

Fulfilling a promise they had made to their mother, Addie, Cash, Darl, Jewel, Dewey Dell, and Vardaman, in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, journey across the Mississippi countryside to bring her body to be buried in Jefferson, alongside her immediate family. Each one, in turn, narrates the events of this excursion as they are perceived. Though all of the family members are going through the same experiences, each one expresses what they see and how they feel by exercising their individual powers and limitations of language. What each character says as well as how he/she says it gives insight into that character's underlying meanings.

Darl, for example, uses his linguistic skills to gain power as narrator. He possesses the ability to pick up on things unsaid and to read other people's actions. Dewey Dell describes his intuitiveness when she says that "he said he knew without the words, and I knew he knew because if he had said he knew with words I would not have believed...and that's why I can talk to him with knowing with hating with because he knows" (27). He uses his gift of realizing things without them having to actually be told to him to gain credibility with the reader. Who would doubt a narrator who possesses that type of adroitness? Also, his language is clear and reflective. He uses similes and metaphors and appears to have an acute awareness of spatial relationships. Darl's sophisticated perception and poetic linguistics give him the means of reaching for and maintaining his role as a competent observer and reporter. However, his position does create certain problems for his siblings.

Tull describes Darl's "look" as being uncanny.

"He is looking at me. He dont say nothing; just looks at me with them queer eyes of hisn that makes folks talk. I always say it aint never been what he done so much or said or anything so much as how he looks at you. It's like he had got into the inside of you, someway. Like somehow you was looking at yourself and your doing outen his eyes." (125)

It is the same penetrating gaze that gives Darl so much power that makes the others around him so uncomfortable, especially Dewey Dell. She feels that his strange knowledge of what has not been said is an invasion of her privacy. "The land runs out of Darl's eyes; they swim to pin points. They begin at my feet and rise along my body to my face, and then my dress is gone: I sit naked on the seat above the unhurrying mules, above the travail" (121). If Dewey Dell interprets his "knowing" as crossing some personal boundary that she created then that would explain her fantasizing about killing Darl and why she reported his setting fire to the barn. In fact, everything about Dewey Dell is extremely personal. Whereas her brothers report what happened, she tells how she feels about it. She uses language not as a

means of describing but rather as expressing.

"He could do so much for me if he just would. He could do everything for me. It's like everything in the world for me is inside a tub full of guts, so that you wonder how there can be any room in it for anything else very important. He is a big tub of guts and I am a little tub of guts and if there is not any room for anything else important in a big tub of guts, how can it be room in a little tub of guts. But I know it is there because God gave women a sign when something has happened bad." (58)

She is not describing the sun as "poised like a bloody egg upon a crest of thunderheads" (40) like Darl would or explaining how to do something in a step by step manner like Cash. Dewey Dell is attempting to express her confusion and her fears. She is a young girl who became pregnant and doesn't know what to do about it. She knows she can't tell her family and she has no means of taking care of herself. Instead of using language to describe the world around her, she uses it to show how she feels on the inside. Language is a personal thing to Dewey Dell and though she does not possess Darl's polished quality of speaking, she demonstrates its power as well as he does.

Cash, like Darl, uses language as a means of gaining authority. He begins the novel as not having any control because Darl possessed the role of narrator. His first narration is in the form of a list. The second and third are not even complete thoughts because nobody takes him seriously. He has no power as a narrator; he is simply a character. It is not until Darl goes insane, losing his role. The weight of that role is then passed onto Cash who, in his last two narrations, finally has the ability to tell things as he sees them. Language has importance to Cash in of itself. It gives him what he previously lacked - the simple right to express what he thinks.

"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 like the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it." (233)

Whereas language is a power to Darl, Dewey Dell, and Cash, it is a limitation to their mother. She feels that words made up to describe certain experiences are inadequate to the experiences themselves. She says that "words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at" (171). Phrases like "motherhood" and "love" according to Addie, are completely separate from what they actually mean; they are simply tools. How could the balding man wearing glasses who

spent hours staring at the alphabet to spell out the word "pride" know that that's what a mother would feel when she's watching her child act out the lead part in the school play? And how could that brilliant young woman just out of college possibly understand the word "death." It has no meaning to her - it is only a term used to describe the transition from living to nonliving. Language is crucial to all of Addie's children, except Jewel, to mark who they are but it is experience that matters to their mother.

The power and limitation of language can be used to explore different perspectives of the same events. Although Darl, Dewey Dell, Cash, and Addie all saw the same things, they each use different methods of expressing them to portray what is important. The function of language is different for each character but plays an equal part for each.