



# **As I Lay Dying**

*William Faulkner*

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*As I Lay Dying* is Faulkner's harrowing account of the Bundren family's odyssey across the Mississippi countryside to bury Addie, their wife and mother. Narrated in turn by each of the family members—including Addie herself—as well as others the novel ranges in mood, from dark comedy to the deepest pathos. Considered one of the most influential novels in American fiction in structure, style, and drama, *As I Lay Dying* is a true 20th-century classic.

This edition reproduces the corrected text of *As I Lay Dying* as established in 1985 by Noel Polk.

## As I Lay Dying Details

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Author : William Faulkner

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# From Reader Review As I Lay Dying for online ebook

Ademption says

THIS BOOK IS ABOUT HICKS THEY GO TO TOWN

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°°°.°..°-°. \_· ????? Ροζουλ? Εωσφ?ρος · \_·°-°.°·°°° ★·.· ^·.·★ ?????? ???????  
??????? Ταμετο?ρο Αμ says

{ ΚΑΘΩΣ ΨΥΧΟΡΡΑΓΩ...AS I LAY DYING }

Καθ?ς.... ψυχορραγ?.

Αυτ? το «καθ?ς»ε?ναι που προσδ?δει τ?σο βαθ? μυστ?ριο και π?νο λες και συγκεντρ?νει το ν?ημα και την ουσ?α ?λης της ανθρ?πινης ?παρξης την ?ρα του επιθαν?τιου ρ?γχου. Τελευτα?ες αναπνο?ς θαν?του ?σως σημαντικ?τερες απο την ?δια την αν?σα των ζωνταν?ν.

Με κυρ?ευσε αυτ?ς ο τ?τλος. Με σημ?δεψε.

Τι αλ?θεια σκ?φτεται κ?ποιος τις τελευτα?ες του στιγμ?ς;

Καθ?ς ψυχορραγε?. Καθ?ς τελει?νει. Καθ?ς γε?εται το μυστικ? του θαν?του που του ψιθυρ?ζει λ?για ανε?πωτα και απαγορευμ?να σε ?σους δεν βρεθο?ν στην ?δια κατ?σταση.

Καθ?ς...θα ε?ναι αργ?. Καθ?ς η κατ?σταση θα χειροτερε?ει. Καθ?ς ?λα θα ε?ναι ασ?μαντα. Καθ?ς τα σημαντικ? δεν υπ?ρξαν ποτ? κι αν υπ?ρχουν τ?ρα ε?ναι αναστρ?ψιμα και μ?νο με τη φαντασ?α προβλ?ψιμα.

ΦΩΚΝΕΡ:

Δεν ξ?ρω να σας πω με σιγουρι? αν ε?ναι ο σημαντικ?τερος συγγραφ?ας του 20ου αι?να. Ξ?ρω μως σ?γουρα πως αποτελε? μ?α σπουδα?α της λογοτεχν?ας σχολ?.

?χει δικ? του στ?γμα. Δικ? του τρ?πο λα?κ?ς γραφ?ς και γλαφυρ?ς ρητορε?ας. Μπορε? να εντ?ξει το γκροτ?σκο και τραγικ? γελο?ο γεγον?ς σε μια αριστουργηματικ? δι?γηση. Να δημιουργ?σει με τα πιο σκο?ρα και σκοτειν? χρ?ματα ?ναν π?νακα που ξεχειλ?ζει φως και ζω?. Ανο?γει μια καινο?ργια π?ρτα στην αναγνωστικ? αντ?ληψη,σκ?ψη,ικαν?τητα και δυνατ?τητα.

Σ?γουρα θεωρ? πως για να τον διαβ?σεις πρ?πει να ε?σαι σε πλ?ρη ετοιμ?τητα. Σε αν?λογο ψυχισμ?,ηλικ?α,καλλι?ργεια και εμπειρ?α.

Παρακολουθο?με λοιπ?ν το καθ?ς...μιας ετοιμοθ?νατης μητ?ρας 5 παιδι?ν και εν?ς συζ?γου,αμφισβητο?μενων απο την ?δια.

Η σκ?ψη της-την οπο?α και διαβ?ζουμε μετ? το θ?νατο της-φων?ζει για την σχ?ση μ?σα σε ?να γ?μο,την αυτοθυσ?α της γυνά?κας που καταπι?ζεται στα κοινωνικ? και θρησκευτικ? πρ?τυπα,την αναγκαστικ? μητρ?τητα και το μεγ?λο αμ?ρτημα του π?θους που το ονομ?ζουν λ?θος ?σοι ποτ? δεν το ?ζησαν.

Τελευταία της επιθυμία να θαφτεί στο μέρος που γεννήθηκε και αφοβόσκεται πολύ μακριά από εκεί που ζει, προποθεί οδοιπορική ψής της οικογένειας προς τον οικογενειακό της τόφο.

Αυτή το οδοιπορική της αγροτικές οικογένειας που ρημίζει από ανήχεια και φτώχεια αλλά διακατέχεται από βαθύ αίσθημα υπερηφάνειας και εντιμότητας είναι τόσο γελοίο, θλιβό και τραγικό που πονεί μέχρι δακρύων.

Πριν το θάνατο, ήταν βρίσκμασταν ακόμη στο καθύς...ο μεγάλος γιος αναλαμβάνει να φτιάξει το φέρετρο της μητέρας του και μάλιστα το μαστορεύει κάτω από το παρθύρο της ετοιμοθάνατης για να το βλέπει και να είναι η συντροφιά της στο καθύς...

Ο θάνατος διαταράσσει το μικρότερο παιδί που υποφέρει και συνεχώς μονολογεί πως η μάνα του είναι ψύρι. Αρνείται το φεύγει της και ανοίγει τρέπες στο φέρετρο για να μπορέ να αναπνέει εκείνη.

Ή η οικογένεια έχει από ένα νόχο μυστικό, από μια ανομολήγηση αμαρτία και προς εξίλωση όλων τους ξεκινούν αυτή τη νεκρική πομπή που διασχίζει τον Αμερικανικό νότο και φέρνει στην επιφάνεια κάθε έδους ανθρωπίνης συνέδησης και αισθητικής.

Οι δυσκολίες και η κακοτυχία είναι οι μνιμοί συνοδοί τους. Όλοι για κάποιο προσωπικό λόγο επιθυμούν αυτή το μακρύ ταξίδι. Οι σχέσεις τους δοκιμάζονται, οι μσκες πφτούν, τα μυστικά αποκαλύπτονται στην πορεία. Μια πορεία που έχει στροφή προς την παρνοία.

Μετά από δέκα μέρες περιφοράς της νεκρής λόγω αντιξοοτήτων η σψη πλημμυρίζει τον άρα και τις ψυχές. Δεν επιστρέφουν όλοι πίσω μετά από αυτή την νεκρική πορεία. Αυτό που επιστρέφουν δεν είναι και δεν θα γίνουν ποτέ αυτό που ήταν πριν το ταξίδι.

Συγκλονιστικός ο μονόλογος του Νταρλ (νάς από τους γιούς) ήταν πια έχει περσει τα ήρια της διαταραχής.

Τι είναι αυτή που σε κάνει και γελές; του λώ.  
«Αυτή αυτή αυτή...».

Καλή ανήγνωση!!  
Πολλός ασπασμός!!

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## Paul Bryant says

Once you get past the ungainly oddness and wild strangeness which assails you from every direction, then you can see the weirdness which lies beyond.

The story, and there is a very strong clear linear narrative here, is wonderfully stupid. A back country family

in Mississippi in the 20s has their dear mama Addie Bundren up and die on them and the lazy-ass sumbitch daddy thinks he then has to carry out her settled dying wish which, very unreasonably, was to get buried with her own kin 40 miles away in Jefferson. This wouldn't be so bad except it's the height of summer and there's just been bad rains and a flood, so the bridges over the river are down. The whole passel of them, four sons, one daughter, one daddy, two mules and one horse, nevertheless trek off to do the right thing. To say they encounter obstacles would be to say nought but the truth. One such is that before very long Addie starts to decomp, to which many passing strangers take exception.

So it's kind of a comic tale but it ain't told comically. No sir. No ma'am.

The guides will say the same thing about this short but dense-like-a-black-hole novel:

*As I Lay Dying is written as a series of stream-of-consciousness monologues, in which the characters' thoughts are presented in all their uncensored chaos, without the organizing presence of an objective narrator.*

That's from the online Spark Notes. Fair enough, except that it's just completely not true. All the short chapters are headed up with a character name, and it kind of naturally seems as if that character is narrating, but a) only occasionally could you call anything in this book stream of consciousness, and even then it's nothing at all like our old beloved friends Virginia Woolf or James Joyce because these interior monologues come at you in perfectly formed and mostly graceful sentences; and b) The chapters obey no consistent rules or they change the rules all the time which is the same thing, so that in the middle of a paragraph it is suddenly the author's omniscient voice popping up.

And another thing - what Faulkner does all the time is bend the credibility of the characters' voices until they break.

Here's two examples of purely natural monologue

*Because be durn if there ain't something about a durn fellow like Anse that seems to make a man have to help him, even when he knows he'll be wanting to kick himself the next minute.*

And

*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. It's like it aint so much what a fellow does, but it's the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it.*

But here's an example of Faulkner's own voice breaking in. The narrator here is Vardaman, aged around ten :

*I can cry quiet now, feeling and hearing my tears It is dark. I can hear wood, silence. I know them. But not living sounds, not even him. It is as though the dark were resolving him out of his integrity into an unrelated scattering of components*

The last sentence is not Vardaman. It's Faulkner.

Here's the daughter Dewey Dell – her usual mode is like this

*About his head the print of his hat sweated into his hair. His shirt is blotched with sweat. He has not washed his hands and arms.*

But then

*The cow breathes upon my hips and back, her breath warm, sweet, stertorous, moaning.*

(even my spellcheck does not know stertorous, much less an uneducated 17 year old country girl. So what is Faulkner doing here? Messing with us readers, I think.)

And now, here's Darl, one of the sons. Now as this family is the purely uneducated rural poor, how is it one of their sons (the one who narrates about half of the book) thinks in this lushly textured poetic and highly intellectual language?

*He looks up at the gaunt face framed by the window in the twilight. It is a composite picture of all time since he was a child.... For a while, still, she looks down at him from the composite picture, neither with censure nor approbation. ...*

*Then she flings herself across Addie Bundren's knees, clutching her, shaking her with the furious strength of the young before sprawling suddenly across the handful of rotten bones that Addie Bundren left, jarring the whole bed into a chattering sibilance of mattress shucks, her arms outflung and the fan in one hand still beating with expiring breath into the quilt.*

*She looks down at the face. It is like a casting of fading bronze upon the pillow, the hands alone still with any semblance of life : a curled, gnarled inertness; a spent yet alert quality from which weariness, exhaustion, travail has not yet departed, as though they doubted even yet the actuality of rest, guarding with horned and penurious alertness the cessation which they know cannot last.*

Check out these examples of Darl's vocabulary:

*We go on with a motion so soporific, so dreamlike as to be uninferant of progress, as though time and not space were decreasing between us and it.*

*How do our lives ravel out into the no-wind, no-sound, the weary gestures wearily recapitulant*

*A cubistic bug*

*Starkly re-accruent*

Don't sound like no poor white trash I ever came acrost, dunt know about you. Sounds more like Marcel damn Proust than Hank Williams. Shoot, sounds more like this William Faulkner hisself talkin. Seems he didn't want to write no normal book but one a them whatchacallem modernist efforts but like he jes couldnt hep hisself & had to git that thar poetic jawbreakin stuff in there someways n so turned one a his ole country boys into some kinda god damn genius.

It doesn't really work, a few pages of Darl and my suspension of disbelief came crashing down and really bruised my left shoulder, I can still feel it now.

And there's another thing about old Darl. He frequently launches off into Deep Space, like this:

*I don't know what I am. I don't know if I am or not. Jewel knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know whether he is or not. . He cannot empty himself for sleep because he is not what he is and he is what he is not.*

I had to look round and ask here, who let Samuel Beckett in here?

Even so, and also taking into consideration a couple of apparent plot holes in the rather-too-neat O Henryish ending (how did bumbling Anse fix up all that in such a short space of time?) I still loved the bravery and confidence of this novel. It ramified my brain, and there is hardly any higher praise. It was great.

4.5 stars

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### Emily May says

I've been working up to a William Faulkner book for years. His books always appear on lists of "best books of all time" and "books you should read before you die". But when I've felt in the mood for a classic or something "literary", I've always passed him up for other authors, even those with 1000+ page monsters. I think, deep down, I always sensed Faulkner just wasn't for me.

The first problem is my lack of enthusiasm for **stream of consciousness** narratives. If I'm being honest, I rarely like it. I don't mind working at a book if it's hard-going, but this style of narration makes it difficult for me, personally, to ever settle into the rhythm of the book. And Faulkner takes it to a whole new level. He drops us into scenes and scenarios without any explanation; I genuinely felt like Faulkner wanted to deliberately confuse his readers about characters and ideas he could have easily portrayed in a more accessible way. Confusion for confusion's sake.

Honestly, I can think of little more boring than suffering through every thought, feeling and instinct that passes through the human mind. I have my own mind that plagues me with this randomness; I don't need to read it in someone else's perspective. I want an author to organize language into a structure that is interesting, compelling, thought-provoking... and stream of consciousness, for me, is rarely any of those things.

But that's just my tastes for the style. Trying to take a step away from that a second and view what the novel did as a whole, I can't say I enjoyed the story. Nor do I tend to enjoy books with more than two or three perspectives - and this one had fifteen! In less than three-hundred pages!

The plot follows the Bundren family after the death of their matriarch, Addie. Fifteen perspectives tell the story of the family's journey to Jefferson, where Addie is to be buried. Hauling a wagon with Addie's decomposing body, the Bundren family sets out on a nine-day journey of frequent hunger and discomfort.

Faulkner includes important themes in his work, such as religion, poverty and identity in the Southern United States, but I still feel like other authors have done this in a more palatable way. I would much rather read Steinbeck any day.

One reviewer said this of Faulkner's style and I couldn't agree more:

*It is easy to be confusing. It is easy to write something beautiful and understandable for*

*yourself. It's hard to write universal words which we can all connect.*

So, so true.

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## **Megan Baxter says**

I am feeling totally inadequate to the task of reviewing this book. It's only the second Faulkner I've read, and while I enjoyed *Absalom, Absalom*, it didn't quite utterly astound me the way this one did.

I was expecting the run-on sentences and outright rejection of periods that I found in the first book. Instead, I found short little chapters, and voices that spoke in terse sentences that only hinted at what lay beneath.

Note: The rest of this review has been withdrawn due to the recent changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision [here](#).

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at [Smorgasbook](#)

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## **Michael Finocchiaro says**

Where to start with a masterpiece that is both short like the distance between two thoughts and deep as the thoughts themselves? This is one of Faulkner's true masterpieces: a grotesque road trip with a rotting corpse told in the voices of the extremely dysfunctional and occasionally insane family members. It is Ulysses in the Southern United States, or a Georgian Grapes of Wrath (Faulkner having been inspired by the former and certainly influenced the latter). The writing is some of the most powerful that Faulkner ever produced:

*...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 are just sounds that people who never sinned nor loved nor feared have for what they never had and cannot have until they forget the words.*

The words leap off the page and both draw you into their language's inner beauty and repulse you for the violence he depicts. It is as visceral as a slaughterhouse (complete with awls piercing caskets) and yet more optimistic than this generation's *Walking Dead*.

One of the greatest American novels ever written and one that will still be as moving and relevant centuries from now as it speaks eternal truth in the American vernacular. A must.

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## **Matt says**

I'm no copyright lawyer, but it seems like Faulkner's estate could have sued the hell out of the makers of *National Lampoon's Vacation*. There is the obvious corpse-carting similarity, but I can almost hear the



familiar refrain of Lindsey Buckingham's "Holiday Road" bleed into the scene of the Bundren's fateful river crossing. (Pre)DMCA violations were definitely afoot, at least in spirit.

This is the book for those who find Faulkner's other well known works to be intimidating. *As I Lay Dying* delivers all of the point of view shifts and modernist goodness of *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom* but in more palatable, bite-sized chunks. The endless chapters that trap one within the other books in a way that doesn't allow for natural stopping points within the text for bathroom or laundry breaks are eschewed in favor of shorter sections that are each narrated by a member of the Bundren family or else a random, curious onlooker about town. This format also eases the intensity of the typical Faulknerian (i've been waiting to use that term) shift between the action that is occurring and the stream of consciousness interior monologuing that characters in Faulkner novels seem to so enjoy.

The constraints placed on the text make the themes of this book explode with meaning. The sins of the father are visited upon the heads of the children, familial obligation collides with personal agendas, and the immediate sainthood imposed upon those who have passed is examined in a more doubtful light.

Word on the (back cover blurb) street is that Faulkner cranked out this book over a six week period while working twelve hour shifts at a power plant. In my mind this makes him the literary equivalent of that one cheerleader in high school that everyone secretly hated because she seemed so damned perfect.

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## Vit Babenco says

"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."

She is dying; she lies still... But everything around her is in motion, all things are on the move, the world is spinning.

The narration consists of the character's fragmentary thoughts, feverish mental impressions as if painted with the bold strokes of brush by the intrepid and furious impressionist...

*"I had a nightmare once I thought I was awake but I couldn't see and couldn't feel I couldn't feel the bed under me and I couldn't think what I was I couldn't think of my name I couldn't even think I am a girl I couldn't even think I nor even think I want to wake up nor remember what was opposite to awake so I could do that I knew that something was passing but I couldn't even think of time then all of a sudden I knew that something was it was wind blowing over me it was like the wind came and blew me back from where it was I was not blowing the room and Vardaman asleep and all of them back under me again and going on like a piece of cool silk dragging across my naked legs."*

*As I Lay Dying* is a road book...

"Back running, tunnelled between the two sets of bobbing mule ears, the road vanishes beneath the wagon as though it were a ribbon and the front axle were a spool."

It is an unimaginable chronicle of the long and calamitous funereal trek.

Obstinacy combined with foolishness is a deadly force...

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## Alex says

Many of us slogged through this unofficial My First Faulkner in high school, and probably all any of us remember from it is Vardaman's line, "My mother is a fish," which our teachers used to teach us about Foreshadowing, and for many of us it would be My Last Faulkner too because we learned mostly that Faulkner is a fucking pain in the ass. It's actually less confusing than *The Sound & The Fury*, which is sort of like saying a given animal is less dangerous than a bear strapped to a shark: okay, but there's a long way between that and safe.

Faulkner is a pain in the ass because he was a modernist - one of the Three Great Modernists, along with Woolf and Joyce, and modernism is when you jumble up your timelines and perspectives and generally just obfuscate everything so it's about all a body can do to figure out what the plot even is, and while all three of these authors are great, in that they know what they're doing and they're memorable and they're telling great truths, they are also massive pains in your ass and should basically not be read by most people.

But you can more or less follow most of the plot in this book, and here's what it is: this shambling backwoods family of future Trump voters sets off to bury the matriarch on her family land, and they fuck it all up. The plot has the grinding inevitability of great tragedy, but the events have an obstinately small scale; it's just these idiots, trying to get a coffin across a river.

Here are the characters:

- Addie Bundren, the one who dies;
- Anse, her lazy good-for-nothing husband, who looks "like a figure carved clumsily from tough wood by a drunken caricaturist," a description that Cormac McCarthy would build basically his entire career on;
- Cash, the carpenter eldest son who never finishes a sentence even in his head;
- Darl, who for some reason doubles as an omniscient narrator, the most articulate of the group, considered queer for that very reason (remember that scene in Idiocracy where the dude gets diagnosed with "talking like a fag"? ) and constantly babbling about *is* and *was* like a college kid getting stoned for the third time;
- Jewel, the horse-obsessed son whose eyes are constantly described, "like pieces of a broken plate," which no they aren't, that's simply not what eyes are like;
- Dewey Dell, the sole daughter, whose "wet dress shapes for the blind eyes of three blind men those mammalian ludicrosities which are the horizons and the valleys of the earth" in the single worst description of breasts ever perpetrated to paper;
- Vardaman of the fish, who is off in some vague way - Faulkner has never been particularly specific about his medical diagnoses. Benjy from *Sound & The Fury* is also non-diagnosably "off"; he might be autistic, who knows. Vardaman is either in his early teens and off (my position) or around 8 and less off. There's conflicting evidence.

Faulkner sort of recycles some of his characters from *Sound & the Fury*, written just a year earlier in 1929: Benjy and Vardaman are both fucked in the head; Dewey Dell and Caddy are the underdressed daughters; Darl and Quentin are the time-obsessed poets. (They also share a setting, Faulkner's famous and made-up Yoknapatawpha County in Mississippi. Mississippi might be real, how would I know.) *Sound & the Fury* didn't sell well, and Faulkner aimed "deliberately to write a *tour de force*," a surefire winner, which more or less worked out. He claims to have written it in six weeks and one draft.

There are a few other characters, most notably the more functional neighbors Vernon and Cora Tull. Everybody takes turns narrating; each has a distinct voice, but all of them use words they couldn't possibly have any excuse to know. Here's young Vardaman's description of a horse:

It is as though the dark were resolving him out of his integrity, into an unrelated scattering of components - snuffings and stampings, smells of cooling flesh and ammoniac hair, an uncoordinated whole of splotched hide and strong bones within which, detached and secret and familiar, an *is* different from my *is*.

Faulkner's not even trying to make anyone talk realistically. He's about something, I guess - lending epic weight to lifesize events - and I even kinda like it... but it's still basically ridiculous.

I'm making fun of Faulkner a lot, which is easy and fun to do because he's a jackass, but I like this book. The river crossing is genuinely exciting. Faulkner's kinda funny, in sort of a "check out this sentence I'm about to get away with, fuck all of you" way - not as funny as his fellow Southern Gothic Flannery O'Connor, but who is. The book overall walks a line between complicated and understandable, and for once Faulkner stays on the right side of it.

Over the course of the book, most of the family have their own stories to play out. It's surprising and neat; new dimensions keep unfolding. We learn that Jewel (view spoiler); Dewey Dell (what kind of fuckin' name is that?) (view spoiler); Darl (view spoiler). Even dumb old Anse (view spoiler). He also (view spoiler).

I'm not the world's biggest Faulkner fan. Of the modernists, Woolf is by far my favorite; of the writers in general, the modernists are among my least favorite, because for fuck's sake just write down what's happening, if I wanted a puzzle I'd do a crossword.

I generally wouldn't recommend that anyone read Faulkner unless they're just dying to for some reason, and in that case one should maybe ask oneself what that reason could possibly be, and is one really making good life choices here, and is one crazy, and is one possibly a pretentious dickwad, and wouldn't one honestly be better off just watching TV. Says the guy who was just dying to read Faulkner like a week ago, and now I've gone and done it and I kinda thought it was great. I don't know, man.

I aint so sho who's got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and when he aint. 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. It's like it aint so much what a fellow does, but it's the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it.

Don't look at me.

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## **Parthiban Sekar says**

"I can remember how when I was young I believed Death to be a phenomenon of the body; now I know it to be merely a function of the mind - and that of the minds of the ones who suffer the bereavement. 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."

**Death brings out the best and the worst in the families.** The deceased doesn't just escape our reality but changes the way we look at the reality for which it leaves an unfillable void in the wake of the families and the friends. It is difficult for anything to grow around it unless it is forgotten or, somehow, mended. Time, *an irrevocable quantity*, stays still, while we keep moving in infinite space.

“That's what they mean by the womb of time: the agony and the despair of spreading bones, the hard girdle in which lie the outraged entrails of events.”

**Death does not always bring the truth out** but deceives us sometimes by carrying the secret to the grave, leaving the family and friends in a web of deceit. Here is **Addie Bundren** *dying alone, hiding her pride and her broken heart*. Sin doesn't matter to her. So does salvation. All that whirls around her and ensnares her in this familial life, she believes, are just *words to fill the lack*. Love, fear, and pride are just empty words to her. However the roots of her disillusionment lie underground, invisible to the human eyes. If someone asks her to pray to god for her sins, she would say

“My [Her] daily life is an acknowledgment and expiation of my sin.”

**Eternity is a fearsome thing to face.** Now, Death comes to free her from the misery and other watchful eyes. All through her life she attended to the needs of selfish children and uncaring husband, **Anse Bundren**. He wanted more children. She gave him more children. But only one belonged to her – her own boy - **Jewel** who is the product of her godless association with a Not-All-Too-Holy minister.

**There are holes**, now in the coffin box inside which Addie plunged into an *unwakeable* sleep; also, in the lives of the Bundren family. To mend the holes, they embark on a funeral tour to the destined place to bury her, as she wished. As the story is set in the early times, they don't have any dull hearse to drive in black suits to the burial grounds, so they took her decaying body in a creaking wagon through a bridgeless river to a pitiless city full of loveless people.

As it happens to any planned journey which meets with innumerable impediments, this journey is not an exception to it. The morbid picture brought out by the narrators when followed by buzzards wherever they go, while the cats try to scratch the coffin box and the people stand with their hands to their noses, can be quit appalling. Readers with vivid imagination are not advised to imagine much while reading this purifying work of art, and dear book sniffers, try not to sniff this one. There are some quite inexplicable scenes like this one: two of Anse's sons are listening under an apple tree to what is going on inside the coffin and one says, amusingly or mockingly, that he can hear her talking, and that, in reality, is nothing but a fatal and natural decomposability.

**Death is a kind of sleep which leaves others wide-awake.** On her death, almost every character is put into some kind of ordeal: the holy father coming to ask for forgiveness from so-far-faithful husband, her daughter trying to abort her pregnancy, the first son with a broken horse, the second son struggling to give a decent burial to his not-so-loving mother, the third son sacrificing his only possession which, in others' view, is also his mother – a horse, the youngest one trying to keep the buzzards and cats away from the coffin, and Anse pushing everyone to uphold his promise. Promise is a word, too. Isn't it? But what it fills up here is the body of Addie, as she lays dying.

(view spoiler)

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There are lot of interesting and memorable characters and sentences in this book with narrations varying in tone and style, as in *The Sound and the Fury*. Like in his other books, poverty and empathy are keys here. There is a couple of another important characters who I have not intentionally bothered as they are busy mourning over the sad demise of their dear mother. In simple words, this is just another masterpiece from Faulkner.

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### Nicholas Armstrong says

"And since sleep is is-not and rain and wind are was, it is not. Yet the wagon is, because when the wagon is was, Addie Bundren will not be. And Jewel is, so Addie Bundren must be. And then I must be, or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room. And so if I am not emptied yet, I am is."

..... There are people who actually like this?

Seriously though, I'm pretty sure I get it, I just don't like it. There is a family and each one is a reflection of a way of living, or in some cases, a way of dying. Anse is the 'woe is me' type and Addie is the 'Serve your purpose and die' type and that's all well and good, and it's a pretty cool idea for a book, I just don't like Faulkner. Do you know that skill has very little to do with the process of inventing a concept? I'm still not entirely convinced that Faulkner is the genius he is made out to be. In fact, I'm not entirely convinced I should like him at all. Based off his biography he is kind of a pathetic, lying, failure - so what am I supposed to think of his writing?

Stream-of-consciousness is one thing, writing in Faulkner's way is another. Scenes are dropped onto our heads in ways we cannot comprehend and actions are portrayed without explanation. And do you know the unfairest cut of all? Faulkner *knows* what he is trying to say, he knows all about these characters, he just isn't showing us anything. An example: originally there were no names at the beginning of the chapters. Yeah, no kidding. He just wrote this shit with no explanation of our speaker and expected us to figure it out. *That is not genius*. Writing is about making a connection to a stranger, bridging a gap of confusion to create understanding and to share an idea, a theme, an image with thousands or millions of people who you've never met. Faulkner writes in jargon he understands with little to no respect for the reader and I can't forgive him for it. If you don't believe me then write something. Write a short story. Write 3, or 4, or 5 pages. Flesh out the characters and their histories and their conflicts. Got it? Okay, now when you are writing a scene with multiple people use only the pronoun he. *You* will know who you are talking about - do we? Is that good writing? No, it isn't.

It is easy to be confusing. It is easy to write something beautiful and understandable for yourself. It's hard to write universal words which we can all connect.

Good idea, Faulkner, poor performance.

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## Bram says

Without straying from his inimitable voice, Faulkner delivers a more professional, calculated effort here than with his novel of the year prior, *The Sound and the Fury*. There are more novel-y aspects to *As I Lay Dying*, and Faulkner emerges as the master of the slow- or late-reveal, which might be described as reverse-foreshadowing. As an example, Faulkner will provide a character scene that's fraught with emotion and history and meaning, but he won't explain the context. There's dramatic electricity, and we fully expect to understand the situation even while failing to receive any adumbrations. And that's because Faulkner *isn't* actually hinting at events to come; he's showing us something we can't understand without promises of future textual elucidation. We just have to trust that he'll come through, which of course he always does via hints that come *after* the event. It's sort of uncomfortable, and it made me reread certain passages obsessively, assuming that something must have slipped by. But this way we get to feel the drama first with disorientation rather than with understanding.

I've read a few confusing novels, and no writer seems to use this method of disorientation so deliberately and so effectively as a ploy. Faulkner puts us at his mercy. He's the one calling the shots, and we have to play by his rules. More than anything else, I think it's this aspect that can make people uneasy or unhappy with his works. But really it's a gift, leaving us with the rawness and incomprehensibility of life, which only begin to make sense in hindsight through functions of memory and our desire to find order and purpose. This, along with stream of consciousness, is what gives Faulkner as much of a claim to the title of Modernist as any of his contemporaries: he provides us with a hyper-reality via a unique, non-straightforward narrative structure.

So this is a great book, and its star rating is possibly suffering because it's coming on the heels of a definitively 5-star read. The characterization is, for the most part, fantastic. The story is told from various points of view, usually in two- or three-page chapters. I'd say about ten characters help to tell the story, but our primary narrator is Darl (some spoilers to follow). Darl is the second eldest son of the story's plot-mover, Addie Bundren, and his character arc is probably the one thing keeping this novel out of 'masterpiece' territory for me. He's described as someone intuitive and special, a bit of an oddball but a nice, thoughtful kid. His own narration backs this up; he's the wise one, the amateur philosopher, and his narration is filled with difficult words and surprisingly correct grammar. But something happens with him toward the end of the book that didn't quite work for me. Faulkner's main philosophical exploration in this novel is relativity with regard to both morals and sanity, and Darl does something that confirms the others' suspicions that he's a little bit crazy. But given the absurdity of the situation the characters are in, Darl's action actually makes some good sense. From a certain point of view, it's perfectly understandable. So far, so good—Camus would have been really jealous of this set up. Only one character, Darl's older brother Cash, recognizes that Darl may not actually be crazy:

*Sometimes I aint so sho who's got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and when he aint...It's like it aint so much what a fellow does, but it's the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it.*

Exactly. But then, inexplicably, Faulkner decides that Darl is, in fact, insane: in the course of Darl's final narration, he exhibits previously unseen schizophrenic behavior, complete with nonsensical ramblings addressing himself in the third person. What? Faulkner should have left him the way he was, as the guy who has almost too much sense and insight and therefore gets funny looks from all the 'normal' people. But this criticism arises from the contents of a two-page chapter, and fortunately it can be excised with a little mental effort. There's also the possibility that some crucial hints in the book escaped me. Because of Faulkner's storytelling style, in which many things only make sense later, it's likely that I missed the significance of many comments, thoughts, and glances along the way. As I mentioned in a review for *The Sound and the*

*Fury*, Faulkner is ripe for rereads because it's inevitable that seeming irrelevancies and ambiguous character interactions from the first read will take on new meanings when you're equipped with knowledge of the whole story. Unfortunately, I've never been one of those readers who can go right back to the beginning of a book after finishing it.

One of the fascinating things about this novel is that it can be read either as a tragedy or as a black comedy (or, therefore, as a tragicomedy). The case for the former is rather straightforward considering the events of the book, particularly with regard to Darl. The bleak comedic aspect comes from the story's McGuffin—to fulfill the above-mentioned Addie Bundren's last wish of being buried in her family's hometown—which becomes increasingly absurd as it proves logistically improbable to carry out. All manner of misfortunes are incurred as a result of her spineless husband's uncharacteristic firmness in fulfilling this wish, a resolve that's made even more unbefuckingly absurd by the book's final five words. It's all too tragic for laughs, but it's pure genius.

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### **Alisha says**

Aside from the fact that the title is taken from a line in "Agamemnon" (which makes it already unbearably cool) this is a breathtaking book. It took me about four chapters to get used to Faulkner's style of writing- the dialects, the chapters each being from another character's perspective, his way of having no narration so you have to figure out what is going on from the half-conversations the characters have themselves... but god, once I adjusted, I was completely floored. This is a beautiful, heart-rending book. It also seems to be a story which is honest and completely unembellished- the characters are presented as they are, even if they're unlikable at first or even banal. The honesty is refreshing. After reading this, I've become convinced that there are two kinds of people in the world; those who like Faulkner, and those who don't.

Edit: After reading this book for the second time, I'm more convinced than ever of its power and genius. Fucking Faulkner! This is a book necessary for life.

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### **AmyAmy says**

I know you're "supposed to" love this book because it's Faulkner, but I HATED IT! I know you're "cool" and "intelligent" if you read Faulkner, but I can't stand him. Sorry, I don't know what he's talking about (and at the risk of sounding immodest, I am bright). I DON'T think it's cool and "hip" to write in a confusing manner, and I don't try to impress others by liking ambiguity. I had my fill in college with snobs who pretended to like this stuff. Sorry I sound harsh here (I'm really a nice person), but YUK!

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### **Lisa says**

That feeling when you close a book, and it is like you can't breathe, because all the breath of life seems to be stuck in that story, and you just finished it, and there is a vacuum inside.

That feeling when you try to describe a book, and all the adjectives you come up with are negative, and yet the story has such power, and you loved it, like life.

That feeling when you are not sure what to read next, because whatever you pick will carry some of the flavour of the sorrow and the hopelessness and the sadness and the excruciatingly unfair black comedy of uneducated, poor, religious life.

That feeling when the novel spills over into real life and makes you hear your heart beat for people that may not exist, but that are more real than many of your neighbours.

That feeling you share with a main character that you aren't sure where the thin line between sanity and insanity is drawn, and whether it is in the eye of the beholder to make a final decision:

"Sometimes I aint so sho who's got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and when he aint. 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. It's like it aint so much what a fellow does, but it's the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it."

That is reminiscent of Emily Dickinson's beautiful poem on madness:

Much Madness is divinest Sense-  
To a discerning Eye-  
Much Sense-the starkest Madness-  
'Tis the Majority  
In this, as All, prevail-  
Assent- and you are sane-  
Demur- you're straightway dangerous-  
And handled with a Chain-

I LOVED this novel, and it made my stomach turn. I don't know what the majority of readers would make of this polyphonic Job's journey or Greek tragic odyssey through a fictional Southern landscape, but I figure I am mad in the Dickinson or Faulkner way. There is so much truth in the choir of the voices in the Bundren family, even though each voice alone seems random and mad and disoriented.

The underlying social issues, stemming from the hopeless choicelessness of the poor and uneducated people in the rural South, are not explicitly made a topic as in Steinbeck's novels, but rather hinted at in the confused unawareness of those living that life themselves, unable to raise their voices coherently to demand change.

Religion hovers above their heads as a stick and a carrot. "If you do this, you will face eternal punishment...", "if you suffer through that, God will praise you in heaven"... Most of the time, the Christian doctrines remain mysterious to the characters, and they can't see why an omniscient and omnipotent god would choose to do what he does to them. Has he chosen to let the Devil act to make a 17-year-old girl pregnant and to let her be left alone with ten dollars to try to get an abortion? And what divine sense of humour makes her fail at that and become a renewed victim of sexual exploitation, while her father takes the ten dollars she kept to get himself new teeth and another woman?

Getting their mother buried in her hometown exposes the siblings to extreme situations from which they won't all recover. Some of them will be marked forever by the strain that forced them to balance on the thin line between madness and sanity. I will hear their voices and remember that I walk on that line too.

To the cast of the play, a huge thank you for letting me join you on the stormy ride:



Vardaman - There's no shame in having a fish for a mother!

Cash - You are a mighty fine man, and a voice of care and reason, and when luck means breaking the same leg twice, you certainly know how to cherish your good star!

Darl - I understand you, that line is mighty thin, especially in times of hardship!

Dewey Dell - You have the future on your side, your daughters and granddaughters will have more rights and less vulnerability!

Jewel - There is power underneath your confusion if you can get it sorted!

Anse - Being headless amounts to child abuse!

Addie - Your story is universal!

Christians and gods - the usual cast!

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## **Duane says**

Unmistakingly Faulkner. A unique writing style combined with a sad and haunting story. You may read Faulkner and say when you are finished, "I didn't like that", but you will never forget what you read.

Reread Sept. 2016

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## **Fabian says**

This thrilling, chilling tale is told through a schizm. The conglomeration of different consciousnesses is a bubbling soup mixed in with dark symbols & Southern Gothic elements, and it is indeed a delightful experience, an overly-delicious dish. The macabre is Alive; this prose palpitates.

This is waayyy more accessible than, say, "The Sound and the Fury" and for those who have strayed away from this darling writer, this particular masterpiece will immediately put him or her in Faulkner's direct sphere of influence-- he/she will swim in that dark, twisted atmosphere, bask in it for some long while. Read this and you will know what Faulkner & his deep, haunted, tortured South are all about.

Best Willy Faulkner book?

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## **Lyn says**

"My mother is a fish."

Faulkner's short novel about a rural family following the death of their matriarch. Funny, disturbing, maddening, thought provoking, and mysterious.

I have never been a big fan of stream of consciousness ( thus I have never finished The Sound and the Fury) and Faulkner does well to limit that technique here. He does employ multiple narrators, varying perspectives, themes and an eclectic narration.

I cannot help thinking this is a thin, minimalistic American version of War and Peace.

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## Michael says

Written in the stream-of-consciousness mode, *As I Lay Dying* charts the odyssey of the impoverished Bundren family as its feuding members trek across the wilderness of the rural South toward their county's capital, where they intend to bury the rotting corpse of the family's matriarch. The narrative jumps from perspective to perspective, and each character's voice is highly stylized, from the second eldest son's ornate meditations on life and death to the youngest child's simplistic despair over the loss of his mother. Often, the novel filters the same event through different characters' point of view; it disperses the narrative's coherence and forces readers to make sense of conflicting, oft-antagonistic viewpoints. The story's amalgamation of tragic and comic elements lends the work shifting tones, further thwarting attempts to easily consume the book or understand it as a unified whole. Faulkner's experiments in form slow down the pace at which readers can move through the novel: he forces his audience, then, to empathize with and dwell in the perspectives of those typically dismissed as white trash.

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## Maria Bikaki says

Μως δεν εμαι πια σ'γουρος κατ? π?σο ?χει κανε?ς το δικα?ωμα να λ?ει τι πρ?γμα ε?ναι παλαβ? και τι δεν ε?ναι. Ε?ναι σ?μπως μ?σα στον καθ?να μας να βρισκ?ταν ?νας ?λλος ?νθρωπος που να ?ταν π?ρα απ? τα ?ρια της φρονιμ?δας ? της τρ?λας, και που ?ντας μ?ρτυρας στις λογικ?ς και στις μη λογικ?ς πρ?ξεις μας, να τις ?κρινε με την ?δια φρ?κη και το ?διο σ?στισμα.

Νομ?ζω ?τι υπ?ρχουν κ?ποια βιβλ?α που πρ?πει να διαθ?τεις τον κατ?λληλο ψυχισμ? και την κατ?λληλη ηλικ?α για να τα διαβ?σεις. Νι?θω ?τι αν δι?βαζα το συγκεκριμ?νο βιβλ?ο σε πιο μικρ? ηλικ?α κατ? π?σα πιθαν?τητα δε θα ε?χα συνδεθε? μαζ? του. Τ?ρα ?χοντας περ?σει τα πρ?τα ?ντα, κατασταλαγμ?νη στις απ?ψεις μου και με πολ? περισσ?τερους προβληματισμο?ς απ' ?τι ε?χα στα 20 μου και με μ?α περ?εργη συναισθηματικ? δι?θεση και ψυχοσ?νθεση μπ?ρεσα να βαδ?σω σε αυτ? το δ?σβατο μονοπ?τι ?σο οξ?μωρο και αν ακο?γεται αυτ?. ?να πραγματικ? δ?σκολο κε?μενο παρ? τη γλαφυρ?τητα και την πραγματικ? ιδια?τερα παραστατικ? και αρκετ? εντυπωσιακ? και παραστατικ? γραφ? του συγγραφ?α. ?να βιβλ?ο για την απ?λεια και για τις συναισθηματικ?ς εξ?ρσεις που αυτ? δημιουργε? στα πρ?σωπα που αφορ?, για τη διαχε?ριση του π?νθους. Για τους βιβλι?φιλους σε ετοιμ?τητα για αναγνωστικ?ς προκλ?σεις ε?ναι ?να βιβλ?ο που πρ?πει να διαβαστε? τουλ?χιστον μια φορ? στη ζω? σας και να κοσμε? τις βιβλιοθ?κες σας.

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