have been coming

over every time I could, coming sometimes when I shouldn't have, neglecting my own family and duties so that somebody would be with her in her last moments and she would not have to face the Great Unknown without one familiar face to give her courage." (21) If Cora only knew what Addie believed, how the Great Unknown simply did not exist for Addie. . . . Anyway, Cora is fulfilled in thinking she is doing what God has planned, and is even more fulfilled as she lists her sufferings and hardships while serving other people. Cora is not only fulfilled but because of her trust in God, she can handle hardships and injustices of this world. Tull assesses the situation and Cora, "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, though sometimes I think that Cora's a mite closer than anybody else." (67)

Cora is so close to the Lord that she is already living a kind of anticipated after-life. It is the fact that she has shifted the responsibility of her own thinking into Biblical formulas that establishes her after-life so securely, that automatically those two basic conditions are taken care of. By so firmly establishing this belief in the fundamentalist view of death, and because she is living at a rather superficial level, violation, or her recognition of violation is impossible. If she went through the same experiences as Addie, she would not respond the same way. She would interpret them differently and would not recognize them as violations. At most, they would be sources of suffering, which for Cora, would be a reason for joy. Cora is too busy acting, talking, and singing, accumulating her reward, to recognize violations whether she intends it to be that way or not.

Death for Peabody is a different matter. Although he finds death to be positive, his view is not a tired, passive resignation or an active, extraordinary supernatural phenomenon. Rather, it is simply an ongoing, continual, life/death cycle.

Although there is a life force common to the three views, it activates the three people differently; or they respond to it differently. If levels of awareness or the extent of struggling in the involvement with the two basic conditions were to be compared, Addie would be first with the most severe sense, Peabody second, and Cora third. In considering the sense of violation that was seen in Addie's life and that was not seen in Cora's life, Peabody seems to find a comfortable midway point.

There seems to be a difference, however, in the way Peabody's view of death affects his life. He has developed not only a reverence for living and dying, but also a kind of poise for meeting life and death. His belief in the continual movement of living and dying seems to give a continuity, or a steady, even pace to his own living. He is at peace in this life although he doesn't always understand it, and he is at peace in his thoughts of death.

If he feels violations, he is able to deal with them. And maybe he has had positive experiences or has interpreted them as such, unlike Addie. Peabody, when he enters the action, knows himself well enough to be able to establish his identity and existence and to meet others and to meet his own death as well as the death of those around him.

"How are you, sister?" he says. (43) And that could be just a familiar greeting but it may hold more than that. It might be a feeling of kinship, in his view, a kinship because each person is related by

being part of life and death. And he goes beyond a personal sensitivity to an awareness of a human condition, an awareness of "each person's pride, that furious desire to hide that abject nakedness which we bring here with us, carry with us into operating rooms, carry stubbornly and furiously with us into the earth again." (44,45)

Addie's "death is an interruption, a stoppage, a cause and an opportunity for reflection...."¹⁵ It has prompted Peabody to articulate his view of life and death which has been forming through his seventy years, and in his articulation are two other views, Cora's and Addie's father's, eventually her own. Because Addie's lifetime, (her lifetime during life and her lifetime during her "life" in death), is central in As I Lay Dying, she is a good example of someone's resolving the two basic conditions and balancing the uneven play of life and death forces. And Cora's and Peabody's views provide contrasts, a brief context, making Addie's view clearer on its own and related to others.

V. The Long Trip from Birth to Death

Man is one and he is many, needing to live completely as one man, as well as needing to share that singular strength with other men in a corporate unity, sharing the life spirit that is in all men, in all life forms. And also, by the fact that he is alive, he must find his place in relation to his inevitable death.

The tones of the life spirit in the daytime, bubbling, sunny springs

¹⁵Malcolm Cowley, "Introduction," The Portable Faulkner, ed. Malcolm Cowley, (New York: Viking Press, 1946), pp. 16,17.

and in the night time, faint high cries in the wild darkness, coincide with the progression of Addie's coming to terms with those two basic conditions in Faulkner's As I Lay Dying. There has been a steady decline of hope as this unusual woman has encountered positive potentials in the contexts of nature, sex, birth, and words, and then in her relations with them, has found them locked so they are incompletely and inconsistently fulfilled. The decline has leveled and the tones have settled in quiet darkness at her resignation and acceptance of the way she sees her life to be. Resignation and acceptance have led to her passivity in dying. And the potential in death she has found open to her, fully and constantly. During the time of Addie's dying, death, and time after death, she has succeeded in establishing her existence or presence among others, even establishing a kind of union with other life forms, in that she has become the center of attention as her family and community prepare for her death and burial trip. Ironically, in her acceptance of death and in her establishment of a relationship with it, giving herself to it, she has, at the same time, broken through her isolation to a kind of recognition of this union after death. How others speak of her and handle her coffin on the trip to Jefferson intimates that she is quietly alive. In some way she may be able to realize this attention and that she is part of other life forms by the fact of their actions and fulfillment of Anse's promise. As Addie's view has evolved through her lifetime, Cora's and Peabody's views have remained steady, serving as constants, and serving as contrasts while Addie's view was changing and finally became as decisive and stable as theirs.

Through Addie's trip to Jefferson, to her lowering into the ground, light disappears and sounds are softened and become brooding like the

land. The land Addie said was part of her blood and flesh finally accepts her and her blood and flesh are now part of the land, "implacable and brooding." Addie was given life, she came to terms with the matters of life and death and found death to be her release. Her life is over. Her death is over. And now she is beyond them, beyond having to deal even passively with them and their uneven play in the novel.

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FAULKNER'S AS I LAY DYING: THE EVOLUTION OF
ADDIE'S VIEW OF LIFE AND DEATH

by

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B. A., Gustavus Adolphus College, 1969

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1971

Each man must deal with the uneven play of life and death forces. He does this by coming to terms with two basic conditions. One is that he must establish his existence and self-identity alone as well as in spiritual union with other people and other life forms. The other condition is that he must come to terms with his inevitable physical death; he must find a life relationship with the fact of death. There are different ways of reconciling oneself with these two conditions. In Faulkner's As I Lay Dying, Peabody states three views of death, which hold inherent corresponding views of life, "The nihilists say it is the end; the fundamentalists, the beginning; when in reality it is no more than a single tenant or family moving out of a tenement or a town." (p. 43) The first view is Addie's father's, and eventually Addie's, the second, Cora's, and the third, Peabody's. In this study the views of Cora and Peabody serve as comparisons and contrasts to the evolving view of Addie Bundren.

Addie's lifetime is emblematic of man in the process of coming to terms with life and death. She finally reaches a solution after struggles and attempts in four contexts of nature, sex, birth, and words. After Addie has experienced failures and a sense of violation trying to unite with the life spirit in other life forms in the contexts of nature and sex, she establishes herself very firmly as one person, able to stand alone, isolated though she may be. However, as the need for spiritual union with others still remains, she turns her attention to preparing for death. This attention to her death becomes more and more important as she continues to feel further failure and violation in the contexts of birth and words.

Addie accepts the fact of her death and sees it as her means of

release, but there is more to it than release. During the time of Addie's dying, death, and time after death, she has succeeded in establishing her existence or presence among others, even establishing a kind of union with other life forms, in that she has become the center of attention as her family and community prepare for her death and burial trip. Ironically, in her acceptance of death and in her establishment of a relationship with it, giving herself to it, she has, at the same time, broken through her isolation to a kind of relationship or union with others. And there seems to be a kind of recognition of this union after death. How others speak of her and handle her coffin on the trip to Jefferson intimates that she is quietly alive. In some way she may be able to realize this attention and that she is part of other life forms by the fact of their actions and fulfillment of Anse's promise.

The three views of death regard it as the end, as the beginning, and as part of an ongoing life/death cycle. Death is positive in all three views, but it has different influences on the three lives. Addie finally passively accepts isolation and death to feel release in death and a reconciliation with life; the active Cora accumulates her eternal reward. And Peabody calmly deals with life and his eventual death. As Addie's view has evolved through her lifetime, Cora's and Peabody's views have remained steady, serving as constants and comparisons in the evolution.

During this evolution of Addie's view of life and death, hope has steadily declined as she has experienced disappointments in nature, sex, birth, and words. The decline has leveled with her resignation and acceptance of the way she sees life to be. This has led to her passivity in dying. Finally, in death, she discovers a full and constant fulfillment. So her long trip from birth to death finishes and she has come to

terms with the universal uneven play of life and death forces.