

## ABSTRACT

MASSEY, KATHRYN REBECCA. Shattering the Empty Vessel: Absence and Language in Addie's Chapter of Faulkner's As I Lay Dying. (Under the direction of Nick Halpern.)

When Faulkner centers Addie Bundren's monologue both symbolically and literally in As I Lay Dying, her presence in the novel is complicated by the fact that she is also the embodiment of *absence*. Correspondingly, Addie's monologue works to expose a similar paradox, which lies at the core of language itself: she insists that each word is "just a shape to fill a lack" (72). Critics frequently recall this statement when they undertake an analysis of her theory of language. However, many perceive it to be a simple and straightforward linguistic argument while I believe that its philosophical implications are quite complex. Addie's theory of language reveals her struggle to come to terms with a concept that is so fundamental to our experience of the world that it is often overlooked by readers and critics alike: the concept of perceived absence, or what Martin Heidegger calls "being-missing."

Heidegger's philosophy offers a valuable starting point for an exploration of Addie's chapter because his linguistic complexity, intricacy, and subversiveness parallel Faulkner's own writing in many ways. Even more significant, Heidegger describes "being-missing" as the point of intersection between the concepts of presence and absence while As I Lay Dying places Addie Bundren at exactly this metaphysical crossroads.

Addie's monologue expresses her obsession with the perpetual "loss" language produces every time the "word" replaces the "doing" of her own subjective experience.

Her desire to rebel against the word out of anger is matched by Faulkner's desire to use language subversively in order to challenge his reader, and involve him or her more actively in the novel. Finally, the most important function of Addie's chapter is to illustrate the "lack" that will always accompany the word, to recreate the moment of "loss" that Addie witnesses over and over again.

**SHATTERING THE EMPTY VESSEL: ABSENCE AND LANGUAGE  
IN ADDIE'S CHAPTER OF FAULKNER'S AS I LAY DYING**

by  
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Chair of Advisory Committee

## Dedication

Thanks the friends and teachers I've had here who kept me reading, writing, and thinking.

Thanks to Dr. McKelly and Dr. Walters at Auburn University who did the same and taught me so much.

Love to my family.

Love to all my friends, especially my girls, and always Ben:

*cover up the blank spots  
hit me on the head*

- Talking Heads

## **Biography**

Rebecca Massey received her Bachelor's Degree in English from Auburn University in 1998, where she also minored in Philosophy. She attended graduate school at North Carolina State University from 2000 to 2003, when she received her Master's in English.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

When Faulkner centers Addie Bundren's monologue both symbolically and literally in As I Lay Dying, her presence in the novel is complicated by the fact that she is also the embodiment of *absence*. Correspondingly, Addie's monologue works to expose a similar paradox, which lies at the core of language itself: she insists that each word is "just a shape to fill a lack" (72). Critics frequently recall this statement when they undertake an analysis of her theory of language. However, many perceive it to be a simple and straightforward linguistic argument while I believe that its philosophical implications are quite complex. Addie's theory of language reveals her struggle to come to terms with a concept that is so fundamental to our experience of the world that it is often overlooked by readers and critics alike: the concept of perceived absence, or what Martin Heidegger calls "being-missing."

Chapter Two surveys the various critical interpretations of Addie's theory of language. But instead of looking only at their analyses and conclusions, I want also to explore the language of the critics in order to see how they characterize the absence operating in Addie's chapter -- specifically, how they choose to articulate the notorious " " in her monologue. After observing repeated attempts to either pass over, turn away from, or "fill-in-the-blank," I come to sense a common aversion to the discussion of absence in Addie's chapter, even though it seems her narrative is designed to bring about a confrontation with it. Failing to recognize the significance of this space in the text, Addie's reader is likely to miss the point of her theory of language, which effectively grows out of this moment of confrontation with absence.

Chapter Three introduces the work of Martin Heidegger. His phenomenology provides a starting point for the discussion of presence and absence in Addie's monologue. Critics do not often use his work to analyze Faulkner's novels, and critics who do usually rely on his later philosophy, which focuses more heavily on his philosophy of language. Admittedly, using Heidegger's theory of language to interpret Addie's initially may seem to be more appropriate. However, his earlier philosophy is in many ways similar to As I Lay Dying in theme and style: Heidegger and Faulkner share the same preoccupation with absence; they both use language subversively in order to articulate or recreate this absence in the text; and they both depend on subversion as a strategy to involve the reader more consciously and thoroughly in the interpretation process. So understanding Heidegger's motivations as a writer -- moreover, one who is attempting to elucidate the complexities of absence -- helps to explain Faulkner's own motivations and subversive strategies in the writing of As I Lay Dying. Most importantly, Heidegger's notion of "being-missing" substantiates Addie's claims about the "lack" inherent to the word; it proves that her theory of language is a valid theory, not simply a product of her cynicism.

Chapter Four gives a detailed analysis of the linguistically subversive strategies Faulkner uses in Addie's chapter. He uses visually and rationally subversive devices which simultaneously attract and repel his reader. As a result, "meaning" in the text is alternately suggested and deferred. Faulkner's aim, I hypothesize, is to expose Addie's reader to the same loss that she relives over and over again as she watches the false "word" eclipse the "doing" of her original experience, where "meaning" lies.

Although Addie's monologue is driven primarily by her defiance of the "word"

that has abandoned the “doing,” in the face of this betrayal she attempts to recapture or signify the “doing” through nonverbal (or anti-verbal) means. Her search for alternate forms of signification plays itself out most obviously in her most intimate relationships, which are either sexual or violent. But there are also other places in Addie’s narrative, in the rest of the novel, and in other Faulkner novels, where alternate systems of signification operate.

Chapter Five identifies and examines the most dominant language theories that coexist and compete with one another in Addie’s chapter, finally comparing them with her own unique interpretation of the “word” as a negation of the “doing.” I admit that her theory of language is obviously problematic since it rebels against the very idea of a communal system of language, and even symbolically cancels out her presence in the novel. However, at this point, I call attention to her own description of the naming process, in which she identifies the violence and objectification that initially push her away from the word.

Given the literal and symbolic position of Addie’s monologue in the novel as a centralizing force (even if it is a self-annihilating one), it seems both misguided and overly simplistic to view her narrative as evidence of a failed attempt at assimilation, or to dismiss her theory of language because of its bleakness. Addie’s monologue can more accurately be interpreted as evidence of a heightened sensitivity to language, and to its power as paradoxically destructive and creative.

## II. ADDIE'S THEORY OF LANGUAGE

### Critical Interpretations of Addie's Chapter

Although Addie Bundren's monologue in As I Lay Dying is partly a chronological account of her life and partly a stream-of-consciousness narrative, at its core it is a complex theory of language hinged on this thesis: the word is "just a shape to fill a lack" (72). Because the story of Addie's death is the novel's primary narrative, and her single chapter is located in the middle of the text itself, many critics agree that her monologue is as much the symbolic center of Faulkner's novel as it is the literal one. However, critics debate whether Addie chooses to abandon the word on account of its insignificance or to resurrect it from its defunct state. The consensus among them is that she interprets the word as meaningless because it is disconnected from the "reality" of her experiences.

Frequently, critics look to Addie's familial, psychological, and religious influences to understand why she equates language with emptiness. But these analyses often concern themselves most with Addie's emotional state, cultural position, or gender role while her *own* interpretations of the "lack" in language become secondary concerns. As a consequence, many critics do not recognize that Addie's belief in the emptiness of the word is only a fraction of her theory of language;<sup>1</sup> they hastily interpret it to be the conclusion of her monologue when it is actually the starting point.

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<sup>1</sup> Addie never uses the term "language" in her chapter. However, she addresses the "word" at length. I hold Addie's assertions about the word to be the core of her "theory of language," and not distinct from it in any way.

### Psychological and Feminist Criticism

Many critics have focused on the tension between presence and absence that underlies Addie's narrative and is central to her theory of the word. But although these difficult metaphysical issues are of central importance, they have become little more than subtopics in the larger discussion of gender in her monologue. While older analyses of Addie tend to focus on her familial role, recent interpretations of her silence, death, and distrust of language are frequently read in the context of her use of language within a patriarchal society. Absence and presence, then, are simply interpreted as extensions of the dichotomous relationship between femininity and masculinity (absence/silence/female, presence/voice/male). The contradictions that surface in these psychological and feminist readings of Addie's chapter are significant mostly because they reveal their own limitations -- expending most of their energy attempting to trace the "cause" of Addie's theory of language at the expense of discussing the theory itself.

Older criticisms of As I Lay Dying also tend to focus on issues of gender in Faulkner's text, but mostly as they relate to Addie's role as a wife and mother. Sally Page's analysis operates on the assumption that the "ambiguities of [Addie's] character" can be clarified through an understanding of "the nature of woman and the importance of her impact on others, especially her family," a theme she identifies as central in Faulkner's work (111). Similarly, David Williams says that "Addie defines her nature in relation to her family" (105). Given the critical emphasis on the role of the female in Faulkner's novels, the subject of language (the focus of Addie's argument) is often brought up only to be subsumed by this discussion of gender. For example, Williams

notes that, for Addie, “words are an abstraction of consciousness, removed from the *mater* of material and devoid of intrinsic life” (106). However, Addie’s theory of language need not be informed only by her experience of “motherhood.” This is only one of many labels she rejects for its superficiality, and that specific rejection should not be the primary basis for an interpretation of her theory of language.

Like Williams, Richard Godden interprets Addie’s theory of the word in terms of the familiar male/female dichotomy. He says her passage is partly grounded in the Eden mythology, in which the female brings about “The Fall” by ushering in “sexual knowledge (a source of infinite multiplication) and knowledge as thought, which since we think in words is language (itself a source for the infinite multiplication of ideas).” Accordingly, he determines that Addie’s theory of language can be broken down into the following formulas: originally, “Eden = virginity = silence” and then “The Fall = fertility = language” (109). Because the Eden mythology presents the woman as the catalyst for “The Fall,” he concludes that “Faulkner accepts that words are female” (117).

Within the past couple of decades, many critics have chosen to distance themselves from criticisms of Addie that focus only on her familial position or that attempt to explain her position in the novel in otherwise dualistic terms. However, they are still preoccupied with the same question of gender in Faulkner’s work. In contrast to Godden, Karen Sass’s analysis centers upon her assertion that “love, motherhood, sin, pride, fear -- discourse itself -- have all been construed in male terms” and that Addie’s rejection of words is a rejection of the language of the patriarchy (10). Likewise, Harriet Hustis speaks of Addie’s “disillusionment with traditional masculine images of language” that surfaces in her monologue, despite her “indoctrination into the conception of

language as linear and hierarchical (10, 17). Both critics imply that Addie's inability to express herself through words is a direct result of her being a female subject within a masculine construct, the language of the patriarchy.

Of course, the disagreements that arise among these psychological and feminist criticisms do not invalidate them; in fact, none of these interpretations are contradicted by the actual text. But, at times, this lack of contradiction between text and analysis seems to suggest a disconnection between the two, as if critics' theories are being laid on top of the text instead of rising out of it. Addie does not characterize words, language, or speech as either "female" or "male," because the scope of her argument is much broader than that. Reducing her theory of language to this specifically gender-oriented reading -- no matter which conclusion is reached -- oversimplifies her argument and projects issues of gender into the text that Addie does not originally raise.

This is not to say that Addie's inferior status in a patriarchal society has no bearing on her theory of language. In fact, it is likely that her own feelings of powerlessness and resentment in that context intensify her hatred of the word since, to Addie, the word itself is a symbol of ineffectiveness. However, it would be inaccurate to say that her status as a wife, mother, or woman is therefore the cause of her hatred of the word, or that her theory of language applies only to those in the same subject position. Simply, Addie does not suggest that men and women use language -- or are used by language -- in different ways. Moreover, the word's "lack" is a torment to *all* of Addie's children, both male and female, as they struggle to articulate their grief or anger, their moral or philosophical dilemmas, throughout Faulkner's novel.

Hustis makes the important point that critics often misrepresent female characters

in Faulkner novels by hastily grouping them together under the heading of “Faulkner’s women,” as if they all shared a single “female subjectivity.” And she aims to “not simply evaluate the characters themselves in terms of reductively moralistic dichotomies such as ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ ‘sexual’ or ‘virginal,’ ‘silent’ or ‘domineering’” (10). But the “moralistic” dichotomies of criticism are no more damaging or misrepresentative than the gender dichotomies of so much psychological and essentialist feminist criticism, which often take the focus away from Addie’s argument and view it instead through the narrowed lens of “masculinity” or “femininity” -- something that all of the preceding analyses have in common.

If Addie’s monologue does uncover places in the text where gender is an issue, it does not dwell there. When she finally does speak, she speaks from a place where the division between femininity and masculinity is finally less important than the division between absence and presence. The moment that death dissolves her biological existence it also erases her categorization as a female; in other words, her presence in the novel after her death is metaphysical, not physical (i.e., biological or female). It is from this new mode of being that Addie identifies and articulates the absence that lingers behind the word -- a “medium common to all and inadequate for all” (Nielsen 33).

### **Philosophical and Linguistic Criticism**

I can explore Addie’s theory of language more fully using criticism that focuses on the philosophy of language and pays close attention to the broader concepts of presence and absence that “shape” the word in the most literal sense. Many of Addie’s often-quoted pronouncements -- for example, “words are no good [. . .] words dont ever

fit even what they are trying to say at” -- are frequently glossed over because it is easy to interpret them as simple restatements of her thesis: the word is “just a shape to fill a lack” (171). But while these statements may seem simplistic, they actually raise more questions than they answer. Is she suggesting, for example, that words do not make logical sense, because they are not identical to the thing to which they refer? that words misrepresent thoughts? that words are ineffective? inaccurate? used to mislead? These questions often lie unexamined beneath the surface of the monologue while critics use adjectives such as “empty” or “inadequate” to encompass Addie’s entire theory of the word. But by recognizing that these linguistic issues exist, the reader is better able to discover the real complexity of her argument. This complexity is often taken for granted by critics who condemn Addie’s “inability to see any situation in terms other than inky black or pearly white” (Holland-Toll 445), or dismiss her as a kind of “ignorant country mother grasping for meaning” (Watkins 213) instead of a character acutely aware of the destructive nature of the word.

Robert Hemenway, however, views As I Lay Dying as a philosophically complex and significant text. He chooses to focus on Darl’s notoriously difficult passages, in which the character’s “primary concern is the subsuming question of being.” And he argues that “limiting Darl’s emotional struggle to an identity crisis ignores the existential implications of Faulkner’s language” (134). This call to explore all of the text’s philosophical dimensions seems equally relevant to an analysis of Addie’s chapter, the analysis of which needs to move beyond a rather restrictive discussion of gender and identity categories.

Understanding the word in Addie’s terms means turning to a discussion of

absence and presence. Critics and philosophers who regularly explore philosophical abstractions such as “being” and “non-being” have much to contribute to an analysis of the word and the absence it conceals. Like Addie, they are especially aware of language’s inability to represent these abstractions. Consequently, they learn to talk around things -- not to be evasive in reference to their subject matter, but to acknowledge and examine the word’s inherent “lack.”

### **Addie’s “            ” : Critical Responses**

Among the most frequently scrutinized of Addie’s statements, and the one that admits most obviously to the failure of the word, is her assertion that “The shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a            and I couldn’t think Anse” (173). The “            ” here is, of course, open to many interpretations about what it signifies, what it avoids naming, what it implies about the nature of communication, and how it solidifies Addie’s argument about the function (or dysfunction) of language. This space is perhaps the most crucial single component of Addie’s theory of language because it brings the absence she speaks of to the surface of the novel in the most literal sense: it is a tangible, physical absence on the page itself. This linguistic void incriminates the word by admitting its inability to signify “reality.” There is no signification of absence on the page but rather a confrontation with absence in its most basic and original form: “            ”

The critical response to the “            ” is particularly relevant to an exploration of absence in Addie’s chapter because the words of each critic inevitably provide a firsthand account of the way in which he or she conceives of absence. But critics who articulate

this absence should realize that their words that are no more transparent, accurate, or pure than the language in Faulkner's novel they are aiming to elucidate. Also, any attempt to name the " " essentially ignores or refutes the argument implicit in that open space: the word has failed to signify the reality it set out to define. Each articulation of this "gap" or "hole in the text" (Godden), this "blank" or "pure space of silence" (Matthews), is still an articulation of *absence*; only, the critic calls upon language to cover up this absence with a word or phrase.

No reader of Addie's chapter can discuss or write about the absence here without re-conceptualizing it in some way. Therefore, any analysis that tries to address it (mine included) will suffer from the same problematic condition Addie diagnoses: "words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at." Addie's " " is the only shape that does "fit" at this point in the monologue because it is the only one that refuses to conceal the word's "lack." Any critical interpretation, any disagreement or consensus about it, will fall short of the original meaning, intention, and function of the space in the text. This thesis is premised on the belief that Addie's chapter revolves around not a word that is withheld from readers, but an *absence* that is *given* to them. Therefore, the present inquiry into the meaning of the " " reflects not so much on critical attempts to reconstruct a missing word. Instead, it attempts to examine the words of each critic and explore the way in which they characterize the absence that confronts them in Faulkner's text.

### **The "Fill-in-the Blank" Interpretation**

Most of the criticism that focuses on Addie's chapter makes some attempt to

outline her theory of language; unfortunately, much of it avoids referring to the “ ” in her monologue which, in many ways, is the crux of her argument. Those who do note the significance of this ambiguous textual space tend to agree with each other about its function. They usually equate the “ ” with Addie’s virginity, or with her loss of it, since these are the topics most obviously being addressed in the sentence: “The shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a \_\_\_\_\_ and I couldn’t think Anse.”

Opting for the straightforward “fill-in-the-blank” approach proves to be somewhat unreliable, though, and risks oversimplifying the meaning and impact of this space. However, the impulse to do so -- to cover the “ ” as neatly and tightly as possible -- is worth investigating. Many critical responses to it reflect and perpetuate the idea that this piece of the novel is an empty space waiting to be filled in with a word instead of something already filled in by absence. Consequently, analyses of the “ ” stop short when a missing word appears to have been recovered.

Edmond L. Volpe, while not referring to the “ ” itself, illustrates the critical attempt to fill in the “blanks” of Addie’s passage where the word is elusive. Volpe says of Addie:

At first she wants to kill Anse because he tricked her, she says, by hiding behind a word. That word, which is probably “love,” betrays her, because to a man like Anse it can only be a word. Then she realizes that what really tricked her were words older than “Anse” or “love” and that the same word that tricked her also tricked Anse. What the word is, Addie does not say; but it is likely that the word she is thinking of, which tricks both her and Anse, is “death.” (135)

Paul R. Lilly hypothesizes that the word “unvirgin” (which appears shortly after in Addie’s monologue, as well as in The Sound and the Fury) has been deleted from

Addie's monologue (143). Lilly's criticism differs from Volpe's in that he tries to patch the gaps in Addie's monologue with other words in the monologue. In this sense, Lilly's interpretation seems more accurate and appropriate. He looks to Faulkner's own terminology to fill in his own textual space instead of rotating various abstractions ("love," "death") in and out of the passage, as Volpe does. However, both critics do share the tendency to translate the " " in the most literal way, as if there were a one-to-one relationship between the open space and the word. But the meaning and function of the " " extend beyond the confines of that ratio.

In an essay that owes much to Lilly's criticism, Godden similarly proposes that the "missing word marked by a gap in the typography could be one of two: 'hymen' [. . .] OR 'phallus'" (104). He views Addie's monologue as a narrative filled with "riddles" that Faulkner expects readers to decode, and claims that Addie's argument about language becomes progressively more concrete through a "series of substitution[s]" (103). Godden hypothesizes two "equations" that establish the logic of Addie's chapter, and that help solve the "riddle" of the "missing word": "Eden = virginity = silence" and "The Fall = fertility = language" (109). Employing a parallelism much like the one that guides Godden's analysis, R. Rio-Jelliffe offers another linguistic equation that explains the "blank space" (to borrow Lilly's term). He says, "[Anse's] name to Addie is but a 'word,' a 'significant shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame,' a blank ' " (107). All of these critics interpret the open space to be easily fillable, and even negotiable in its meaning. So even when critics stray from Addie's theory of language, their own analyses stand as proof of it.

Because each of these linguistic substitutions, equations, and parallelisms

highlight the manipulability of the word, they all essentially validate Addie's theory of language. To her, the word is untrustworthy precisely because of its manipulability. The " " is the most accurate expression of Addie's feelings at this point, but critics only conceal or deny it by positing one word after another in its place -- each one "just a shape to fill a lack." This "fill-in-the-blank" approach implies that Addie's thought, and perhaps even Faulkner's text, is incomplete in some way, when they call on other words to cover the "hole in the text," as Godden terms it. But Addie would argue that the word, not the " ", is hopelessly incomplete. The very existence of the word calls attention to the fact that it is a substitute for the thing itself, the "doing" she imagines that has no linguistic parallel. In an effort to uncover the meaning of this space in the text, many critics mistakenly bypass the absence that *is* there because they are searching for a word that is not.

### **The Confrontation with Absence**

John Matthews, much like Addie, is preoccupied with the concept and function of absence, and he realizes that this absence shapes the word in As I Lay Dying. Like the previous critics, he examines the ambiguous space in Addie's chapter within the context of Addie's discussion of her virginity. However, he believes that this discussion revolves around an ineffable center, which he identifies as "a silence that refers to the state of the body's virginity only through the function of the words around it" (42). His reading of the " " acknowledges that an absence does exist there and that it is somehow distinct from the words surrounding it, thereby implying that the " " is not interchangeable with a "word." Forgoing the "fill-in-the-blank" approach, Matthews directly confronts the

absence in Addie's chapter because he understands its crucial role in the novel's conception of the word, and therefore in the reading of As I Lay Dying as a whole.

Addie's chapter is more fully appreciated as a literary and philosophical work through criticism that does not conceal the " " but approaches that space *as* an absence. Once it is confronted, though, descriptions of this absence often lead Addie's monologue back to that realm of linguistic manipulation she disparages. Even when absence is brought into critical discussions of Addie's chapter, the " " never transcends its presumed function as a "missing word," or what Matthews calls "the only pure word in As I Lay Dying" (41). The paradoxical notion of a "pure word" that is a blank space leads Matthews to arrive at a philosophical and linguistic crossroads where one belief must take priority over the other: either reality necessitates the word or the word creates reality. Here, his path diverges from Addie's. Matthews does not see the " " as the point at which Faulkner's text finally breaks through the wall of words Addie has been trying to topple throughout her monologue. Instead, he concludes that "disappearance, absence, articulation all obtain within presence or speech" and that "silence, preconsciousness, perception, memory, and action are all structured by writing" (29, 38). In other words, there are *only* "other words."

But the words of the critic, like all words, are admittedly one step removed from reality, as Addie perceives it. Just as the word antagonistically inserts itself between Addie and her reality, the validity of her monologue is challenged and the transmission of her message is disrupted when critics interpret the " " as a form of signification, or a symbol of something other than itself. Matthews's interpretation of it as "a silence that *refers* to the state of the body's virginity" parallels Godden's conclusion that it is a "*sign*

for a sexless and silent Eden” (my italics) -- not just because the two arguments are compatible, but because they interpret the space as a sign or referent. But construing this absence as any kind of symbol only severs the reality of “” from the meaning of “” when the two are originally unified in Addie’s monologue.

Ultimately, the “” is a site of linguistic debate as well as philosophical debate. It exists in one dimension as an ambiguous textual space, but it also becomes a powerful and paradoxical presence in the novel, one that becomes metaphysically significant. The critical tendency to gloss over the stark moment of absence in Faulkner’s text -- or to transform it into “just a shape to fill a lack” (the word) -- is unfortunate in the sense that it seems to miss the point of Addie’s theory of language. Readers will never come to terms with the absence inherent in the word if they continuously deny the existence of that absence or attempt to hide it with a word. But in another sense, observing and investigating this reaction to the “” proves beneficial because it points toward the common reluctance to face the absence that inhabits that space.

### III. ABSENCE AND PHILOSOPHY

#### The Aversion to Absence

Readers who attempt to understand Addie's theory of language as both a literary and philosophical argument initially may choose to compare and contrast it with other language theories, hoping to discover the primary language theory that Addie is implicitly rejecting, endorsing, or even anticipating.<sup>2</sup> But I would argue that even more important than the status of her language theory seems to be her interaction with the word itself, and Faulkner's figuring of the word as a "lack." Therefore, my analysis of Addie's argument is less concerned with language theory in general and more concerned with what lies at the heart of Addie's own particular language theory: her obsession with the absence that is inherent to the word.

Heidegger's phenomenology proves to be especially relevant to a reading of Addie's chapter not simply because it provides a comprehensive theory of absence, which is certainly at work in the her monologue. He also recognizes the tendency to avoid the discussion of absence (as is evidenced by the critical response to the " " in Addie's monologue), or even to dismiss absence altogether as a valid subject of inquiry (as did many of his contemporaries in the philosophical community). Given these circumstances, the writing of both Heidegger and Faulkner seems to be at least partly antagonistic. Heidegger's theory of absence, which is only a fraction of his revision of metaphysics, challenges the Positivist philosophy of his time; Addie's theory of the word

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<sup>2</sup> However, these issues are still relevant to an understanding of Addie's chapter, and are therefore addressed in Chapter V.

as an absence challenges, and potentially undermines, Faulkner's own medium.

Nevertheless, both writers attempt to resuscitate and elucidate the concept of absence in their writing. They understand that the existence of absence -- or the *presence* of absence -- is an object of perception and feeling as well as thought.

### **Martin Heidegger and the Phenomenological Project**

While Henri Bergson's analysis of presence and absence<sup>3</sup> helped to revise and expand the study of metaphysics in the early twentieth century, Heidegger's re-

<sup>3</sup> In *Creative Evolution*, published in 1907, Bergson devotes a chapter to "The Idea of Nothing," which anticipates many of Heidegger's philosophical theories -- specifically his concept of "being-missing." Bergson says that absence is incorrectly perceived and theorized when nothing and something, absence and presence, are interpreted as mutually exclusive categories. Instead, he argues, these are overlapping concepts. Moreover, the perception of absence is always influenced by desire, expectation, and attention:

All action aims at getting something that we feel the want of, or at creating something that does not yet exist. In this very special sense, it fills a void, and goes from the empty to the full, from an absence to a presence, from the unreal to the real [. . .] only, if the present reality is not the one we are seeking, we speak of the *absence* of this sought-for reality wherever we find the *presence* of another. We thus express what we have as a function of what we want.

According to Bergson, people speak of a "nothing" when they are actually perceiving a "something" that does not engage their interest. The confusion between these concepts is due partly to the limitations of language, which has no means to describe how "the presence of one may be said to consist in the absence of the other" (297-298). But Bergson's principal argument is that the categories of absence and nothing are not really objects of perception at all. A logical operation, such as negation, can present only the illusion of absence or nothing. This process never yields Nothing itself, as more than hypothesized.

Remarking on Bergson's "Idea of Nothing," Eva Brann concludes, "This seems to me an ingenious and occasionally true psychological account of how existence comes to be thought of as occupying territory wrested from Nothing." However, she says, "it cannot be the whole or even an altogether plausible account. For one thing, a felt absence is nothing like Nothing -- like absolute Nothing, that is -- for desire is the most vibrant of lacks" (178). Brann's comment calls attention to an important tension missing from Bergson's theory -- the difference between what can be "thought of" or hypothesized (Nothing) and what is "felt" (absence). So while Bergson does account for desire and expectation, which stretch the boundaries of the concept of Nothing, Brann's proposition marks the point at which Heidegger's theory of absence can be distinguished from Bergson's: Heidegger's phenomenology is rooted in the experience of absence, not the theory of it.

conceptualization of absence as “phenomena” -- as perceived and felt -- will be the primary philosophical basis for the interpretation of Addie’s chapter. According to Robert Magliola, “the effect of Heidegger’s monumental book *Sein und Zeit* [Being and Time] is to shift the focus [of modern philosophy] from intellect-consciousness to a more radical emotion-consciousness” (5). After Bergson, Heidegger investigates the same presence/absence paradox as is illustrated in “The Idea of Nothing.” But, unlike Bergson, Heidegger approaches presence and absence phenomenologically, not simply as theories but as “phenomena” experienced by the individual.

For Heidegger, any understanding of “reality” and its ontological categories must come through an exploration of the modes of “being,” which exist not as hypotheses but as experiences. He chooses to turn away from preconceived theories that overshadow and actually “do violence to” individual experience. In doing so, he is able to revise the concepts of absence and presence that traditionally dualistic philosophy misconstrues as polar opposites (BPP 62). In Heidegger’s terms, they are not opposite entities -- one positive and existent, one negative and nonexistent -- but instead each has a distinct mode of being. Furthermore, he argues that each mode of being is worthy of investigation, despite increasing resistance to the difficult discussion of these categories.

Much of Heidegger’s 1929 lecture titled “What is Metaphysics?” explores the pursuit of science, which he considers an obstacle to the proper study of metaphysics. Unfortunately, he says, it “wishes to know nothing of Nothing” (244). All of the questions raised by the concept of Nothing are dismissed by science as problems of logic only. As a result, they are addressed through a kind of detached speculation, while the ambiguous correlation between presence and absence is generally overlooked. But

Heidegger recognizes and draws attention to this issue:

A being -- that's something, a table, a chair, a tree, the sky, a body, some words, an action. A being, yes, indeed -- but being? It looks like nothing -- and no less a thinker than Hegel said that being and nothing are the same. Is philosophy as science of being the science of nothing? (BPP 13)

For him, these two “sciences” are interdependent, although they are mistakenly interpreted as mutually exclusive categories -- that is, if “the science of nothing” is acknowledged at all. In light of this philosophical dilemma, Heidegger’s notion of “being-missing” serves as a starting point for the much needed discussion of the relationship between presence and absence, “being” and “nothing.” Most significantly, Heidegger examines them not as philosophical abstractions, but as actual experiences.

### **“Being-Missing”**

The specific sensation of “missing” is often linked to abstract concepts such as “absence” and “nothing,” and therefore interpreted as something metaphysically neutral or inconsequential. And since the only philosophical vocabulary available to address this experience is limited to an expression of *either* “presence” *or* “absence,” an understanding of the experience of missing is also limited by this dichotomy. According to Heidegger, it is a mistake to assume that being-missing is the opposite of being present. Rather, absence and presence overlap in the experience of missing.

Heidegger explains, “in the case of ‘being-missing’ it is not that we do not find anything. Instead, this circumstance shows us the emphasis we do put on intention, comportment-toward [other objects].” Heidegger’s assertion that “missing is the not-finding of something we have been expecting as needed” may at first seem to be an overly complicated statement of the obvious. But what he is illustrating here is that the

experience of “not-finding,” or “missing,” is actually an event in itself, all the more heightened by individual expectation (BPP 310). (Remember also Bergson’s emphasis on desire and expectation in the experience of “nothing.”) In this event, absence announces itself as a “felt absence” (to borrow Brann’s phrase); it becomes a present and perceived thing, as distinguished from the Nothing that can only be an object of thought. “Being-missing,” then, becomes the point of intersection between the concepts of presence and absence.

Because As I Lay Dying places the character of Addie Bundren at this metaphysical crossroads, her new mode of being is undoubtedly that of “being-missing,” in the sense that her absence is an active force in the text after her physical presence ceases to be. But Heidegger’s concept is perhaps even more important because it helps to explain, and even reinforce, her theory of the language: when Addie insists that the word is “just a shape to fill a lack” she is identifying it as a form of “being-missing” -- which is also to say that every word negates the thing that is named; every word brings about a loss of (the named thing’s) presence.

#### IV. COMPARING HEIDEGGER AND FAULKNER

##### Similarities in Style and Theme

Curiously, but perhaps not coincidentally, the language of Heidegger's phenomenological writing runs parallel to the language Faulkner's fiction. Both were known for the complexity and abstraction of their work and they were often attracted to the same themes. This shared interest seems to be at least partially responsible for their stylistic resemblance. Namely, both writers were preoccupied with the concept of absence. While Heidegger addresses this concept directly through his phenomenology, Faulkner approaches it indirectly by presenting Addie as the extracted or "missing" center of his novel. Because everyday language is unable to yield a comprehensive, or even coherent, discussion of the concept of absence, Heidegger and Faulkner choose to subvert this language. In effect, this subversion creates a new vocabulary within the world of their texts through which the more abstract dimensions of their reality (absence, in particular) can be articulated.

Walter Kaufman notes this similarity as well when he says, "the reader should keep in mind that Heidegger's difficulty is almost legendary, and that like Aristotle and Hegel before him, and like Faulkner in our own time, he often deliberately defies the idiomatic vernacular, although at other times he appeals to it" (234). Kaufman is not working within the framework of literary criticism when he compares the writing styles of Heidegger and Faulkner, and he does not propose an explanation for the similarity. His comment is important not so much because he raises the issue of the "difficulty" of each writer, but because he recognizes their works as "deliberately" defiant. Furthermore, I

would argue, the writing styles of Faulkner and Heidegger are most likely defiant out of necessity.

Both writers are writing against the lack of consciousness that characterizes the conventional use of language. Faulkner protests this most obviously through Addie, who to some extent voices his linguistic defiance. However, she carries his defiance one step further by renouncing not just the meaningless vocabulary of morality, but the use of all words. Though cynicism about the use of language is more overt in As I Lay Dying, it is one of Heidegger's concerns as well. He says that "we do know 'Nothing' if only as a term we bandy about every day," but regrets that it is an "ordinary hackneyed Nothing, so completely taken for granted and rolling off our tongue so casually" ("What is Metaphysics" 246). The typical encounter with the word is characterized by both writers as passive and unconscious in the most negative sense, illustrating the language user's indifference to the communication process. To counteract this indifference, Heidegger and Faulkner both use styles that demand attention and active participation from their readers.

Both Heidegger and Faulkner expect their audiences to adopt a new strategy for reading -- if not learn a new "language" altogether -- when the text presents an unfamiliar vocabulary for them to decipher, and when circular language and repetition become essential features of the text. Heidegger's terminology consists mostly of compound phrases that are only subtly distinguishable from one another, and that derive from "Being" in the most literal sense. His vocabulary includes: being-among, being-at-hand, being-in-itself, being-in-the-world, being-within-the-world, being-toward, being-within-time, and of course, being-missing. Like Heidegger, Faulkner has an obsession with

complex metaphysical categories, which he reveals through his own distinctive set of expressions: not-fish, not-blood, not-Anse, not-moving, no-wind, no-sound, no-hand, no-strings. On first glance, these peculiar phrases may be the most noticeable aspects of each writer's text. Uncovering the logic behind these stylistic choices is especially important because it reveals the complex relationship between writer, reader, and text.

In the texts of Faulkner and Heidegger, the burden of the word -- to represent reality accurately and effectively -- essentially becomes the burden of the reader.

Decoding the language of the text requires the reader to participate actively in the interpretation process. John Matthews explains the importance of reader involvement:

If the truth of experience or consciousness must be some sort of presence, and if language cannot render that object fully [. . .] the reader must assemble the full expression in his own creative imagination. In this view the incompleteness of any linguistic performance is finished by the reader, in whose mind perception or sense becomes fully present. (42)

Heidegger and Faulkner know that attacking or lamenting the word for being a dead relic of thought or feeling is pointless if the act of communication is passive, if it does not somehow demand the reader to use his or her "creative imagination" in the interpretation process.

In the writings of Heidegger or Faulkner, the word is not transparent, not a fact understood beforehand. Instead, it is a piece of the larger puzzle of the text that makes sense only when the reader adopts and exercises the particular "language" of that text. Heidegger and Faulkner do not often let their audiences read their work mechanically or unconsciously; instead, they emphasize in and through their writing that the act of expression (on the part of the writer) *is and should be an obstacle* if it is to reflect the complexity of human understanding. Conversely, they have every reason to expect that

the interpretation of their work (on the part of the reader) will be an active, and even difficult, process.

### **Their Connections to the Shifting Language of “Reality”**

Heidegger and Faulkner are conscious of the complexity of their work and the intellectual/conceptual demands they make on their readers; their writing styles bring the obstacle of communication to the surface of the text quite “deliberately.” However, the historical context both writers shared was likely a factor in their stylistic tendency to “talk around” their subjects and “point toward” meaning. While Modernists revered the word and its infinite possibility, various fields of inquiry in the early twentieth century had long been operating under the opposite assumption: they had reacted to, and been shaped by, what they perceived to be the inherent limitation of the word.

### **“The Retreat from the Word”**

George Steiner’s 1967 essay, “The Retreat from the Word,” outlines the movement across countless disciplines away from the word as a primary form of expression. He traces this movement back to the seventeenth century, a time in which “significant areas of truth, reality, and action recede[d] from the sphere of verbal statement” (14). Following in the footsteps of mathematics -- “*the history of that language [being] one of progressive untranslatability*” -- Steiner cites phenomena of physics that “are no longer accessible through the word” (14, 17). Ultimately, he concludes, “It is no paradox to assert that in cardinal respects reality now begins *outside* verbal language” (17). Even the more liberal arts, once rooted solidly in language, have

pushed the word to its boundary and discarded it. They now look to other forms of signification better equipped to illustrate the more abstract dimensions of “reality.”<sup>4</sup>

Understanding that the relationship between philosophy and poetry is an intimate one, Steiner explains that the language which was once the foundation of each has become a challenge to both:

Nowhere, however, is the retreat from the word more pronounced and startling than in philosophy. Classic and medieval philosophy were wholly committed to the dignity and resources of language, to the belief that words, handled with requisite precision and subtlety, could bring the mind into accord with reality. Plato, Aristotle [. . .] are master-builders of words, constructing around reality great edifices of statement, definition, and discrimination [. . .] they share with the poet the assumption that words gather and engender responsible apprehensions of the truth. (18-19)

Steiner explains that after “Spinoza sought to make the language of philosophy a verbal mathematics [. . .] philosophers know that they are using language to clarify language, like cutters using diamonds to shape other diamonds.” As a consequence of “verbal mathematics” (i.e., logic) becoming the primary tool of philosophy, “Language is seen no longer as a road to demonstrable truth, but as a spiral or gallery of mirrors bringing the intellect back to its point of departure” (20). The “retreat from the word” then culminates in the twentieth century with Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language, which effectively invalidates the language of metaphysics altogether.

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<sup>4</sup> Steiner explains that the “languages” of mathematics, architecture, biochemistry, physics, economics, and sociology have all essentially “[abandoned] the word for the figure” -- whether it be a number, graph, or formula. He observes that even modern art uses abstraction to rebel against any kind of “verbal equivalence” (16, 22).

### **Heidegger and the critique of logic**

S. Morris Engel discusses the influence of Wittgenstein's work on twentieth century philosophy, saying in 1971, "For a half a century or so now metaphysics has been subjected to a new kind of attack. New sorts of questions have been asked of it, and new objections raised against it." In particular, Engel notes the impact of Wittgenstein's belief that "the confusion which abounds in philosophic discourse is due directly to language," specifically its vagueness and manipulability (33). Constantly questioning the efficacy of metaphysical language, these "new objections" also worked to collapse the field of inquiry as a whole and finally lead to the assumption "that metaphysics is impossible, for the kind of knowledge it is after is in principle unattainable" (96).

In the twentieth century, the practice of logic essentially overtakes the study of metaphysics. For example, Brann writes, "Logic became the venue for nonexistence because logicians were willing to see it as a soluble problem and to kick away all the struts [i.e., linguistic ambiguities] that kept it standing as a high mystery." The logician's primary goal is to "first [focus] on the rectification of ordinary language, the elimination of undesirable entities" (77). Or, in short, one of the main functions of logic is to exclude certain topics from further discussion when they do not fit into its vocabulary. And the fate of "undesirable entities" (for example, existence and nonexistence, being and nonbeing) in this logic-driven philosophical context is that they are quickly dismissed as nonsensical concepts and cease to be subjects of any investigation or inquiry. Ultimately, logic denies language's capacity to negotiate the most significant and intimate of abstractions -- namely, the concepts of "reality" and "truth."

Heidegger's phenomenology is obviously diametrically opposed to the logic-

driven philosophical trends of his time, exemplified by Positivism. First and foremost, he calls for a revision of the traditional study of metaphysics and claims that “*being is the proper and sole theme of philosophy*” (BPP 11). Heidegger, like Wittgenstein, acknowledges the fundamental ambiguity of metaphysics and its language. But unlike Wittgenstein, Heidegger embraces this quality. For example, Heidegger explains that the term “is” is “necessarily ambiguous. However, this ambiguity is not a ‘defect’ but only the expression of the *intrinsically manifold structure of the being of a being* -- and consequently *of the overall understanding of being*” (BPP 205). Here, the ambiguity of language is neither evidence of its failure nor an “undesirable entity” to be expunged from language. On the contrary, Heidegger would argue that because “is” is able to express “Being” in its multiplicity, the value of the word lies not in its conventional meaning but in its inherent ambiguity.

Heidegger is aware of the “The Retreat from the Word” Steiner describes and his phenomenology is, in great part, a response to it. Specifically, Heidegger does not perceive the ambiguity and imprecision of words to be a sign of their uselessness. On the contrary, he accepts the malleability of language precisely because it reflects the radical abstraction of his own phenomenology, which ultimately rests on an understanding of “Dasein,” or “being-there.” Like the work of the “classic philosophers” Steiner describes, Heidegger’s writing reveals his continuing effort to be one the “master-builders of words, constructing around reality great edifices of statement, definition, and discrimination.” His intricate phenomenological terminology is evidence of this. Like the “poet” Steiner describes, Heidegger also holds fast to “the assumption that words gather and engender responsible apprehensions of the truth” (Steiner 19).

Owing to his laborious crafting of language, Heidegger's work parallels the work of Faulkner, both in style and in intention. Neither writer "retreats" from language or works to purge his writing of ambiguity. Quite the opposite, both rely on their stylistic complexities to make reading and interpreting more than simple, unconscious processes or events.

### **Faulkner and the Critique of Addie**

The most fundamental metaphysical abstractions disregarded by logic (presence and absence, being and nonbeing) are of course prominent in Heidegger's work, but these same are somewhat obscured in Faulkner's. Heidegger's source of antagonism appears to be external, in that his writing is a reaction to the larger, logic-driven scientific and philosophical communities of his time that "[wish] to know nothing of Nothing" ("WIM" 244). But Faulkner's source of antagonism appears to be internal, or contained within the boundaries of his text, in the sense that Addie's posthumous chapter is the focal point of the novel but it is also a "structural center of silence" (Lilly 146).

Because Addie's death and burial are the principal events that shape As I Lay Dying, forming the thematic and literal crux of the novel, many critics' initial intent is to make sense of the relationship between Faulkner and Addie -- specifically, to measure the extent to which her argument is either a reflection or rejection of his own feelings about language. On one hand, Addie's condemnation of the word may be regarded as a self-criticism on Faulkner's part; on the other hand, Addie's monologue may be perceived as both inaccurate and antagonistic -- a fallacious train of thought that aims to disrupt or infect the rest of the novel, but one that Faulkner's narration is actually trying to defend

against.

Richard Godden and Floyd C. Watkins make similar arguments about Faulkner's strategy, in that they both recognize and praise his use of the concrete. With Addie's monologue, writes Godden, "Faulkner achieves a purification of language not only more astringent than any of his American contemporaries, but strikingly *different* from the linguistic attitudes that characterized the major modern figures, Joyce, Eliot, and Pound" (101, italics added). In fact, he says, "Addie's systematic purifications are *at odds with* the linguistic atmosphere in which Modernism developed" (113, italics added). However, Watkins claims that "Addie's speech is one of the most effective rejections of abstraction written in the early twentieth century. Her denial of the efficacy of a moral vocabulary and her reliance on concrete image, fact, and action are *reflections* of the best aesthetic principles of Eliot, Faulkner, and Hemingway early in their careers" (213, italics added). Godden distinguishes Addie's style from the Modernists while Watkins aligns her with them. But in spite of this dissimilarity, each critic sees Addie's monologue as the vehicle through which Faulkner tries to redeem the word through a "purification of language" and "rejection of abstraction."

Godden also insists that Addie's rejection of language does not necessarily imply Faulkner's, nor does it invalidate his work. He explains, "The general assumption that Faulkner and Addie share a mythology of language may be accurate, but if this is so it does not boil down to a mutual mistrust of words. Addie does claim that some words are arbitrary, but her every effort is to cure rather than to mistrust them" (112). Likewise, Andre Bleikasten does not see Addie's argument as a denial of Faulkner's creative capabilities; on the contrary, he says that Faulkner's "verbal inventiveness [is] designed

to correct the shortcomings and offset the diffuseness of ordinary speech” (28). He claims, “At this point in his career, the resources of language no longer held any secrets for Faulkner, and he now exploited them with an assurance, an exactness, and a dexterity verging on virtuosity” (21). Even Addie’s chapter, according to Bleikasten, works to demonstrate Faulkner’s constant precision and control over language.

However, other critics are more suspicious of Addie’s argument and make a point of distinguishing her theory of language from Faulkner’s. Panthea Reid Broughton claims that Addie “deludes herself” with her distrust of language and argues, “No matter how corrupt the abstracting process should become, Faulkner’s fiction offers no justification [. . .] for approving Addie Bundren’s rejection of abstraction” (191). Similarly, Daniel J. Singal insists that, although “Faulkner clearly admired [Addie’s] existential heroism,” he would never “admire her wholesale rejection of language. Such an absolutist choice ran against the tenets of his evolving belief system, which was predicated on the effective *integration* of words and deeds” (150).

These criticisms, which refute the assumption that Addie is the spokeswoman for Faulkner’s linguistic/artistic vision, gather strength from the inherent contradiction of her monologue. As Judith Lockyer notes, “[Addie’s] denouncement of language is finally less significant than the fact that she talks about language at all” (73). Lynn Marie Lipphart Berk says, “Our view of Addie is further complicated by the fact that while she insists on the inadequacy of words, she depends on them a great deal in the context of the novel” (79). So many of Addie’s critics feel that her argument is invalidated not only through its contradiction of Faulkner, but through its internal contradiction as well.

When critics debate the origin and purpose of Addie’s theory of the word, they

usually come to one of two conclusions: either Faulkner uses Addie's self-assurance to support a theory of the word he endorses, or Faulkner uses Addie's self-contradiction to invalidate a theory of language he rejects. The problem with both of these interpretations is that they assume Faulkner and Addie operate as a single unit -- as if the author's motivation finally determines a reading of Addie's theory of language. But, more likely, Addie's argument is affected by *two* sets of motivations, both Faulkner's and her own.

Faulkner's primary motivation is to make the interpretation process as active and challenging as possible in order to facilitate the reader's involvement in the text. Addie, however, is obsessed with the failure of language. She disrupts the communication, or interpretation, process out of a need to rebel against the word. So although the motivations of Faulkner and Addie obviously complement one another in the text, they still exist independently of each other. Addie is not designed specifically to be Faulkner's advocate, nor is she his adversary. However, her desire to rebel against the word parallels Faulkner's desire to obscure the language of the text. So as a result of Addie's rebellion against the word and Faulkner's subversion of it (each for a different reason), Addie's monologue becomes the arena in which the tension between presence and absence is perpetually acted out through the word.

## V. ADDIE'S CHAPTER

### Language as Loss

Addie's somewhat ambiguous description of her own relationship to language illustrates the obstacle of expression at the core of As I Lay Dying, and also suggests a growing fissure on which all language is built. She says, "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" (173). The implication here is that the word will abandon the "doing." For Addie, the concept or experience that constitutes the "doing" can never be fully actualized or communicated through language because naming will inevitably betray what is named.

Ironically, while she completely distrusts and disparages language, Addie's narrative has to depend on the word to support her argument. This has been a major source of contention for many critics who use the inherent contradiction of her argument to discredit it altogether. However, if Addie's argument rests on the assumption that every word is "just a shape to fill a lack," then the inconsistency of her argument and the self-defeating quality of Faulkner's text actually prove Addie's point -- as well as John Matthews's:

To begin to write, to mark the page, *produces* the mood of bereavement, as if the use of language creates the atmosphere of mourning. Writing does not respond to loss, it initiates it; writing itself is as much a kind of loss as it is a kind of compensation. (19)

The "loss" Matthews speaks of here is, in the most general sense, the loss of presence that occurs when the word only highlights the absence of what it is naming.

Addie's monologue validates Matthews's assertion, in that she is obsessed with the perpetual "loss" language produces every time the "word" replace the "doing." Her desire to rebel against the word out of anger is matched by Faulkner's desire to use language subversively in order to involve the reader in the novel. But, finally, the most important function of Addie's chapter is to illustrate the moment of "loss" that Matthews articulates, which Addie witnesses over and over again.

Because Addie desperately wants others to struggle with the same absence that grieves her -- the "lack" or "loss" of presence that accompanies the word -- Faulkner aims to recreate it for the reader of her monologue. In doing so, he uses a series of subversive strategies that can be broken down into two main categories: (1) strategies that challenge the reader's ability to interpret the events of the text visually (through imagery and analogy), and (2) strategies that challenge the reader's ability to interpret the events of the text rationally (through repetition, contradiction, and negation).

**(a) VISUAL SUBVERSION:  
IMAGERY AND ANALOGY<sup>5</sup>**

Addie's monologue begins as a fairly straightforward account of her life before marriage and motherhood, but evolves into a complex and nebulous narrative that mixes rigid assertions about the word with ambiguous illustrations of how language operates. The beginning of her life as a wife and mother coincides with her "terrible" revelation about the true nature of language: "So I took Anse. And when I knew that I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it. That was when I learned that words are not good; that words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at" (171). While there are no references to the "word" or "words" in the first two pages of Addie's section (before she recalls becoming a wife and mother), the last five pages of her chapter contain 23 references to them.

At the same point that Addie's theory of language begins to emerge in her monologue, Faulkner's images and analogies becomes more conspicuous and elaborate. Each one essentially works in conjunction with her theory of language in order to illustrate the weakness and failure of the word. However, while the image and the analogy may be expected to serve as vehicles for clarifying a particular concept or experience, here they intentionally emphasize their own abstraction. Consequently, they cease to be a means of elucidating the events, arguments, or themes of the text. Instead,

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<sup>5</sup> Although the analogy and image can overlap, I interpret them here as two separate components of the text, each with a different function. The "image" in Addie's chapter is a typically small unit of meaning, made up of a word or brief phrase. I will discuss the way in which it operates as a literary device. The "analogy" is longer and more involved. I will discuss how it applies to the more complex facets of Addie's theory of language.

they become yet another means of questioning the reliability of the word, or exposing the loss of presence that always accompanies it.

### **The Obstruction of the Image**

Speaking about Anse, Addie's narration is somewhat reminiscent of Darl's most difficult passage, in which he contemplates the intricacies of identity, being, non-being.

Addie says:

I would think about his name until after a while I could see the word as a shape, a vessel, and I would watch him liquefy and flow into it like cold molasses flowing out of the darkness into the vessel, until the jar stood full and motionless: a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame; and then I would find that I had forgotten the name of the jar. (173)

Darl says earlier:

Beyond the unlamped wall I can hear the rain shaping the wagon that is ours, the load that is no longer theirs that felled and sawed it nor yet theirs that brought it and which is not ours either, lie on our wagon though it does, since only the wind and rain shape it only to Jewel and me, that are not asleep. 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*. (80-81)

In both monologues, each image becomes a source of fascination for the reader not in spite of its difficulty, but exactly because of it; its opacity is its most attractive quality.

Initially, these passages seem to be composed of concrete images: Addie describes a vessel, molasses, a jar; Darl describes the wagon. However, the actual event being described either escapes or defies perception.

In Addie's passage, the reader cannot imagine how a one-dimensional "word"

could become a three-dimensional “shape,” how a man could “liquefy,” or how “molasses” could be distinguished from “darkness” when the image is taken literally. In Darl’s passage, the reader cannot imagine how “the wind and rain shape [the wagon],” how amorphous substances can “shape” an object that already has a definite structure. Finally, Addie and Darl come to meditate on the concept of emptiness, which emerges through the image as either “a significant shape profoundly without life, like an empty door frame,” or a moment “when the wagon is *was*.” Ultimately, each image in Addie’s chapter becomes problematic. It is meant to be a prominent feature of the monologue, but it is also designed to be inherently elusive.

All of these interpretive and imaginative challenges are rooted in the act of perceiving -- or, to be more specific, constructing perception through the act of reading. Daniel Tiffany’s analysis of imagism and modernism provides a basis for understanding this phenomenon. While the Modernist image is initially associated with Imagism, it seems appropriate to apply it to fiction as well as poetry. Between Darl’s intensely private and poetic passages and Cash’s compulsively rigid accounts of everyday events,<sup>6</sup> the distinction between poetry and fiction is already tenuous from chapter to chapter in *As I Lay Dying*. And because Addie’s monologue itself moves among a variety of styles and tones -- from her detached account of marriage and family, to her ecstatic depiction of the affair, to her sinister and “terrible” vision of the word -- it seems to do away with that distinction altogether.

Tiffany’s analysis of the image closely parallels Addie’s analysis of the word,

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<sup>6</sup> The reader may remember that one of Cash’s chapters is simply a numbered list of thirteen facts or details that relate to the building of Addie’s coffin (82-83).

although their responses to the act of communication are drastically different. He says, “the modernist poetic image entails a mediation of visibility simply by its displacement of the image concept into a verbal medium.” What Tiffany neutrally refers to as “displacement” (the “verbal medium” substituted for the “image concept”) is what Addie negatively interprets as “lack” (the “word” betraying the “doing”). But they are describing the same verbal phenomenon; in Addie’s terms, this is the moment in which the “word” replaces the “doing.” The “lack” that Addie attributes to the word appears in Tiffany’s account of the image as well. He says, “the modernist poetic image is equivocally, but intentionally, *nonvisual*, insofar as it resists, contests, and mediates the experience of visibility, but also in its preoccupation with the invisible” (21). So according to Tiffany’s analysis, recreating the image through the medium of the word results in the same kind of paradox that shapes Addie’s chapter: “Opacity and negativity - - the power to withhold from the eye the visualization promised by the image -- become the salient features of the image” (2).

In Addie’s monologue, the image is given to the reader partially obscured, like an underdeveloped picture. In this way, the *presentation* of the image and the *obstruction* of the image become equally significant events in the narrative. The “being-missing” paradox at the core of Addie’s chapter re-emerges again through its most significant images; in them, presence (presentation) and absence (obstruction) are revealed simultaneously.

### **The Motif of “Shape”**

In Addie’s monologue, “being-missing” also expresses itself through the motif of the “shape,” a word that appears five times in her chapter. Four of these usages appear in the intricate and notorious jar passage (previously quoted) that details the subtly destructive naming process. “Shape” and “name” are similar concepts in that neither one is useful, or even fathomable, without a referent. While “name” is linked to “Anse,” “shape” is linked to nothing. Without a referent, the word “shape” undermines its very purpose: it calls attention to the fact that no specific shape is being designated by the term. In Addie’s chapter, “shape” exists only to showcase its own ambiguity.

When Anse the man is separated from Anse the name, conceived of apart from its referent, it also invokes and emphasizes its own indeterminacy. Perhaps most important, both “shape” and “name” allude back to Addie’s interpretation of the word as “just a shape to fill a lack.” In the jar image, Faulkner fuses “shape” and “name” visually in order to blur the lines between them conceptually. Severing each term from its referent, and then merging these referent-less terms into one nebulous and indeterminate image, Faulkner shows how they defer perception, interpretation, and therefore meaning. At the heart of this deferral is absence -- that which is framed by the “shape,” framed by the “name,” and framed by the “word.” Although the effect of this absence in the text is obviously significant, readers must also understand the devices that are used to suggest, indicate, or create absence in the first place.

### **“Structured Absence”**

Timothy Walsh’s book, The Dark Matter of Words, investigates not only the

concept of absence, but its various categories (lack, loss, etc.). As discussed in Chapter III of this thesis, Bergson expanded on the traditional idea of absence by taking desire and expectation into account, and Heidegger took the notion a step further by examining it phenomenologically, as an actual experience. Walsh approaches the subject from yet another angle. He is less interested in the theory or experience of absence and more interested in the mechanics of the sentence that work to illustrate it.

Because Wolfgang Iser addresses the issue of absence in the text and Roman Ingarden addresses the issue of absence in language as a whole, Walsh uses them as a starting point for his discussion. However, he says that their analyses do not “distinguish between the absences that inevitably result from the schematic nature of language and the conventions of literary form, and what I will refer to as ‘structured absences,’ the very different sort of vacancy that specifically and intentionally implicated (107). Walsh is primarily concerned with the ways in which sentence structure creates and/or reveals absence in the text. His analysis leads to the discovery of an important type of absence, much like Heidegger’s “being-missing” and Brann’s “felt absence,” that the writer subtly inserts into the text.

Walsh illustrates “structured absence” by contrasting a pair of sentences that differ only slightly, although this difference is significant. The first reads, “Her hair made me wistful” and the second reads, “The color of her hair made me wistful” (107). Walsh notes that the first sentence allows the reader to fill in any missing details unconsciously or instinctively, as a natural part of the reading experience. But the second sentence has a peculiar effect: “The color is still not named, but it is implicated as the cause of the wistfulness [. . .] the color of the hair has been spotlighted, and the vacancy in this regard

has been singled out as being of special importance” (108). In other words, when the text suggests the presence of a specific “color” but intentionally withholds it from the reader, this detail of the sentence announces itself *as missing*. This kind of absence -- deliberately invoked and framed by the structure of the text -- is what Walsh refers to as a “structured absence.”

The motif of “shape” in Addie’s monologue can be interpreted as “structured absence” in its most compact form: Faulkner employs a single word (such as “shape” or “name”) to highlight its own ambiguity. But not all illustrations of “structured absence” operate so discreetly. The majority of the novel revolves around the movement of a single corpse, which is Faulkner’s most conspicuous rendering of “being-missing.”

### **Ghosts and Corpses**

Richard P. Adams refers to Addie’s death as the “great static obstacle” in As I Lay Dying (77), and Edmond L. Volpe notes that “The subject of the novel is death; its central image the human corpse, generating furious passions and furious activity” (127). For the most part, Faulkner critics recognize this “central” irony in the novel, as well as the paradox of Addie’s situation: “Addie is more alive once dead than she had seemed before, more a pressure upon her family and her world” (Bradford 1095). But the particular type of “pressure” that she exerts in the novel, as the paradoxically present/absent corpse, is not usually addressed. Since Addie is the literal and symbolic center of As I Lay Dying, the reader may logically want to interpret her as a ghost who haunts the novel after her death. However, the figure of the ghost and the figure of the corpse actually evoke opposite emotions; they offer the reader two very different ways to deal

with the fact of Addie's absence.

M.E. Bradford characterizes Addie's presence in the text after her death as ghostly as describes her "Watching and penetrating every object, place, and person in her orbit." He explains that "Ghosts, according to their close observers, are usually troubled spirits who cannot find quietude until something occurs among the living to put them at their ease" (1094). He cites the various "present-tense but postmortem descriptions" that refer to Addie in the novel after she has died. Bradford observes that she "speaks" to Darl and Vardaman and "listens" to Cash as he is sawing her coffin, that "Dewey Dell is too busy to 'allow' her mother to be dead," and that Addie re-emerges in various forms (becoming a fish to Vardaman and a horse to Jewel). Her ghost has a "will" and she "visits" the other characters in the story (1095, 1096). Bradford claims that "once Addie is assumed to have an afterlife among the Bundrens, there is no strain in the correlative presupposition that she reads [. . .] the minds of husband and children" (1095). His language is very telling because it reveals the way in which the figure of the ghost is able to retain and display essentially human characteristics despite the fact that it logically signifies the loss of human life. The ghost-figure finally offers some measure of tangibility in place of that loss.

Surprisingly, perhaps, the ghost and the corpse appear to be antithetical figures: the ghost is non-physical but given human attributes; the corpse is undeniably physical but devoid of all those capacities and abilities that once made it human. When Daniel Tiffany investigates the obstruction of the image and its ironically "*nonvisual*" quality, he turns to the figure of the corpse to illustrate his point. He claims that "the 'strangeness' of the cadaver as an image resides [. . .] in its resistance to visibility." It becomes both a

confusing and disturbing picture due to the observer's "aversion to a representational image that has been stripped of its referent." The "representational image" here is the material body and the "referent" is the life or being that ceases to inhabit that body. In other words, the signifier is still present but not the signified, so that "the cadaver is a picture of no one" (8).

The ghost is ultimately more comforting than the corpse because it allows the observer to reinterpret a presence rather than confront an absence. For example, as Bradford observes, Addie's family is able to perceive a fish or spirit or invisible companion in place of an absent mother. Perceiving her ghost, Anse and the children can *defer* the confrontation with absence brought on by Addie's death, but perceiving her corpse they must confront that absence. Robert Hemenway articulates this dilemma:

Addie "is" because [the Bundrens] do not really consider her dead until she is placed in the Jefferson grave, but she "is not" too, a fact made painfully evident by the putrefying corpse. Yet the smell itself proves a kind of existence, so in some sense she "is." (139)

Addie's fluctuation between "is" and "is not," in light of Bradford's and Tiffany's analyses, reveals the tension in Faulkner's postmortem characterization of her. If Addie is interpreted as a ghost haunting the text, she maintains a continuous presence even though that presence is manifested in different forms. But if she is interpreted as a corpse, her presence can *only* be the embodiment of absence.

For Addie's family and Faulkner's reader, the ghost-figure is finally more tolerable than the corpse-figure, both physically and psychologically. Interpreting her as a ghost, viewers and readers do not have to confront "being-missing" in its most blatant and disturbing form; their natural impulse is to avoid that experience since the corpse is not only physically disturbing, but metaphysically incomprehensible. However, horror

and “loss,” embodied by the figure of the corpse, are experiences that readers and viewers must undergo in order to recognize fully that absence which is central to Addie’s chapter and the to novel as a whole.

Ultimately, the confusion between Addie the ghost and Addie the corpse reflects the same interpretive predicament that surrounds the “ ” in her chapter. If the “ ” is like a ghost, it can continually be “filled in” with other presences, *other words*. But if the “ ” is like a corpse then no alternate presences, *no words*, will ever be able to “fill in” that space.

### **The Subversion of Analogy: Spiders and Orphans**

Looking back at the end of the previous section, I can see my own impulse to use analogy in order to make sense of the complex themes in Addie’s monologue. Considering whether Addie’s “ ” is more *like* a ghost or more *like* a corpse, I am approaching the text with a method of analysis that I imagine Addie might consent to -- given her desire to rebel against the word, and given Faulkner’s desire to subvert it for the sake of illustrating her theory of language. Unlike words, which attempts (unsuccessfully) to fix a single meaning through the act of definition, analogies attempts to articulate the meaning of the “ ” without directly participating in the same naming process that Addie denounces (exemplified by the “fill-in-the-blank” method of criticism addressed in Chapter II). And because analogy relies on comparison instead of definition, it offers the possibility of finding a “loophole” in the communication process, or a space where the “word” dissolves and the “doing” is finally recovered and articulated.

The most significant moments in Addie’s chapter are those in which she reveals

her obsession with the word and uses analogy to articulate her theory of language. In these moments, the reader may expect analogy serve its traditional function -- using a familiar picture to illustrate a more alien concept (here, Addie's argument about the nature and betrayal of the word). However, in Addie's chapter the analogy becomes a subversive literary device in the most surprising way; it ultimately undermines its own purpose. Just as the obscured image becomes paradoxical and subversive when it is characterized by its "nonvisual" quality, the ambiguous analogy becomes paradoxical and subversive when it defies its explanatory function. Addie's analogies give the impression that they are bringing the reader closer to the meaning of the passage when, in actuality, each one becomes yet another means of creating *distance* between the reader and the text.

### **Spiders**

In this portion of her monologue, Addie ostensibly offers a reason for the violence she inflicts on her schoolchildren:

I knew that it had been, not that they had dirty noses, but that we had had to use one another by words like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging and twisting and never touching, and that only through the blows of the switch could my blood and their blood flow as one stream. I knew that it had been, not that my aloneness had to be violated over and over each day, but that it had never been violated until Cash came. Not even by Anse in the nights. (172)

This abuse, she implies, is a remedy for her "aloneness" (although this feeling of alienation is never actually alleviated, or "violated," until she becomes a mother).

Addie's tone is very assured as she describes how she and the children "*had had* to use one another" (italics added). In fact, the passage reads like a series of pronouncements that are all variations of a single pattern: "*I knew that it had been, not* that they had dirty

noses, *but* that we had had to use one another by words like spiders”; “*I knew that it had been, not* that my aloneness had to be violated over and over each day, *but* that it had never been violated until Cash came” (italics added). The repetition of this exact pattern seems very deliberate, as if Addie is taking great pains to clarify any potential misunderstanding about the violence that occurs. On the whole, the structure and style of the passage suggest that it has an explanatory function, aiming to articulate the complexity of the relationship between Addie and the children. The spider analogy, then, appears to be only a fragment of that explanation.

This analogy, despite its eccentricity, is easily overshadowed by the graphic violence in Addie’s story. Most obviously, the analogy aims to express her feelings of detachment and alienation. The unsettling elusiveness of words -- “swinging and twisting and never touching” -- prevents any meaningful verbal exchange between Addie and the children. This statement also recalls her previous assertion that “words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at,” and here the final consequence of this frustration and failure is violence (171). The spider analogy is undoubtedly a device Addie uses to illustrate her torment, and thereby justify her actions, but this is only one of its many functions.

The second purpose of this analogy is to illustrate the tenuous structure of language. Refocusing on the negotiation of the “words” instead of the “blows of the switch,” the reader is able to recognize the parallel between two fragile relationships -- the connection between Addie and the schoolchildren, and the connection between all words. Addie’s abuse does not simply reflect a wish for unity or communion through

human contact, as many critics suggest.<sup>7</sup> This violence is the basic, primal expression of her hatred for the word. Each “[blow] of the switch” symbolically reunites the “word” with the “doing.”

Understandably, Addie chooses the abstraction of the analogy over the restriction of the word. The analogy allows her to condemn the defining or naming process while she simultaneously distances herself from it. However, the text gives the reader no reason to believe that either Faulkner or Addie wishes to make the interpretation process easy. Faulkner is a “deliberately defiant” writer, as Kaufman says, and Addie is perhaps the most defiant character in the novel, even rebelling against the one link she has to the reader -- her own words. Even after the reader is able to uncover the double-function of Addie’s analogy (to illustrate human and linguistic complexities simultaneously), the possibility of recovering the “doing,” or reversing its “loss,” is ultimately exposed as an illusion.

In Addie’s spider analogy, Faulkner uses each preposition as tool to create distance between the reader and the text. Initially, the preposition may be thought of as an instrument of precision, describing every position and detailing each specific movement taking place: “we had had to use one another *by* words like spiders dangling *by* their mouths *from* a beam” (italics added). However, the abundance of prepositions within this analogy only makes the picture more and more difficult to interpret. Conceptually, the reader is required to superimpose one set of physical relations on top of the other. As a

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<sup>7</sup> Critics often interpret Addie’s actions to be indicative of her desire for “humanity” (Vickery 54), “identity” (Volpe 132), “unity” (Godden 121), “completion/confirmation” (Bradford 1097), or “communion” (Holland-Toll 445). These analyses will be discussed more in depth in the second section of this chapter.

result, prepositions such as “by” and “from” cease to be instruments of precision. Instead, they reinforce the elusiveness of words and the distance between those words. And this felt, or perceived, distance becomes an inescapable part of the reader’s experience as well.

Finally, the sensation of “swinging and twisting and never touching” can be used to describe several fragile and complex connections: the spiders’ relationship to each other, Addie’s relationship to the schoolchildren, the reader’s connection to the meaning of the text, and each word’s connection to another. In fact, the spider analogy seems to offer a description of how analogy works. Analogy compares and describes but never defines, so that the interpretive process is never allowed to end and meaning is never fixed. So in a sense, this passage is an analogy of an analogy.

### **Orphans**

As Addie lies next to Anse in bed, she uses analogy again to make sense of the betrayal and failure of the word:

I would lie by him in the dark hearing the dark land talking of God’s love and His beauty and His sin; hearing the dark voicelessness in which the words are the deeds, and the other words that are not deeds, that are just the gaps in peoples’ lacks, coming down like the cries of the geese out of the wild darkness in the old terrible nights, fumbling at the deeds like orphans to whom are pointed out in a crowd two faces and told, That is your father, your mother. (174)

Unlike her single reference to the spiders, this analogy is actually a combination of several dissimilar analogies. Although the transition from one to the next is hardly smooth, each appears to take its place in a larger pattern, or operation, carried out by the passage -- the movement from the abstract to the concrete. Initially, the passage recalls

the division between the “word” and the “doing” by positing an opposition between the “word” and the “deed.” Then this dualism expands into an even broader opposition between the “dark voicelessness” (“in which the words are the deeds”) and “the gaps in peoples’ lacks” (in which “the other words [ . . . ] are not deeds”). However, both prove to be ambiguous concepts. But after this point, the language of the analogy works to become more tangible, or familiar, in order to reassure the reader that he or she is gradually approaching the meaning of the passage.

The mystery of the “dark voicelessness in which the words are deeds” is immediately intriguing. Olga Vickery observes, and Floyd C. Watkins agrees, that in Addie’s mind the only legitimate mode of communication is that which originates in the “dark voicelessness” (220). R. Rio Jelliffe asserts that Addie longs to “escape” into this world, suggesting that it may be symbolic of her death-wish (103). Both interpretations show that the concept itself is so abstract and malleable that it is open to almost any reading. Likewise, the notion of “gaps in peoples’ lacks” is so visually and conceptually ambiguous that it invites an infinite number of readings; its meaning can never be fixed.

The reader may notice the resemblance between this phrase and Addie’s previous assertion that the word is “just a shape to fill a lack.” However, resemblance is not explanation: Addie’s phrases may recall and reinforce each other, but they depict an infinite negation that is impossible to comprehend. The “dark voicelessness” and the “gaps in peoples’ lacks” are concepts too abstract to stand alone. So from this point on, Faulkner must use more precise and substantial language to give the impression that the analogy is “working,” or bringing some comprehensible meaning to the text where before only abstraction and confusion existed.

As the “gaps in peoples’ lacks” dissolve into the background of the passage, something concrete emerges from the emptiness. In this section of the analogy, Addie describes the words severed from the deeds as “coming down like the cries of the geese.” The “double absence” is replaced with two kinds of “presence” that are at least identifiable, if not familiar -- the figure of the geese and the sound of their cries. But despite the growing familiarity of the subject, the picture still lacks human imagery and speech; the reader is still twice-removed from any clearly translatable analogy. Moreover, the act of betrayal that has been previously described -- “words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless [while] doing goes along the earth, clinging to it” -- becomes somewhat inconsistent here. Instead of the word rising to the sky and abandoning the “doing/deed,” it falls from the sky to the earth. But just as this analogy begins to give way, a new one comes to take its place.

The most intelligible and familiar analogy in the series is the last one, in which the reader finally recognizes something human. Faulkner describes the words “fumbling at the deeds like orphans to whom are pointed out in a crowd two faces and told, That is your father, your mother.” The verb “fumbling” is significant in that it reflects Addie’s discomfort with the word and its ineptitude. It echoes her earlier claim that “words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at” -- a sentence so hindered by its awkward construction that it validates its own assertion. Constance Pierce writes, “The ‘say *at*’ contains a sophisticated perception of the inadequacy of language.” This is because “we can never hope to create what we ‘are,’ [ . . . ] or even what we think, in words [ . . . ] we can only aim in its general direction” (295). Similarly, Richard Godden notes, “‘At’ is awkward; it gives direction to speech which is not generally thought of as so forcefully

directional” (106). In the context of Addie’s chapter, “fumbling at” seems especially appropriate: it recalls and reinforces her previous assertions about the word; at the same time, it serves as an example of the inherent awkwardness of language.

While the phrase “fumbling at” pulls much of the chapter together thematically, the comparison between words and “orphans” is finally the most important feature of the entire analogy. Gradually moving from the realm of the abstract into the realm of the concrete, the language builds up to a moment of revelation: the “orphans” find their way back to their parents; correspondingly, the “words” return to the “doing/deed” that is their origin. The orphans’ story is able to point back to a moment of significant “loss” (their abandonment and betrayal) while it also inhabits a moment of profound confusion (the orphans are “pointed out in a crowd two faces and told, That is your father, your mother.”) However, according to Addie’s earlier account, the “doing” is symbolically orphaned, abandoned by the word. But in this analogy the “orphans” are the words themselves. So while the story of abandonment and betrayal is a recurring theme in Addie’s chapter, it is not consistent. Here, it is inverted.

Finally, the spider analogy and the orphan analogy have the same effect: one relationship (orphan : parent) is superimposed on another, similar relationship (word : doing). But Faulkner’s comparison only highlights the mismatch between the two when it exposes the inconsistencies of Addie’s narrative. Consequently, the analogy subverts its own explanatory function. Previously, in the spider analogy, prepositions seemed to bring the reader closer to the meaning of the text, but this device actually succeeded in creating more distance between them. In the same way, the increasing concreteness of the orphan analogy seems to bring the reader into a familiar world, in which the meaning of the text

will be more accessible. However, the concreteness of the analogy -- or, to be more specific, the *literalizing* and *visualizing* of the analogy -- only emphasizes the fact that they “don't fit.” They finally illustrate the distance between the reader and the meaning of the text.

The analogy may be the most flexible literary device in Addie's chapter, enabling Addie to circumvent the naming process that severs the “word” from the “doing.” In an analogy, meaning is not fixed but fluid; it is not tied down to a single word but floats between two similar concepts. Therefore, it seems to offer a way to recover the “doing,” or even prevent the original separation between the “doing” and the word. However, the same alienation depicted in the spider analogy, “swinging and twisting and never touching,” returns in the picture of the orphans. Even the openness or permissiveness of the analogy cannot cancel out this fact. As a result, her final analogy does not emphasize a natural and intimate relationship but an unnatural and alien relationship characterized by distance: the “orphans” confront a pair of beings with whom they have no real relationship except in name. Just as the orphan does not recognize the parent, the word cannot recover the doing. There is no *felt* relationship, only a literal connection that attempts to conceal the original separation. With or without analogy, language and alienation remain two inseparable realities in Addie's chapter.

### **The Failure of Analogy: “            ”**

I would think: The shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a            and I couldn't think *Anse*, couldn't remember Anse. (173)

The exposure of absence is long awaited by Addie. This moment in the text -- “            ” -- is the crystallization of her theory of language. Therefore, it is the climax of

her chapter as well as the climax of the novel as a whole (since her monologue is the literal and symbolic center of As I Lay Dying). Confronting this absence, the reader takes a step beyond the lack, loss, alienation, and distance Addie has merely been suggesting up to this point. The “ ” is finally more compelling because it has an added dimension: it is both conceptual *and* physical. Most obviously, it stands as proof of Addie’s belief that the word always fails. If the word is “just a shape to fill a lack,” then here she refuses to conceal that “lack.” But also, as a result of this refusal, absence becomes more than a hypothesis in Addie’s monologue; it becomes a tangible part of the text itself.

Confronting the “ ” in Addie’s monologue means coming to terms with the physicality of this place in the text. Chapter II discussed the critical need to approach it not as an empty space waiting to be filled in with a word, but as a space already inhabited by an absence. The tangibility of this absence, the fact that it is a perceived or “*felt* absence” (Brann’s term), makes it the perfect illustration of Heidegger’s notion of “being-missing.” When the “ ” is interpreted in light of this phenomenology, it can be re-envisioned as a complete and permanent fixture in the novel instead of a neutral or irrelevant space. Examining how “textual blanks” are created in literature, Walsh notes:

Most discussions of textual blanks tend to suggest that all narrative gaps are similar, that they are merely a lack, an empty space. A blank is a blank -- it is nothing -- and we tend to see nothing as equal to itself. Such a way of thinking, however, ignores the point that textual absence can only be perceived in terms of something present -- that is, the parameters circumscribing the absence that combine to give any particular absence a characteristic “structure.” (116)

He would no doubt agree that Addie’s chapter contains the most palpable kind of “structured absence.” And the motif of “shape” reinforces Walsh’s theory as well,

reminding the reader that the “ ” has a structure, too: it “is in the *shape* of a ” (italics added).

Walsh’s most significant observation here is that “textual absence can only be perceived in terms of something present.” His statement implies that any confrontation with a “structured absence” has a physical component and, in this context, absence and presence are inseparable. In the end, if the “ ” is interpreted as a physical and “present” piece of the text then the “fill-in-the-blank” approach is unnecessary and incompatible with the space itself: any attempt to fill in Addie’s “ ” with a word or phrase will only result in a failed analogy, since it is a physical absence that rejects all verbal analogues.

Confronting the “ ” in Addie’s monologue also means coming to terms with its originality. This space is original not just in the sense that it reflects Faulkner’s innovative and unique writing style (although it certainly does that), but in the sense that it constitutes the one unrepeated moment in the text (the text may contain many words but it only has one “ ”). Although he is not addressing the “ ” itself, Richard Godden acknowledges Addie’s obsession with originality:

Addie has a conviction, beyond personal arrogance, about the representative originality of everything in her life. Her virginity, to her, was the first that was ever lost; her adultery occurs in the eyes of God; her children might well be divided into tribes; her refusal of Anse is murder and her words are as new as Adam’s [.] (108)

To say that Addie’s experience is singular, as Godden does here, is to reiterate the fact that it has no analog in language. This is why the collapse of analogy in her monologue, the closing of the “loophole” in language, is especially profound: it illustrates that the word can fall into the very same pattern, becoming a failed analogy for the “doing.”

**(b) RATIONAL SUBVERSION:  
REPETITION, CONTRADICTION, AND NEGATION**

In Addie's chapter, analogy and imagery aim to subvert the text visually while repetition, contradiction, and negation aim to subvert the text rationally. Like the visually subversive devices, the rationally subversive devices are initially motivated by Addie's rebellion against the word. Ultimately, all of these strategies work to recreate for the reader the same "lack" and "loss" Addie observes when the "word" eclipses the "doing." But the function of repetition, contradiction, and negation in Addie's chapter is somewhat more difficult to explain because they do not signify the events of the chapter in the traditional sense; they subvert the word in order to "act out" those events on the page of the text.

Sections of Addie's chapter that employ repetition, contradiction, and negation remind the reader of Darl's logically complicated passages.<sup>8</sup> His mother's death forces him to sort out the metaphysically confusing categories of presence and absence that shape the novel. But many critics interpret these narrations to be based on elaborate word games more than significant philosophical revelations. Paul R. Lilly says that Darl's "endless distinctions between being and non-being" amount to a "vocabulary of nonsense," which Darl eventually comes to share with Vardaman (157, 159). M.E.

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<sup>8</sup> The reader may remember this excerpt from Darl's passage, quoted in the first section of the chapter:

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*. (80-81)

Bradford makes a similar observation about the brothers when he notes how “Vardaman and Darl dwell with tiresome iteration on Being and Non-Being” (1097). Many readers interpret Darl’s obsessive use of repetition, contradiction, and negation to be a sign of his madness, and it likely is. But unfortunately it is often dismissed as “nonsense” for this reason alone.

Robert Hemenway, however, does not believe that the language of Darl’s narrative is meaningless or unnecessarily complex. Darl’s metaphysical concerns and confusions are part of the fabric of “the entire narrative technique of the novel [which] emphasizes the uncertainty of ‘states of being’” (139). In fact, one could argue that linguistic obstacles and complexities should be an integral part of the text in order to demonstrate this theme. In the same way, the challenge of Addie’s language does not invalidate her theory of language -- it confirms her theory of language.

Addie would likely agree with Matthews’s claim that “Language produces truth only as it faults” (15). As Faulkner’s imagery and analogies show, Addie is certainly inclined to communicate through language that “faults,” or otherwise emphasizes its own awkwardness. Likewise, each instance of repetition, contradiction, and negation in her chapter requires the reader to pause in order to sort out the logic, or the illogic, of that moment in the text. In her mind, the word will never move Addie towards the “truth” of the “doing.” But repetition, contradiction, and negation at least allow her to distance herself from the deceptiveness of the word, which so often goes unnoticed.

### **Sex, Violence, and Critics**

Certain themes in Addie's chapter are often explored in isolation from the specific language of the text, which leads to a somewhat limited approach to some very significant issues in her monologue. For example, critics tend to characterize her sexual and violent impulses in much the same way, insisting that "only extreme physical experience can arouse in [Addie] a sense of being alive, as when she tries to reach her students through violence or in her intense relationship with Whitfield" (Sass 12). Critics often link Addie's physical actions to emotional abstractions, such as the desire for "humanity" (Vickery 54), "identity" (Volpe 132), "unity" (Godden 121), "completion/confirmation" (Bradford 1097), or "communion" (Holland-Toll 445). The danger, though, is that these readings can become analyses of the abstractions themselves, not of the actual text.

While the functions of sex and violence in Addie's chapter have been explored by many critics, the relationships between sex and language and violence and language have not -- at least not nearly as often. Addie, however, is always conscious of the link between the words she uses and her theory of the word. The linguistic patterns unique to her narrative are the most accurate mirrors of her inner turmoil and the strongest supports in her theory of language. Most important, her words do not signify sex and violence in the text by posing as the original "doing." Instead, they recreate the acts of sex and violence through their relationships to each other -- specifically, through repetition and contradiction.

## Repetition and Sex

As she waits in the woods for her lover, Whitfield, Addie meditates on the significance of her affair:

he was he and I was I; the sin more utter and terrible since he was the instrument ordained by God who created the sin, to sanctify that sin He created. While I waited for him in the woods, waiting for him before he saw me, I would think of him as dressed in sin. I would think of him as thinking of me as also dressed in sin, he the more beautiful since the garment which he had exchanged for sin was sanctified. (174-175)

Many of the critics who analyze the relationship between Addie and Whitfield choose to explore the symbolic function of sex (achieving unity, identity, etc.). As a result of this approach, the language of sex often becomes a secondary issue rather than the focus of interpretation. But as long as Addie clings to her hatred of the word, she will be driven to defy it. Therefore, any reading of her monologue will be, in part, an attempt to identify the devices that carry out that subversion. Here, that subversive device is repetition, which aims to recreate the “doing” -- the sexual act -- in a way that everyday language cannot. In this passage, Faulkner’s language points to the fact that sex has a “duplicated” or “symmetrical” quality, in that it is a shared experience characterized by mutual desire. This duplication or symmetry is transformed into a strictly *verbal* phenomenon: sex becomes the highest expression of repetition; repetition becomes the literal<sup>9</sup> version of sex.

Addie’s assertion that “he was he and I was I” is not meant to be an informative statement. Instead, it is designed to be a perfectly balanced and symmetrical statement

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<sup>9</sup> In this section of the thesis, I use the term “literal” to describe the event that occurs on the page, the text, or the interaction among the words on the page. The term “literal” does *not* refer to the events of the novel, as described by the characters in the novel.

whose only goal is accuracy. Addie refuses to let the “word” deceptively pose as the “doing,” but uses it to signify the only concept or object it accurately can: she uses it to signify itself. This circularity validates Addie’s argument against the word by implying that the only true statement language can produce is a statement of repetition. Faulkner’s use of this device reveals that Addie’s main concern lies not with the conventional (referential) meaning of the words but with the relationships among words -- and, beyond that, with the creation of symmetry that is the foundation of her sexual experience.

Repetition in this passage also manifests itself through reflection, which Addie uses to describe the circular relationship between herself, Whitfield, God and sin. The various couplings she articulates of are virtually indistinguishable from one another: Whitfield is joined to God because he is a minister; God is joined to sin because “He created” it; Whitfield is joined to sin through his adulterous affair with Addie, and also because he has the ability to “sanctify that sin [God] created.” By presenting these couplings simultaneously in this passage, Faulkner suggests that Addie has access to all of them at once through the act of sex (for example, when she couples with Whitfield she also couples with God through Whitfield, and with sin through God, etc.). However, the language does not emphasize the emotional, physical, or spiritual fulfillment of the sexual act as much it attempts to recreate the symmetry of the experience.

The same motif of reflection characterized by the Addie/Whitfield/God/sin relationship is, of course, magnified in Addie’s relationship with Whitfield. Faulkner describes them as mirrors of one another as Addie speaks of “waiting for him before he saw me,” and “[thinking] of him as thinking of me.” The language of the passage seems to create an infinite series of reflections as Addie anticipates Whitfield’s arrival; she

invokes not only the sight or thought of him but the sight or thought of herself. In this moment, the act of perceiving blends with the act of being perceived to the extent that the subject/object distinction begins to vanish. And this is why Faulkner's description of the affair in Addie's chapter supports many critics' assumptions about the "unity" of the experience. But Addie will not let the reader forget that the "word" is incapable of accurately representing any "doing" other than itself. Failing as a referent, Faulkner's only recourse is to use the word as an *object*. It becomes a small piece of the larger pattern of repetition that does not signify or pose as the "doing," but instead "acts out" the "doing."

Since the word is the only tool Addie has to communicate her story, she knows that she has to make it "fault," or abandon its conventional function (signification), in order to "produce truth" in any way. Therefore, seemingly superfluous repetition is actually Faulkner's way of distancing Addie's narrative from the easy lie of words, building it instead on a somewhat more "truthful" foundation. In the end, identifying the symbolic function of sex, or naming the "doing" (unity, identity, etc.), is not immediately important. Though the "word" will never be able to articulate the original "doing" of Addie's affair, her situation can be better understood when the reader sees *how* the language of sex recreates or "acts out" the most fundamental element of the "doing" -- in this case, the symmetry of desire and experience on which sex is built. This entire process is finally encapsulated in the concept of "exchange," which appears at the end of Addie's passage. Although it is not used specifically to describe her relationship with Whitfield, it echoes the same symmetry and infinite reflection that appear throughout the passage as repetition and sex are fused into one literal act.

### **Contradiction and Violence**

The following passage recounts Addie's abuse of her schoolchildren, a topic that has been frequently discussed in analyses of her chapter:

In the afternoon when school was out and the last one had left with his dirty snuffling nose, instead of going home I would go down the hill to the spring where I could be quiet and hate them [. . .] I would have to look at them day after day, each with his and her secret and selfish thought, and blood strange to each other blood and strange to mine [. . .] I would look forward to the times that they faulted, so I could whip them. When the switch fell I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it was my blood that ran, and I would think with each blow of the switch: Now you are aware of me! Now I am something in your secret and selfish life, who have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever. (169-170)

Many critics agree that she uses sex and violence in much the same the same way, to establish some form of "unity" between herself and another human being. The brutality of the abuse and the forcefulness of her tone seem to suggest that Addie's feelings towards the children -- her cravings for "unity" with them -- are as unambiguous as the violence she inflicts on them. However, her narrative exhibits an underlying inconsistency. Her violence undoubtedly intends to make the children "aware" of her existence, to "have marked" them in some significant way (physically, emotionally, or otherwise). But at the same time, Addie does not disguise her hatred of the alien and her need for aloneness: "instead of going home I would go down the hill to the spring where I could be quiet and hate them." Most likely, this internal conflict and uncertainty, not an explicit desire for "unity," leads Addie to violence.

Contradiction, like repetition, expresses Addie's rebellion against the word. Also like repetition, the subversive quality of contradiction is not just an emotional response to the deceptiveness and failure of language; it is a device that makes an argument of its own about the nature of the word. Addie's internal conflict is compounded by the fact

that she cannot turn to language to express it. Therefore, just as the language of sex uses the word to act out what it cannot signify through everyday language (symmetry), the language of violence allows Faulkner to recreate Addie's internal conflict on the page itself. Repetition and contradiction are also similar in that they initially seem to be uninformative and meaningless, but their underlying goal is accuracy. For Addie, contradiction expresses two opposing "truths," because she experiences two opposing "truths": she is repulsed by the lives that are "secret and selfish" and "strange" to her; however, she is compelled to penetrate each "secret and selfish life" with her presence, through violence. As with the sexual act, Addie's experience here cannot be accurately represented by the word as a signifier; instead, the word is subsumed by the larger motivation of the passage -- to act out the conflict that cannot be articulated in everyday language.

Unlike the illustration of Addie's affair, in which the repetition is fairly overt but the sexual act is not explicit, the violence here is so graphic that it becomes the sole focus of the passage. The contradiction that underlies this violence is not nearly as apparent. The function of contradiction also differs from that of repetition because it also proves to be an important device later in the chapter, where Addie's language continuously "faults" in order to signify the "truth" of her experiences. Contradiction reinforces the fact that the scope of the word is not wide enough to encompass the whole of her reality.

Addie tends to illustrate her closest relationships in contradictory terms. For example, when she speaks about her affair she asserts, "Then it was over [. . .] But for me it was not over." Her narrative, though self-contradictory, is composed of two undeniable "truths" that Addie has yet to realize: the affair has officially ended, but Jewel will

become a life-long symbol and reminder of it. In this sense, her sexual relationship with Whitfield is both over and not over. Shortly after this comment Addie says, “my children were of me alone [. . .] of me and all that lived [. . .] of none and of all” (175). Her first statement is a biological fact since she is the only mother to her children. But because the children are also identified with “the wild boiling blood along the earth,” they are inevitably connected to “all that lived.” Finally, Addie’s death causes the children to weigh their being against hers, “to define life while confronted with its opposite, the corpse of Addie” (Hemenway 135). Although the children recognize their mother as the source of their existence, they must reconcile that fact with the fact of her death; as long as they are a piece of her, they are a piece “of none.”

Each of these illustrations can certainly be referred to as a “paradox,” but this word alone does nothing to embody the contradiction of the experience itself. Therefore, Faulkner uses contradiction to create physical tension and conflict on the page of the text. This device “acts out” a literal violence between the “truthful” but antithetical facts that shape Addie’s reality.

### **Negation**

Andre Bleikasten’s exploration of “Language and Style” in As I Lay Dying reveals a “profusion of words with a negating prefix or suffix” (27). Surprisingly, despite Addie’s constant defiance and denial of the word, these negations are not concentrated in her chapter (the only negative words that appear in her monologue are “voiceless,” “voicelessness,” “unvirgin,” and “not-Anse”). The remainder of Faulkner’s many negations are dispersed throughout the text, and all of them “refer us back to the theme of

absence, of lack, of nothingness which, as we shall see, pervades the whole novel” (28).

While Addie’s chapter does not engage in the act of negation more than other chapters, the structure of the novel points toward her monologue and her character as the original source of that negation. Not only is Addie is the literal and symbolic center of the novel, but she is a voided center as well. Owing to her “being-missing” (Heidegger’s term), each instance of negation effectively points backwards or forwards toward her central absence.

The thematic impact of Addie’s death is fairly obvious, given that most of the novel’s action revolves around the grueling journey to bury her body. But her death is not necessarily the event that negation is attempting to reconcile. The loss of Addie’s physical presence produces the experience of “felt absence” (Brann’s term) and it is this new, paradoxical experience that negation both responds to and expresses. Those who are left to cope with Addie’s death must find a way to articulate and incorporate this reality into their thoughts and conversations. But this proves to be a difficult task since Addie’s new mode of being, “being-missing,” is both an absence and a presence; correspondingly, any language that attempts to describe that state of being will sound somewhat irrational since it must also signify presence and absence simultaneously. Negation is the one device that can accommodate the metaphysical complexities that emerge in the wake of Addie’s death.

Like repetition and contradiction, negation is a rationally subversive device that “produces truth only as it faults.” Many characters in the novel gravitate towards it precisely because of their need to address the irrationality of “being-missing.” Because negation is the one device capable of fusing presence and absence into a single unit of

meaning, it is the one device that can signify this reality. However, in a peculiar reversal of the communication process, negation allows characters to speak about the irrational while they are unable to comprehend it. Like repetition and contradiction, negation shows that accuracy does not always lead to comprehension, and even works in opposition to it. It suggests that “truth” is irreconcilable with logic and language and thereby corroborates Addie’s theory of the word. Each instance of negation recalls Addie’s warning that the “word” will betray or negate the “doing,” leaving in its place a pronounced absence -- “a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame” (173).

In his analysis of negation in As I Lay Dying, Bleikasten’s interpretation of the word appears to be very similar to Addie’s. Namely, both of their hypotheses call attention to the fact that presence and absence are inseparable components of the word. However, Addie comes to this realization through an analysis of the word itself, Bleikasten through an analysis of the act of negation. He insists that Faulkner’s negation is “not simply the reverse of an affirmation.” Bleikasten explains, “the negation preserves within the substance of the word the idea of what it is denying and paradoxically it sometimes even reinforces the meaning it might be supposed to deny” (28). Conversely, Addie views the word as a negative object: it poses as an “affirmation” but it is no more than a “shape to fill a lack.” Bleikasten’s theory of language is essentially an inverse reflection of Addie’s.

Because negation intermingles with absence, but inevitably “reinforces” a presence (“the meaning it might be supposed to deny”), this discussion of the word cannot help but lead back to metaphysics, and to Heidegger in particular. He observes that “we say ‘This is such and such,’ ‘That other is *not* so,’ ‘That *was*,’ ‘It *will be*.’ In

each use of a verb we have already thought, and have always in some way understood, being” (BPP 13-14). Heidegger insists that all words signify being or presence, even if that being or presence is articulated through the language of negation. So even though negation constitutes the most extreme subversion of the word -- bent, in fact, on the word’s annihilation -- it is always the negation *of something*. Therefore, negation is only superficially subversive. It will never lead to the annihilation of the word or of the concept signified by the word because it “reinforces” them both.

Just like analogy, imagery, repetition, and contradiction in Addie’s chapter, the device of negation inevitably becomes self-defeating. But, compared to Faulkner’s other linguistically subversive devices, negation offers perhaps the most validation of Addie’s theory of the word as a “lack” or “loss.” Acting as a negative reflection of the word, each use of negation suggests both its own failure to bring about absence as well as the word’s failure to suspend it.

## VI. THE PURSUIT OF ALTERNATE SIGNIFICATION

To summarize briefly, imagery and analogy in Addie's chapter appear to circumvent the restrictive operations of language in order to move the reader closer to the meaning of the text. However, this desire is continually frustrated and eventually depleted by the same qualities -- opacity and ambiguity -- that initially attract the reader to the text, suggesting an escape from the destruction of the word. Likewise, repetition and contradiction seem to move the reader closer to the meaning of the text when they strip the word of its defining function, using it instead as an object with which to "act out" significant experiences in her life. And negation, because it signifies absence and presence simultaneously, seems as if it might illuminate the complexities of "being-missing." But accuracy does not necessarily bring clarity in Addie's chapter, as the rationally subversive devices prove, and neither does concreteness, as shown by the visually subversive devices.

Although Faulkner's strategies work to bring about "truth" through the subversion of the word, they inevitably build a wall between the reader and the text. For Addie, "truth" is only valid as long as the original "doing" is protected, preserved, and essentially undisclosed. So on those occasions when the word assists in the expression or representation of a "truth," it is only at the expense of comprehension. Faulkner's strategies are designed to continually frustrate the interpretive process and point back to the "loss" or "lack" of meaning that accompanies the word. Furthermore, whether meaning is transmitted through conventional language or through an artistic subversion of language, in Addie's monologue these two approaches amount to the same thing: the word "must always appear a poor and empty shell" by the time that it reaches the reader

(Cassirer 7). Recognizing this fact, Addie seeks to preserve her experience, or the “doing,” by searching for alternate forms of signification.

Although she is disconnected from her family and community in many ways -- through the event of her death, through her professed isolation in life, through her perpetual rejection of a communal language -- she is linked to other Faulkner characters, and his readers, through a common desire to communicate through non-verbal means. Sex and violence, for example, are obvious forms of alternate signification for Addie. They are dramatic events in her chapter and she uses them to express desires and internal conflicts that words fail to articulate. But even though Addie is the only character in As I Lay Dying to attack the ineptitude of language directly, and to find significance in the “ ”, this search for alternate signification appears in other chapters of this novel as well as in other Faulkner novels.

### **Symbolism in As I Lay Dying**

The symbol is an appealing form of alternate signification for the characters and critics of As I Lay Dying because it works in opposition to the word, which seeks to define, or assign boundaries to, a particular concept or experience. The symbol, however, seems to have the reverse effect: it is inherently ambiguous; it is suggestive instead of definitive; it evokes a multitude of associations simultaneously; it does not acknowledge the same boundaries of interpretation that restrict the word and what it can signify. For these reasons, symbols seem better equipped than words to reflect the vast experience of the “doing.”

The most obvious example of symbolism in the text is the picture of the coffin

that appears in Tull's chapter, about a third of the way through the novel (88). In her discussion of the actual coffin (physical, not symbolic), Linda J. Holland-Toll claims, "This coffin is the novel's central image, its most important single object: as such, I would argue, it inevitably creates the webs of significance in As I Lay Dying" (444). The coffin symbol has much the same effect as its physical referent. In Faulkner's text, the reader's confrontation with the coffin *shape* (i.e., symbol) is fundamentally the same as the Bunrens' confrontation with the actual coffin: both experiences bypass the word and proceed directly to a visual experience. In this novel, the immediacy and unexpectedness of the symbol are its most seductive qualities.

The symbol also has the power to reveal patterns and unite various moments or concepts in the text that might otherwise be interpreted as unrelated. Addie's death and corpse are immediately signified by the coffin symbol, but other associations follow from it too. The picture of the coffin anticipates and parallels many of the phrases used in Addie's famous jar passage, in which she reveals the word to be "a shape, a vessel," a "jar [which] stood full and motionless," "a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame." The coffin symbol prepares for subsequent illustrations of "being-missing," in the text and reinforces the absence that is central to her chapter and the novel as a whole. But symbolism is not just a thematically supportive device here. It can also be somewhat comforting for the reader. Although the absence at the core of the novel may be unsettling, the recognition of a *pattern of absence* is somewhat reassuring; it brings unity to this text which is, by its very design, an amalgam of divergent viewpoints.

The symbol appeals to the reader who wants to be swayed by Addie's argument against the word, and Faulkner's critics are also tempted to use symbolism in their

discussion of Addie's chapter. Richard Godden's analysis includes a picture of a square that represents the "empty doorway" in Addie's monologue. He also uses a diagram of two perpendicular lines to illustrate the separation of "word" and "doing" (103, 105). However, any attempt to deny the word through symbolism, inside or outside the text, is in vain since words and letters are symbols themselves. Most likely, the novelty or shock of the random symbol in the text gives the reader the impression he or she is being momentarily liberated from the restrictions of the word. However, Ernst Cassirer insists, "For all mental processes fail to grasp reality itself, and in order to represent it, to hold it at all, they are driven to the use of symbols. But all of symbolism harbors the curse of mediacy; it is bound to obscure what it seeks to reveal" (7). This "curse of mediacy" affects -- or, more appropriately, afflicts -- all the narratives in As I Lay Dying.

### **"Trying to say" in The Sound and the Fury**

While the need for alternate forms of signification is urgent and pronounced in As I Lay Dying, The Sound and the Fury also explores the obstacles and torments of verbal communication that point to this need. One particular comment in The Sound and the Fury resurfaces in As I Lay Dying, where it is transformed into the spider analogy. But, originally, Quentin is the one who observes how "people [are] using themselves and each other so much by words" (146). His comment hints at the same distrust of language espoused by Addie since he, too, finds fault with the unconscious, mechanical use of words. Although Quentin does not make a point of examining the manipulative operations of the word, in his chapter Faulkner plants the seeds of skepticism that grow into a fully developed theory of language in his next novel.

Readers of The Sound and the Fury will probably be most familiar with Benjy's struggle to articulate his thoughts and feelings throughout the novel. As he watches the schoolgirls walk by they are disturbed by his presence and unwanted attention. In this moment, Benjy explains:

*I tried to say, but they went on, and I went along the fence, trying to say, and they went faster. Then they were running and I came to the corner of the fence and I couldn't go any further, and I held to the fence, looking after them and trying to say.* (italics added)

In this passage, the reader is not sure exactly what communication does occur since it is narrated from Benjy's point of view. According to T.P.'s response to him, Benjy succeeds only in "moaning and slobbering through the fence" (63). Understandably, his mental handicap is viewed as the primary cause of his verbal handicap. His condition keeps him intellectually and emotionally isolated from most characters in the novel, so the torture of being inarticulate is easily construed as yet another consequence of that condition.

Compared to Addie's monologue, however, Benjy's repeated emphasis on "trying to say" reflects the frustration and disappointment shared by many Faulkner characters as they struggle with the complexities of verbal communication. Like Quentin's previous comment, Benjy's narrative looks ahead to another one of Addie's declarations: "words dont ever fit even what they are *trying to say* at" (italics added). In Addie's chapter, Faulkner's emphasis on the awkwardness of language and the "fumbling" of words is more pronounced. But "trying to say" proves to be such a traumatic experience for at least one character in The Sound and the Fury that it gives more credibility to Addie's argument, to her anger and lamentation at the failure of language. What Holland-Toll refers to as Addie's "morbid desire for intensity and meaning [. . .] her warped and

pathological need for communion” is actually a desperate need for alternate forms of signification, which she shares with other Faulkner characters (445). So, in an ironic way, Addie is most connected to others in those moments when she is most isolated from them; they are all connected through the same traumatic experience of “trying to say.”

## VII. COMPETING LANGUAGE THEORIES IN ADDIE'S CHAPTER

The most abstract sections of Addie's monologue seem to beg for some kind of interpretation, or even completion, on the part of the reader. The reader's attraction to Addie's perplexing chapter may be due to the infinite deferral of "meaning" that characterizes it. This continuous deferral calls into question not only the literary categorization of As I Lay Dying but also the theory of language it endorses. The confusion is this: when Addie asserts that the word is "just a shape to fill a lack," she recognizes that it is not fixed but subject to infinite manipulation, thereby articulating (or anticipating) a postmodern theory of language within a (historically) Modernist novel; however, Addie's belief in a "doing" that exists apart from the "word" is essentially Platonic, and therefore irreconcilable with postmodernism. Addie's theory of language may be rigid but it is not simple; it invites and accommodates an array of other language theories but it is not coherent enough to sustain any single one.

### **The Postmodern Argument: Language Constitutes Reality**

Addie's obsession with the absence inherent to the word is perhaps the most obvious sign of a postmodern argument in her chapter -- namely, the Derridean version of postmodernism. To reiterate John Matthews's point, "Writing does not respond to loss, it initiates it; writing itself is as much a kind of loss as it is a kind of compensation" (19). Not only does Addie recognize this "loss," but she makes the confrontation with absence (" ") an essential component of the reading experience in her chapter. She is not simply narrating the events of her life; she is proposing a radical reinterpretation of the

word that takes into account its paradoxical ability to invoke presence and absence simultaneously. In this way, her argument shares Derrida's interpretation of the word as an absence, or a "disruption of presence" (121).

The structure of the novel makes a postmodern argument in that it sets up a center only to expose it as a "lack" (a fact that also parallels Addie's assertions about the word). The "great static obstacle" of Addie's death is, of course, insurmountable in As I Lay Dying (Adams 77). Moreover, Addie's chapter seems to protrude from the larger structure of the novel: it is posthumously narrated and therefore sets itself apart from the other narratives; at the same time, these other narratives gather around Addie's chapter in order to reinforce the fact that it is the central absence of the novel.

Addie's character and monologue can also be read as postmodern denials of the concept of "origin," what Derrida might refer to as the "abandonment of all reference to a *center*, to a *subject*, to a privileged *reference*, to an origin, or to an absolute *archia* [beginning]" (115-116). In addition to being the structural center of the text and the main catalyst for the novel's action, Addie is the novel's most prominent mother-figure, her children's biological "origin." But in the wake of her death, the idea of origin becomes problematic. Volpe writes, "the reactions of the Bundren family to Addie's death are attempts to deal with the unfathomable, incomprehensible reality of non-being" (136). And to restate Hemingway, "The Bundrens seek to define life while confronted with its opposite, the corpse of Addie" (135). When the symbol of their "origin" (Addie) becomes an absence, her children must struggle with the concept of their own presence, which

becomes extremely tenuous after their mother's death.<sup>10</sup>

The subversion of the word in Addie's monologue also looks forward, stylistically, to postmodern criticism. For example, Derrida and Addie both build their hypotheses about language on paradox and contradiction, and therefore require an equally subversive style to reflect their argument. They both illustrate their theories of language visually when the object or process the reader is asked to conceive of is essentially "nonvisual" (to borrow Daniel Tiffany's term): Addie describes the word as a "shape" that has no fixed or real-life referent; Derrida describes language as a structure in which "The center is not the center" (109). Also, Addie's explanation of words as a double-absences, or "gaps in peoples' lacks," is echoed in Derridean theory. Matthews explores this idea when he says, "The word, as sign, stands for the thing itself; and therefore it seems to declare the unavailability of what it names and also of the namer" (25). Like Derrida, Addie must express her theory of language through visual and rational paradoxes because these are the most effective means of signifying the multiple, infinite absence that lies behind the word.

Addie's monologue contemplates some of the most fundamental tenets of postmodern language theory, specifically in regard to Derrida's notion of "play." In a sense, they do not disagree about the existence of "play," only the appropriate reaction to it. Addie's obsession with gaps and lacks, with empty jars and vessels, reflects the

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<sup>10</sup> Hemenway points out the magnitude of the metaphysical confusion that occurs after Addie dies. He notes the phrasing in Darl's complicated passage: "His words are not 'I don't know who I am,' but 'I don't know what I am. I don't know if I am or not'" (134). He also cites Dewey Dell's statement: "*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*" (AILD 121). Vardaman's infamous confusion between Addie and the fish is interpreted by Bradford as "a reflex of [his] metaphysical uncertainty" (1097), and the comment Vardaman makes in the novel immediately after Addie dies is also reflective of this shared metaphysical insecurity: "I am not crying now. I am not anything. Dewey Dell comes to the hill and calls me. Vardaman. I am not anything" (AILD 56).

postmodern realization that the word always brings with it the absence of what it names. Derrida celebrates this “play of absence and presence” but Addie is tortured by it. Derrida claims that “Play is the disruption of presence” but Addie does not feel “play”-- she *only* feels the “disruption of presence.”

Oddly enough, Addie seems to anticipate the postmodern concept of “play,” and Derrida seems to anticipate her “*negative*” reaction to it. Upon realizing the existence of “play,” he describes two possible reactions to it. He recognizes, on one hand,

the saddened, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauistic side of the thinking of play whose other side would be the Nietzschean *affirmation*, that is the joyous affirmation of play of the world [. . .] a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation. *This affirmation then determines the noncenter otherwise than as loss of the center.* (121)

Considering Addie’s theory of the word in light of Derrida’s comment, it is fairly clear that she cannot conceive of the word as he does, as “*otherwise than as loss of the center.*” (which is, to her, the loss of meaning or “doing”). Hers is the “saddened, *negative*” response to the word, which can be seen as a firm rejection of the postmodern celebration of “play.” In other words, “loss” will never become “play” to Addie. However, this rejection at least implies a *recognition* of the postmodern view. Addie may refuse to “play” with words in the “joyous” and affirmative Derridean sense of the word. She may devote her narrative instead to a continual recreation of the “doing.” But as long as she acknowledges the fact that an absence exists within every word, her monologue validates, at least partly, one significant postmodern theory of language.

### **The Middle Ground: Language and Prelinguistic Thought both Constitute Reality**

Despite Addie’s continual assertions that “words are no good,” that “words go

straight up in a thin line,” and that each one is “just a shape to fill a lack,” Faulkner’s reader may still hope that Addie’s awareness of the word’s “lack” will prove to be an advantage in her monologue, not a disadvantage. Timothy Walsh contends that “the most subtle lesson of language is precisely the realization of its own limitations, which are recognizable only because we do have access to what lies beyond those borders” (60). The language of Addie’s monologue does not explicitly deny the existence of “truth,” nor does it explicitly deny access to “reality” and “understanding.” Readers of her chapter may therefore assume that her language theory corresponds to the theory Walsh describes, in which encountering the “limitations” of language may yield knowledge of something beyond language.

George Steiner contradicts the postmodern view of language by insisting that the limits of language do not define the limits of reality. He states, “We live inside the act of discourse. But we should not assume that a verbal matrix is the only one in which the articulations and conduct of the mind are conceivable” (12). “Language,” says Steiner, “can only deal meaningfully with a special, restricted segment of reality. The rest, and it is presumably the much larger part, is silence” (21). Likewise, Walsh does not believe that an acknowledgement of the absence behind the word inevitably leads to a postmodern interpretation of language or reality. Instead, he says that any theory of language should take into account the “labyrinthine twistings that language must therefore undergo in order to accommodate our transactions with absence, silence, and emptiness” (6). In other words, Walsh sees the expression and structuring of absence as valuable tools in the writing process, not failed attempts at articulation. He is continually drawn to literature that uses the word to signify something “outside” the system of

language.

Walsh's desire to transcend the world of the text, or the world of the word, is especially acute in his analysis Addie's infamous jar passage. In it, he says that Addie "seems to *penetrate*, momentarily at least, *beyond* the familiar sea walls of language into an *underworld* where words are protean features of a haunted terrain" (78, italics added). His language reflects an intense desire to move "beyond" the limitations of the word. And he makes a point of stressing the "depth" of Addie's language: he traces the movement of her passage from the "familiar" to the alien, and it is in this new, hidden realm that the "truth" or "reality" of the passage seems to lurk, waiting only to be uncovered by the reader. The language and style of Walsh's criticism are almost more indicative of his view of Addie's theory of language than his actual interpretation of her passage. His own theory of language obviously informs his reading of Addie's jar passage; it confirms his belief that the text can be transcended and can signify something "beyond" itself.

Because Walsh and Steiner share a belief in the importance of "extra-linguistic or prelinguistic modes of awareness" it is likely both would agree that postmodernism's insistence on the indeterminacy of the word appears to be "both inaccurate as well as reductive" (Walsh 50, 96). They also seem to share the same fear of a postmodern theory of language: a claim such as the one Derrida endorses -- "*there is nothing outside the text*" -- seems to suggest an intellectual, emotional, or spiritual claustrophobia for these critics. It threatens to sever the individual from significant portions of "reality" and deny him or her any revelations of "truth."

Steiner, for example, maintains that "Where such *understanding* [of the ineffable]

is attained, the *truth* need no longer suffer the impurities and fragmentation that speech necessarily entails” (12, italics added). Similarly, Walsh speaks of the possibility of “bypassing the shaping parameters of language to gain a *higher* and *truer* perception of *reality*” (59, italics added). However, concepts such as “truth” and “reality” are inevitably deconstructed by postmodern theory. And while Addie does not mention these terms specifically in her monologue, she is liable to reject them as well -- and for the same reasons as postmodernists.

The reader might recall her anger with the insufficient “moral” vocabulary of her neighbors: “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” (173-174). The vocabulary of transcendent “truth” and “reality” is finally no more reliable than the artificial “moral” vocabulary Addie rails against. For her, these words all have the same effect; they are all negations of her experience, or the “doing.”

Although her own narrative is often impenetrable, the difference between Addie’s language and the language of the (supposedly) transcendent lies in the intention of each. Addie uses vague language only to expose the limits of language. She knows that when the words “truth” and “reality” are used, they only highlight their own instability and manipulability. She is frustrated with words such as these not simply because they are vague but because they are unintentionally and obviously vague. They pretend to signify the broadest of concepts but, in the aftermath of their failure, they succeed in doing the opposite: they invoke the greatest absences imaginable -- they highlight the “unavailability” of the “truth” and “reality” they aim to represent.

Addie’s theory of language does not only conflict with postmodernism, which

asserts that language is the primary basis of reality. It also conflicts with a commonly accepted and fairly conventional theory of language, as espoused by Steiner and Walsh: language exists alongside prelinguistic thought and both are reflective of reality. Walsh emphasizes that his analysis of absence in literature is “in complete opposition to the prevailing tenets of poststructural literary theory, which maintains that we can never be privy to authentic and unifying knowledge because all human cognition is mediated by language” (8). But in actuality, his theory of language is not diametrically opposed to postmodernism -- Addie’s is. The “reality” of postmodernism is made up of the “word” only; nothing exists prior to it. Addie’s “reality” is made up of prelinguistic thought, or the “doing” only; nothing exists after it.

### **Addie’s Argument: Prelinguistic Thought Constitutes Reality**

Although Addie’s theory of language shares a strong resemblance with both Platonism and postmodernism, it is ultimately antithetical to each (and they are also in conflict with to each other). As Addie describes the process by which absence and presence shape the word simultaneously, she seems to make a postmodern argument. But in contradiction to the anti-dualistic basis of postmodernism, she perceives each experience in her life through the dichotomy of the “word” and the “doing.” In this sense, her theory of language sounds Platonic -- it idealizes the “doing” and dismisses the “word” as an insignificant copy of the original event, or Form. Sally Page, for instance, sees Addie as “an idealist whose desire for the achievement of an inner vision of perfect union and fulfillment within human reality drives her ultimately to a rejection of reality, of humanity, and of life itself” (112). However, the act of idealizing alone does not make

Addie a Platonist.

Addie does utilize the Platonic structure but within that structure there is a role reversal. The “doing” that Addie reveres above the “word” should correlate to the Form that Plato reveres above the copy. But according to her description, the failed “word” corresponds to the “air” and, therefore, the world of Forms. The original “doing” corresponds to the “earth.” Platonism, then, is inverted in Addie’s monologue. As a result, Addie is able to maintain the dualism that separates her language theory from that of postmodernism, but she also separates her language theory from Platonism by subverting the traditional relationship between the original Form and its copy. Ironically, Addie rejects the notion of the ideal, non-physical Form because she *idealizes* and reverses the original, physical experience of the “doing.”

### **Original Experience and Communal Language**

At this point, turning back to Richard Godden’s previous observation will help to shed light on a crucial assumption in Addie’s theory of language, which is not often taken into account. He notes that “Addie has a conviction, beyond personal arrogance, about the representative originality of everything in her life” (108). Her adamant belief that her experience is singular, that it has no analogue in language, is reinforced by the “ ” in her monologue. Ultimately, the “ ” can be interpreted as not only a defiance of the word but as a direct challenge to the communal nature of language.

Linda J. Holland-Toll says that Addie’s life is characterized by a “complete alienation from the communion through which life and love flourish.” According to her analysis, Addie “embraces [this] Void because her refusal to compromise, to see any

common ground between herself and the common run of humanity, [and] leaves no possibility of meaningful communion” (445). Holland-Toll also calls attention to the fact that Addie’s rejection of communal language is a conscious decision, and the severe consequences of that rejection (dysfunction, alienation, death) seep into the lives of her entire family (445-446). However, her criticism does not take into account the underlying complexity of Addie’s theory of word, nor does it address its betrayal of the “doing.”

In his study of the modernist image, John T. Gage discusses Modernist concerns about the function of language, which seem to run parallel to Addie’s own concerns about the word. He explains:

The imagist stance was more than an attempt to create a new language for the purpose of better perceiving and better communicating the nature of things and their relation to human emotions. It was an attempt to oppose the very nature of language, which was alien to those ends. It was alien precisely because, as an instrument for recording the uniqueness of each emotion, language [. . .] was doomed to failure by virtue of being communal. (27)

In light of Gage’s analysis, Addie’s renunciation of language seems to be more than reasonable; it appears to be a defensive maneuver, her only means of protecting and preserving the “doing.” What Addie realizes, and what her theory of language aims to show, is a radical and profound fact that is painfully obvious to her: experience and language are not just occasionally incompatible; they are, by nature, antithetical.

Addie fears that if she articulates her original experience through a communal system of language, its originality will dissolve into the “common ground” that is the word. And since that originality is the only quality that distinguishes it from all other experiences, *an experience stripped of its originality* (through the process of being incorporated into a communal system of language) *is thereby stripped of its unique and*

*original “meaning.”* Once articulated, the experience is indistinguishable from other experiences; it becomes just like “the other words that are not deeds, that are just the gaps in people’s lacks.”

### **The Act of Naming**

For Addie, the process that strips the experience or “doing” of its originality is the naming process. But many of Addie’s critics are not inclined to acknowledge the destructive power that Addie attributes to the word. Karen Sass argues that if Addie “could identify her feelings, she could name them and use those names as tools to establish relations with others” (11). She hypothesizes that the “name” could serve as a potential link between Addie and the outside world, if only Addie could recognize this possibility. And Sally Page claims, “To Addie, words represent the limitations of reality [. . .] human beings do not experience in reality the full meaning of the words they use” (117). Her criticism is also an implicit defense of the word. It argues, in effect, the reverse of Addie’s “word”/“doing” dichotomy, in which the elusive “word” is false and the earth-bound “doing” is real. Here, Page insists that “living is deadening” because will always fall short of the “full meaning” promised by the word.

Critics who insist on the importance of verbal communication in Addie’s chapter are obviously inclined to condemn her rejection of it, as Holland-Toll’s analysis clearly illustrates. But, as a result, these criticisms call attention to the negative consequences of this rejection more than the negative consequences of the naming process itself. Addie continually reminds the reader, however, that naming is an inherently destructive act: this process literally empties Anse (the man) of his substance and meaning until all that is left

of him is his name -- “a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame.” The name only reinforces, or “frames,” his absence.

Towards the end of that same passage, Addie provides the reader with another ominous depiction of the act of naming: “And when I would think *Cash* and *Darl* that way until their names would die and solidify into a shape and then fade away, I would say, All right. It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter what they call them” (173). In this passage, Addie’s language points to the violence (dying) and objectification (solidifying) involved in the naming process.

### **Dying: the Violence of Naming**

The “death” of naming is only the first step in an ongoing process of dissolution that every language user witnesses and takes part in. In Constance Pierce’s exploration of “Being, Knowing and Saying in the ‘Addie’ Section of Faulkner’s As I Lay Dying,” she describes the destruction that results from the naming process. Initially, says Pierce, “Being is an unselfconscious and therefore unfragmented response to the world.”

However,

When a person begins to perceive himself as an entity [. . .] he has already left Being and translated it into thought -- a thing of a different nature, which involves *re*-creating Being as an idea of the ‘real’ self underlying all our social, articulated selves. Hence, perceiving kills its catalyst and in turn is killed by the act of naming the perception. (294)

The act of perceiving described here is analogous to the act of naming described in Addie’s jar passage (in fact, naming seems to be the natural consequence of perceiving here, although Pierce somewhat distinguishes the two events from each other). In both, the fragmentation of the articulated object is described as inherently violent. This

characterization can be traced back to Sartre's interpretation of Being and consciousness, which Pierce refers back to and builds on throughout her analysis.

In Transcendence of the Ego, Sartre describes the kind of self-annihilation that occurs when an individual begins to perceive and/or articulate herself as an "I." This "I" is assumed to have a "unifying and individualizing role" (unifying the subject while distinguishing it from other subjects). But, in actuality, "If it existed it would tear consciousness from itself; it would divide consciousness; it would slide into every consciousness like an opaque blade" (40). The violent language of Sartre and Pierce suggests that the moment perception and/or articulation occurs, the named object suffers a violation -- or, more precisely, what is named becomes an "object" (to the perceiver/ articulator) and this objectification *is* the violation. This is the violent act that Addie rages against throughout her monologue.

### **Solidifying: the Objectification of Naming**

In his investigation of Language and Myth, Ernst Cassirer describes the moment in which subjective experience "solidifies" into the objective word:

As soon as the spark has *jumped across*, as soon as the tension and emotion of the moment has found its discharge in the word or mythical image, a sort of turning point has occurred in human mentality: the inner excitement which was a mere subjective state has vanished, and has been resolved into the objective form of myth or speech. And now an ever-progressive objectification can begin. (36, italics added)

Pierce describes the same moment of perception/articulation this way:

a person's Being [. . .] is what he is before he begins to think about, or objectify, it [. . .] but all Addie -- or any of us -- can Be, given the world view of As I Lay Dying, is a miasmatic process of self-consciousness, or consciousness of what we think is self. Our stasis is lost in an imperceptible split second when perception *traverses* the place where Being,

could it Be, might lie. (304, italics added)

Both Cassirer and Pierce are able to trace the movement from the subjective realm of experience to the objective realm of language. Addie, however, finds herself paralyzed between the two since the “word” and the “doing” are irreconcilable. She cannot comprehend a “doing” that “traverses” or “jump[s] across” from one realm to the other. Instead, she is trapped in this interminable “moment” Faulkner describes:

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. (173, italics added)

On one hand, Addie is compelled to preserve the original “doing” by refusing to name it, to fight the “ever-progressive objectification” of her subjective experience; on the other hand, she cannot help but to realize the enormity of her sacrifice. Her refusal to validate, or participate voluntarily, in a communal system of language leaves her clearly isolated from both her community and her family. Pierce describes Addie’s predicament: “Becoming [the object of perception/articulation] means losing what she has come to see as herself. In short, if she wants to know, she cannot Be. Her choices are terrifying: ‘identity’ falsified by language and consciousness to the point where it is unfathomable, or no identity at all” (299).

### **Addie’s “Dark Voicelessness”**

In the face of the word’s destruction, Addie takes the most drastic measure, linguistically speaking, that she can. She negates the “word” before it can negate the “doing,” resulting in what Lilly refers to as a form of “linguistic suicide” (133). She would rather live in a world where the “doing” of her life does not “fade away,” but is

concealed but preserved. The violence of naming that wrenches subjective experience into objective fact is matched by Addie's own form of linguistic violence: her tendency towards the subversion and negation of the word. Refuting the only system of language that she has available to represent her, she reinforces her status as the novel's absent center -- an act that is also, inevitably, an act of self-annihilation.

Laying in bed at night, listening to the "dark land talking," Addie associates herself with the "dark voicelessness" (174). Speaking of Addie's role in As I Lay Dying, he says: "In one light, the action of that book occurs within her [. . .] occurs there while she is hearing the dark land [and all that is in it] talking the voiceless speech." He insists that "she listens all the way until her family begins a new, apart-from-her life [. . .] listens until then and at precisely that time, stops to die" (1098-1099). Indeed, her father's comment that "the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time" leads many readers and critics to see Addie's life as a long, bitter death-wish (169).

Readers and critics who cannot encounter the "dark voicelessness" as Addie does, who know of its existence only through the word, may naturally interpret its negativity to be deathly. But I would argue that significance of Addie's attraction to it lies mainly in the fact that she is drawn to the concept of a "doing" that cannot be negated by the "word." Here, the "doing" speaks to her because it is already posited *as* a negation. In this sense, the "dark voicelessness" -- the no-sight, no-voice that only Addie hears -- indicates not necessarily a desire for her own death, but it suggests the subjectivity, the originality, and the sacredness of her own unarticulated experience.

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**there's more than two ways of thinking**

**there's more than three ways of being**

**there's more than four ways of knowing**

**there's more than one way of going somewhere**

**- Bikini Kill**