As I Lay Dying

Reviewed for The Book Club by Pat Goss

May 29, 2015

1929 was an eventful year for William Faulkner. His first significant novel, Sartoris, was published. He earlier had published two novels, Soldier’s Pay and Mosquitoes, two volumes of poetry, and several short stories. Later that year The Sound and the Fury was published. He had courted Estelle Oldham since they were teenagers; she was born in 1896 and he a year and a half later in 1897. Her family disapproved of him and his family. She had married another man and had had two children. After they divorced, she and Faulkner married on June 20, 1929. She attempted suicide on their honeymoon. Within a year they bought Rowan Oak. A measure of how different life was in Oxford, Mississippi, in 1930 is that Faulkner used the $750 for which he sold a short story to electrify Rowan Oak.

With the publication of the two works I just mentioned, Faulkner was starting on a period of literary creativity perhaps unequaled in American literature. As I Lay Dying was published in 1930, Sanctuary in 1931, Light in August in 1932, and Absalom, Absalom! in 1936. All are works of the first rank. I have read all of them, all at least three times, and although I am not qualified to rank American novels, they are on my personal best list. And I think that literature professors and critics put these books in the top echelon of American novels. In 1998 the editorial board of Modern Library compiled its list of the world’s 100 best novels in English. As I Lay Dying was thirty-fifth. In a poll of readers by Modern Library it was ranked sixty-seventh. Students in the publishing program at Radcliffe were asked by Modern Library to make a list of the greatest novels in English, and they rated As I Lay Dying nineteenth. I am handing around a list of Faulkner’s poetry, novels and short fiction. Faulkner received the Pulitzer Prize for fiction twice, both times for minor works, A Fable in 1954, which also won the National Book Award, and The Reivers in 1962, awarded posthumously. He received the Nobel Prize for literature for 1949, but the award was presented in 1950. His acceptance speech was heralded, and I am passing around copies of it.

Faulkner had taken a job in the power plant at the University of Mississippi in October of 1929. He worked from 6 in the evening until 6 in the morning. Others did the heavy work, and he had lots of time – perhaps as much as six hours a shift – to write. Between October 25 and December 29, according to handwritten notes on the handwritten transcript, he wrote As I Lay Dying. He finished typing it January 12, 1930. The excellent Editor’s Note in the Vintage paperback refers to several of Faulkner’s comments about the book. In his introduction to the 1932 Modern Library volume of Sanctuary, he wrote that he wrote As I Lay Dying in six weeks without changing a word. That boast was not true. When he typed, he edited, and there are additional changes from the ribbon typesetting copy to the published work. He also said that he set out to write a tour-de-force by which he could stand or fall if he wrote nothing else. It is a fine book, but he wrote others by which he also is judged.
The title comes from Agamemnon’s speech to Odysseus in the *Odyssey*: “As I lay dying the woman with the dog’s eyes would not close my eyes for me as I descended into Hades.” Frederick Karl, one of Faulkner’s biographers, contends that “I” is Darl. Most others think Addie is “I.”

In the winter I took an eight-week class on this book taught by Chuck Chappell at Life Quest. We got snowed out a couple of times, but the six sessions Chuck taught inform this review. Chuck is the author of a book about Faulkner, *Detective Dupin Reads William Faulkner: Solutions to Six Yoknapatawpha Mysteries*. He and John Churchill wrote a short article for *ANQ* in 1990, “The Symbolic Significance of Dewey Dell Bundren’s Name.”

Anse and Addie Bundren are the parents of Cash, Darl, Dewey Dell, and Vardaman. Addie is the mother of Jewel by the preacher Whitfield. Near the end of the book Cash gives us information about the family. He was the oldest, and Darl was next. Then about ten years passed before Jewel, Dewey Dell, and Vardaman were born. Dewey Dell tells the druggist in Mottston she is seventeen, and that seems about right.

The book comprises fifty-nine internal monologues by members of the Bundren family and by neighbors. Darl, the second-oldest child and son of Anse and Addie Bundren, has the most monologues, nineteen. Addie speaks only once, but her chapter is the most important. At times the narrator tells a clear narrative. Sometimes the syntax is elevated above what we would expect from a particular narrator, but always with the narrator’s limitations of vision and knowledge, and at times the narrator speaks in an expected vernacular, suggesting the intellectual limitations of the speaker or the speaker’s grief or distraction. For example, Vardaman is distraught over his mother’s death, and Dewey Dell is distraught over her pregnancy. At times the narrator slips into internal thoughts, musings really. Darl especially speaks poetically.

I will start with Addie’s monologue. She was from Jefferson. When she married Anse, she had no family. Neither did he. Her father had told her that living was preparing to stay dead for a long time, a haunt or a curse. She came to the southeast part of the county to teach. She struggled to find meaning in anything or for a connection to alleviate her aloneness. I believe she wanted respite from her aloneness, although she complained that her aloneness was violated. She delighted when her students misbehaved so she could punish them, feeling herself the punishment she meted out and perhaps an elemental connection with her students. The early spring was the hardest time for her. She went to a spring near the school. Spring is the time of awakening, and I think the yearnings that led her to the spring are the first indication of her strong sexuality. She had noticed Anse driving by the school. She found out that he had a good farm and a new house. In her words, “And so I took Anse.” To break through her aloneness or to express her sexuality, which is manifest. She gave birth to Cash, whom she loved. She thought Anse tricked her into getting pregnant with Darl, whom she did not love but who loved her. There are no more children for ten years, until she got pregnant with Whitfield’s child, who was Jewel. She loved Jewel, who was impetuous. In the chapter of *Detective Dupin* about *As I Lay Dying*, Chuck Chappell deals with Addie’s comments about the births of Dewey
Dell and Vardaman. She gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Chuck uses the mathematical term additive inverse to explain what is meant by negativig. The additive inverse of a number is the number which yields zero when added to the first number. Dewey Dell was the additive inverse of Jewel. He quotes a critic who said that Addie balanced the bottom line of her moral accountancy. And Chuck astutely observes, “Addie does not cancel out the significance of Jewel’s birth but rather in her own mind morally justifies it.” Then, later, perhaps having concluded that the books still were not balanced, she gave him Vardaman to replace the child she had robbed of. It was clear to me that the child she robbed him of was Cash. Anse was not allowed into the world Addie took Cash into. Addie viewed three of the children – Darl, Dewey Dell, and Vardaman - as Anse’s. Chuck makes another interesting observation about the children. He thinks Addie was indifferent to Dewey Dell and Vardaman because of the purposes for which she allowed herself to conceive them but that she actively hated Darl because of his being born against her will and through a trick by Anse. Anse was dead to her. She had no use for words that are used to describe things she finds indescribable, such as motherhood. She was a person of deeds, not words. She was not religious and set out to expiate her sin – whether her adultery or her not loving three of her children - in her daily living. She told Cora Tull that Jewel would save her from water and fire, and he did. And Cora was horrified.

At this point I offer three observations about the book. The first is that the ability to see and know things that occur when one is not present and to communicate telepathically, claimed by Anse and demonstrated by Darl, is prominent. When Darl and Jewel were on their ill-fated delivery of lumber, Darl saw the scene of Addie’s death and is the narrator of that scene. He knew Dewey Dell was pregnant and communicated his knowledge to her without speaking. Dewey Dell answered him without speaking. The second is that Faulkner uses humor as a counterpoint to some really horrible events and actions. Most of the humor comes from neighbors’ comments about Anse’s being trifling and lazy. Some comes from Anse’s ridiculous statements of false pride. Third, this is a journey book, like The Canterbury Tales, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Odyssey, On the Road, and others you can name.

With that background I will go through the book, noting some additional themes as I go. This is a good time to note that in As I Lay Dying, Faulkner for the first time named Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County.

In Darl’s first monologue we learn that it is July. We see his precognition because he described what Jewel was doing even though Jewel was walking behind him. The good farm and new house that we learn later attracted Addie to Anse had deteriorated. The caulking between the logs of the cotton house was gone. The house tilted. Jewel was different, a head taller than Cash and Darl. Cash, a master carpenter, was working on Addie’s coffin in sight of her from her deathbed.

Cora Tull had been in attendance off and on for days. She had baked cakes for a woman in town, certainly Frenchman’s Bend, not Jefferson, and the woman did not take the cakes. Cora had occasion to say what a good cook Addie was.
Darl narrated a short chapter in which he talked about masturbation and described Jewel with his horse, still wild, loved and hated by Jewel. He described Anse’s ruined feet.

Jewel was furious at Cash for making the coffin, even though Addie wanted him to and approved every board. Jewel was Cash’s rival for Addie’s love, and he likely was angry because Cash was doing what Addie wanted. Jewel referred to the people gathered as buzzards, presaging the real buzzards to come. He would prefer to have his mother to himself.

A decision had to be made about whether Darl and Jewel should take a job hauling lumber. Anse procrastinated, but it was clear he wanted the three dollars Darl and Jewel would earn. Darl mentioned Anse’s claim that he had to avoid sweating; if he sweated, he would die. Darl was skeptical. It is likely Anse did sweat until he got children old enough to do the farm work, although we know he always got help from neighbors, so perhaps he had not sweated since he supposedly almost died from sweating as a young man. This was the first comic contrast between his laziness and his protestations about taking care of his family. Darl knew Addie favored Jewel; Anse mistakenly accused Jewel of not caring for his mother. Tull was there, and he and Anse were debating whether it would rain.

Cora was in with Addie, and she weighed in. She understood some relationships and misunderstood others. She knew Addie’s pride, was correct that Addie loved Jewel, but thought incorrectly that Addie and Darl had a special relationship.

Dewey Dell and Lafe started their relationship in the fall when they were picking cotton, so they had been at it a long time before she got pregnant in May the following year. She told the druggist in Mottston that she had missed two periods. She told herself she would not screw Lafe unless her cotton sack was full at the end of the row. He filled it for her, but she still told herself that the decision had not been hers. Darl knew she was pregnant and communicated to her without speaking. He also tells her Addie will die before he and Jewel get back, again speaking telepathically.

Tull was a fairly reliable narrator. Peabody arrived. Anse had waited too long to send word for him, but Peabody thought that might have been a blessing because Addie would escape Anse finally. Anse spoke and referred to his second-sightedness telling him of the coming rain. In a series of narrations, Darl, who is on the road, described Addie’s death. Both Peabody and Darl reported the only words Addie spoke, “Cash, you Cash!” or “You, Cash, you, Cash!” Darl knew that Dewey Dell was thinking about what Peabody could do for her if he would. And Darl also reported what was happening where he and Jewel were, stranded on the road with a broken wheel. Darl told Jewel that Addie was dead. Darl’s comments to Jewel through the journey, including his questioning who Jewel’s father was and suggesting that Addie might be a whore when he asked whether Jewel’s mother was a horse, enraged Jewel. As soon as Addie died, Anse said, “God’s will be done. Now I can get them teeth.” Dewey Dell served up cold turnip greens for the meal after Addie died; Peabody had hoped for more. Vardaman was grief-stricken and alternately saw his mother as the fish he had caught, saw the fish as the only thing that had died, hoped his mother was still alive in the coffin, blamed
Peabody for killing her, chased off his buggy and team, opened the windows to her room to give her air, and drilled holes in the top of the coffin, two of which went into her face, to give her air. When Vardaman had gone to chase off Peabody’s team, Dewey Dell had gone to the barn to masturbate. She thought Vardaman was following her to spy on her and shook him violently. Peabody commented that Addie been dead ten days, presaging the ten days that will pass before she is buried.

Vardaman walked four miles to the Tulls’ in a pouring rain and waked them in the middle of night. They figured out Addie had died, and Cora insisted they go to the Bundrens’ at once. They did. Tull helped Cash finish the coffin. Anse tried to help but was in the way. He also fumbled when he tried to touch Addie after she died, one of his few touching actions in the book, and succeeded only in disturbing the covers. Darl reported the finishing of the coffin and the men carrying it inside.

I mentioned the poetic nature of some of Darl’s thoughts. He ended a meditation on page 81, “How often have I lain beneath rain on a strange roof.”

As was his mother, Cash was a man of deeds, not words. His first monologue was an explanation of why he took time to bevel the edges some of the boards in the coffin, a discourse on beveling.

Tull went home early in the morning but returned with Peabody’s team. Other families had gathered for the funeral. The rain had begun. The men – Tull, Varner, Houston, Quick, and Littlejohn – formed a sort of Greek chorus. Whitfield had to swim the river at Tull’s ford, but he arrived. Tull captured Whitfield’s shallowness when he noted that his voice was bigger than he was.

Although the story of the journey was important, Faulkner did not dwell on details that were not as important as the people on the journey and the meaning of the journey. For example, in a monologue by Tull, he expeditiously handled Jewel and Darl’s return and the beginning of the journey, “She laid there three days in that box, waiting for Darl and Jewel to come clean back home and get a new wheel and go back to where the wagon was in the ditch. Take my team, Anse, I said. We’ll wait for ours, he said. She’ll want it so. She was ever a particular woman. On the third day they got back and they loaded her into the wagon and started and it already too late. They’ll have to go all the way round by Samson’s bridge. It’ll take a day to get there. Then you’ll be forty miles from Jefferson.” And the women insisted Addie be put in the coffin backwards so as not to ruffle her wedding dress, making it unbalanced, to Cash’s consternation.

Jewel’s mania and anger manifested as they loaded the coffin onto the wagon, not waiting for those who could not keep up and literally throwing the coffin into the wagon. And he defied Anse by taking the horse on the journey. Darl described Dewey Dell’s climbing into the wagon in a way that hinted at incestuous desire: “She sets the basket into the wagon and
climbs in, her leg coming long from beneath her tightening dress: that lever which moves the world; one of that caliper which measures the length and breadth of life.” P. 104.

Darl reported on the beginning of the journey, including their passing the turn to New Hope Church and Cash’s observation that the corpse would start smelling in a couple of days.

Anse reported about the end of the first day’s journey. In his monologue he included the information that Samson’s bridge was out and gloried in his misfortune, as he did throughout the novel, reflecting on his being chastened because he is the chosen of the Lord, and proclaimed again what really mattered, “But now I can get them teeth. That will be a comfort. It will.”

Samson’s monologue is significant in forwarding the narrative. He reported what we know: that Anse had not had Addie embalmed. Samson was the first who tried to persuade Anse to be sensible and bury Addie at New Hope. He offered one of many comic takes on Anse: “I notice how it takes a lazy man, a man that hates moving, to get set on moving once he does get started off, the same as he was set on staying still, like it aint the moving he hates so much as the starting and stopping. And like he would be kind of proud of whatever come up to make the moving or the setting still look hard.” He is another man who got into trouble with his wife because he could not get Anse to do right. And he, like Tull before and Armstid and Gillespie after, helped the Bundrens. And like the others, he would not be stopped by the Bundrens’ false pride. Anse declines supper, and Samson says, “And when folks stops with us at meal time and wont come to the table, my wife takes it as a insult.” Jewel tried to buy feed for his horse. Samson lectured him, “You cant buy no feed from me, boy. And if he can eat that loft clean, I’ll help you load the barn onto the wagon in the morning.”

The journey continued as they backtracked. Since Samson’s bridge was out, they headed back to Tull’s and again passed New Hope Church, where the Bundrens buried. Passing New Hope twice, not just once, was a wonderful image. Anse might or might not have been motivated by his promise to Addie, which she elicited but really did not care about. He certainly was motivated by getting his teeth. Dewey Dell was hoping for a drug cure for her pregnancy. Vardaman had been appeased by Dewey Dell with the promise of seeing a model train in a store window and eating bananas. Jewel was wild in his love for his mother and went along on the chance that burying her in Jefferson mattered to her. Cash loved his mother, but he had doubts and gave the sign for the turn to New Hope a double take. Darl was the most clear-headed of the bunch and foresaw trouble.

As Faulkner might say, “His writing ever is not easy.” Elliptical might be a description. Also, poetic and rewarding and challenging. At p. 120 of the Vintage edition, Dewey Dell sorted out why she could not grieve over Addie’s death: “I hear that my mother is dead. I wish I had time to let her die. I wish I had time to wish I had. It is because in the wild and outraged earth too soon too soon too soon. It’s not that I wouldn’t and will not it’s that it is too soon too soon too soon.”
They returned to Tull’s. He suggested they wait to let the river go down. Jewel cursed him and demanded he let them use his mule with their mules to pull the wagon across the river. The family that did not want to be beholden could be demanding.

Darl told the story of Jewel’s clearing Quick’s forty acres at night to buy a horse, a descendant of one of the wild horses turned loose on the community in “Spotted Horses,” a novella Faulkner liked a lot because of the character Surratt. He liked the character and the story so much that he greatly expanded the story as part of The Hamlet and changed Surratt to Ratliff. At the end of the monologue Darl told of Addie’s crying over an exhausted, sleeping Jewel. Darl then knew of Addie’s deceit, just as he later knew of Dewey Dell’s pregnancy.

In their monologues, Tull, Darl, and Vardaman told of the crossing of the river. Anse, Tull, Dewey Dell, and Vardaman walked across the bridge, and Jewel, Cash, and Darl tried to get the wagon across the ford downstream from the bridge. They might have made it but for the log that struck the mules and the wagon. The telling of the crossing was detailed and factual in part and elliptical in part. Darl jumped off the wagon and did not assist in rescuing the coffin, and I think we must wonder if he thought it was time to end the insanity. Cash, who could not swim, came out of the water on Jewel’s horse, and his leg was broken. Jewel saved Addie from the water as she told Cora he would. Tull and Jewel recovered all of Cash’s tools. After all the carnage, Anse thought only of himself, reveling again in his setbacks. At p. 163, he said, “If ever was such a misfortunate man.” I think there was another incestuous thought from Darl, at p. 164, “Squatting, Dewey Dell’s wet dress shapes for the dead eyes of three blind men those mammalian ludicrousities which are the horizons and the valleys of the earth.” And practical Cash speaks, at p. 165, “it wasn’t on a balance. I told them that if they wanted it to tote and ride on a balance, they would have to”, then trailing off. In a monologue that is a flashback, Cora remembered Addie’s telling her that Jewel would be her cross and her salvation. At p. 168, “She just sat there, lost in her vanity and her pride, that had closed her heart to God and set that selfish mortal boy in His place.”

Earlier I discussed Addie’s monologue, which came next.

After Addie’s monologue, we heard from Whitfield, who said he had resolved to confess his sin but did not have to because Addie died without telling and because he told himself that telling would be harmful and congratulated himself that his resolving to tell was what mattered.

They made it to the Armstids’. Cash was taken inside. Armstid revealed that a levee was down, so that they would have to go to Jefferson by way of Mottston, another example of the economy of Faulkner’s storytelling when a detail is important but is revealed almost off-handedly. The first night at the Armstids’ Anse actually asked for food for his family. Armstid gave him some drinks. Jewel went to Frenchman’s Bend to bring Peabody to treat Cash because Peabody was thought to be there. He was not, but Billy Varner, a veterinarian, set Cash’s broken leg. Anse planned to trade for a span of mules and after he had another drink, he became boastful about being a trader who could match Snopes. He took the money Cash had
been saving for a gramophone and his own teeth money and traded the money and Jewel's horse and a mortgage on his cultivator and seeder for the mules. When Jewel learned his horse had been traded, he took off on the horse but left it with Snopes, and Snopes's man delivered the mules. The smell and the buzzards already were problems, and they were more so from now on.

I am passing around three maps. Faulkner appended the first to Absalom, Absalom!, and it contains information about several novels. When Malcolm Cowley was assembling The Portable Faulkner, he asked Faulkner to compose a history of the Compsons, which Faulkner did and was proud of and thought showed he still had the magic touch. The history thereafter has appeared as an appendix to The Sound and the Fury. Cowley also asked Faulkner to add the Compsons to the map. Faulkner said he did not have a copy. Cowley sent him the first map, and Faulkner made another map, from which he took out the references to As I Lay Dying. That is the second map. There are a lot of problems with the first map. Tull's place is on the wrong side of the river and too far from the Bundrens', which was four miles away. Armstid's place is too far north of the river. The most troubling mistake is having Mottston south of the river. According to the map, after the Bundrens learned a levee was out, flooding the road to Jefferson, they would have crossed the river heading south to Mottston and then turned around and come back north. There is a ford or bridge on the Mottston Road that the Bundrens would have used to get to and back from Mottston in the journey reported in the book, but they could have used that ford or bridge to get from south of the flooded river to north of it in the first place. There are other inconsistencies. If the river was so high that Tull's bridge was already down before the funeral and Whitfield had to swim the river, Armstid and Peabody should not have been able to get back north of the river after the funeral since they would have used the bridge. When the Greek chorus was dating the bridge, they did so by referring to Peabody's crossing it to deliver Jody Varner in 1888. But Frenchman's Bend, where Varner lived, is north of the river, so Peabody would not have had to cross the river to get to Varner's. Someone at the University of Virginia redrew the map and corrected some problems but did not explain going to Mottston. That is the third map.

Armstid asked Anse to leave Cash, but he would not. The Bundrens made it to Mottston. Dewey Dell tried unsuccessfully to buy something to abort her pregnancy. Anse was aggressive with the townsmen and the city marshal who wanted them to move on because of the smell. Anse had decided that what Cash needed was to have his leg stabilized, and he intended to pour cement on it. The marshal was more concerned about Cash than Anse was. Darl was concerned about putting on the cement, but Anse insisted because they already had bought the cement. Jewel returned, and Vardaman planned to find out that night where the buzzards went at night. Cash's leg looked awful, and they poured water over it.

They got to the Gillespies'. Darl and Vardaman listened to Addie in the coffin when it was under the apple tree. The men moved the coffin into the barn. Vardaman meant to see about the buzzards and saw something he was not supposed to see, Darl's setting fire to the barn. Darl told of the rescue of the animals from the burning barn and of Jewel's saving the coffin from the fire, at the end riding it like his horse. Dewey Dell told Vardaman not to tell
what he saw. Cash’s foot turned black, and they cracked the cement in yet another attempt to give him some relief. Gillespie expressed amazement that they had had no better sense than to cement his leg. And Darl slept on the coffin, under the apple tree again, to keep the cat off.

Darl reported their arrival in Jefferson. In his lesson series on *As I Lay Dying*, Chuck Chappell described the book as a great book with a flawed ending, as is *Huckleberry Finn*. I think the problems with *Huckleberry Finn* are more profound because Twain totally loses his way, turning a book about courage and love and heart-rending incidents observed on Huck and Jim’s journey into a continuation of *Tom Sawyer*, a boys’ book. In *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner had patiently told of a late-starting journey that lasted way too long, but at the end he got in a hurry and put too many events into two days in Jefferson. Anse reluctantly (at p. 227, he said, “I reckon it aint no way around it”) realized they would have to take Cash to the doctor, but Cash would not go until Addie was buried. Dewey Dell changed into her Sunday clothes, which she had in a package that she had said were Cora Tull’s cakes. Dewey Dell’s thinking that dressing up in her best would help her get what she needed or as a celebration of her approaching release is poignant. Jewel accosted a man walking on the road, and Darl calmed the situation and avoided a fight.

Out of sequence, Cash told of Darl’s being taken away. He mixed practicality and insight about Darl, at pp. 232-233. “It wasn’t nothing else to do. It was either send him to Jackson, or have Gillespie sue us, because he knewed some way that Darl set fire to it.... Sometimes I think it aint none of us pure crazy and aint none of us pure sane until the balance of us talks him that-a-way.... But I thought more than once before we crossed the river and after, how it would be God’s blessing if He did take her outen our hands and get shut of her in some clean way, and it seemed to me that when Jewel worked so to get her outen the river, he was going against God in a way, and then when Darl seen that it looked like one of us would have to do something, I can almost believe he done right in a way.” Darl also gave the history of the births of the children, another instance of Faulkner’s providing important information off-handedly.

Anse’s maddening triflingness and whining continued. He did not call ahead to have the grave dug, he would not buy a spade, and he procrastinated about borrowing one. He borrowed two at Mrs. Bundren’s, where a gramophone (or graphophone, as Cash said) was playing. Of course she was not Mrs. Bundren yet. Darl repeated that they should take Cash to Peabody, but Cash demurred.

Faulkner focused on what really mattered. The purpose of the journey was to bury Addie at the cemetery in Jefferson, but the burial was not described. Cash was amazed at how when Darl was taken by the state hospital attendants just after the burial, Dewey Dell attacked Darl even before Jewel and the men from Jackson did because he thought there was something special between Darl and Dewey Dell. We know that Darl and Dewey Dell communicated without speaking and that Darl knew of her pregnancy. Perhaps there was more, perhaps her perception of his incestuous desire. Or perhaps Darl’s knowing of her pregnancy was enough. Cash then realized it was Dewey Dell who told Gillespie that Darl had burned the barn.
Touchingly, Darl said to Cash, “I thought you would have told me. I never thought you wouldn’t have.”

Cash finally got to Peabody, who pronounced another comic take on a terrible event: “I reckon a man in a tight might let Bill Varner patch him up like a damn mule, but I be damned if the man that’s let Anse Bundren treat him with raw cement aint got more spare legs than I have…. Don’t you lie there and try to tell me you rode six days on a wagon without springs, with a broken leg and it never bothered you…. You mean, it never bothered Anse much. No more than it bothered him to throw that poor devil down in the public street and handcuff him like a damn murderer. Don’t tell me. And don’t tell me it aint going to bother you to lose sixty-odd square inches of skin to get that concrete off…. God Almighty, why didn’t Anse carry you to the nearest sawmill and stick your leg in the saw? That would have cured it. Then you all could have stuck his head into the saw and cured a whole family……. Where is Anse anyway?” “He’s taking back them spades he borrowed.” “That’s right. Of course he’d have to borrow a spade to bury his wife with. Unless he could borrow a hole in the ground.”

So Anse returned the spades for the first time in the novel but the second time in time.

Dewey Dell tried at the drugstore in Jefferson to buy medicine. She fell prey to a clerk who gave her something like turpentine to drink and had her come back in the evening so he could screw her. She knew the cure would not work. I do not think it crude to observe that the cure the clerk offered was the cause of the problem in the first instance. There was no train for Vardaman to see, and he was trying to sort out all that had happened and that he had seen.

In Darl’s last monologue he referred to himself in the third person. He had been in a train car and had arrived in Jackson. He had the kaleidoscope he got in France during the war, and he saw with second sight the wagon and Jewel standing beside it and Dewey Dell and Vardaman and Cash on a pallet eating bananas.

Out of sequence again we are back to just after the burial and before they have gone to Peabody’s. They stopped where they had borrowed the shovels, and Anse returned them—before he returned them later when they were at Peabody’s. Anse went out that night. Anse had seen Dewey Dell’s money and taken it. We are a day short because it was also at night that Dewey Dell went back to the drug store. It is possible, I guess, that Anse took her money and went courting after he saw the clerk, but I think we need another day. Peabody had paid for their rooms at the hotel. The next day they got the wagon loaded and were as Darl saw them. Anse walked up with new teeth, two grips, a duck-shaped woman with hardlooking pop eyes, and a gramophone. We still are at least a day short for Anse to get his teeth, court, get a marriage license, and get married. Cash had the next-to-last word: “…setting in the house in the winter, listening to it, I would think what a shame Darl couldn’t be to enjoy it too. But it is better so for him. This world is not his world; this life his life.” It is magical that Faulkner had Cash say not just that Darl was not with them, perhaps “couldn’t be there,” but that he really no longer existed, “couldn’t be.”
Anse had the final word: “It’s Cash and Jewel and Vardaman and Dewey Dell,” pa says, kind of hangdog and proud too, with his teeth and all, even if he wouldn’t look at us. “Meet Mrs. Bundren,” he says.
WORKS BY WILLIAM FAULKNER

The Marble Faun. 1924. Poems
Soldiers' Pay. 1926.
Mosquitoes. 1927.
Sartoris. 1929.
(Flags in the Dust)
The Sound and the Fury. 1929.
As I Lay Dying. 1930.
Sanctuary. 1931.
These Thirteen. 1931. Stories
Light in August. 1932.
A Green Bough. 1933. Poems
Doctor Martino and Other Stories. 1934. Stories
Pylon. 1935.
Absalom, Absalom! 1936.
The Unvanquished. 1938.
The Wild Palms. 1939.
The Hamlet. 1940.
Go Down, Moses. 1942.
Intruder in the Dust. 1948.
Knight's Gambit. 1949. Stories
Collected Stories of William Faulkner. 1950. Stories
Requiem for a Nun. 1951.
A Fable. 1954.
Big Woods. 1955. Stories
The Town. 1957.
The Mansion. 1959.
The Reivers. 1962.
I feel that this award was not made to me as a man, but to my work—a life's work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit, not for glory and least of all for profit, but to create out of the materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before. So this award is only mine in trust. It will not be difficult to find a dedication for the money part of it commensurate with the purpose and significance of its origin. But I would like to do the same with the acclaim too, by using this moment as a pinnacle from which I might be listened to by the young men and women already dedicated to the same anguish and travail, among whom is already that one who will some day stand here where I am standing.

Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: When will I be blown up? Because of this, the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat.

He must learn them again. He must teach himself that the base of all things is to be afraid; and, teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for any thing but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed—love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice. Until he does so, he labors under a curse. He writes not of love but of lust, of defeats in which nobody loses anything of value, of victories without hope and, worst of all, without pity or compassion. His griefs grieve on no universal bones, leaving no scars. He writes not of the heart but of the glands.

Until he relearns these things, he will write as though he stood among and watched the end of man. I decline to accept the end of man. It is easy enough to say that man is immortal simply because he will endure: that when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking. I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past. The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail.
The Portable FAULKNER
Revised and Expanded Edition
Edited by Malcolm Cowley

The Viking Press  New York