The Subversion of Classism in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*

The question of why Faulkner's prose is so difficult has been asked to the point of exhaustion, but it is not without merit. There is a camp comprised of critics who have come to the conclusion that the inscrutability of Faulkner's prose in *As I Lay Dying*— a particularly frustrating work — is a "mistake." According to the critic R.W. Franklin,it is a result of rushed production during a particularly prolific time in Faulkner's fiction writing career. (Hale 6) They assert that Faulkner "wrote himself into a corner" and had no choice but to resign to "jumping out the window" (qtd. in Ross, "Shapes of Time" 723), having committed to, in this camp's view, his failed literary experiments. Many of these critics cite *As I Lay Dying*'s unreliable characterizations as a major failure, and the most frustrating aspect of Faulkner's early work. These critics point to Faulkner's use of disparate, conflicting voices employed by the narrators as the biggest contributing factor to this failure. How can the uneducated, quite possibly illiterate, Bundren family speak with voices anchored in regionalisms and malapropisms while simultaneously speaking with erudite, even poetic, voices? As Ross says, "Critics discover discourse they cannot believe… It is assumed that a voice belongs to some person but also that it is in crucial ways 'appropriate' to that person — to his or her socioeconomic class, level of education and so on." ("Narrative Texts"303)However, if my reading of *As I Lay Dying* is correct, then Faulkner's use of mimetic, symbolic and textual voices is intended to disrupt and subvert prejudices, fictions and perceived realities of the reader, especially in regards to socioeconomic class.[1]

[1]Faulkner expressed his views quite plainly in "Smoke" from *Knight's Gambit,* "Men are moved so much by preconceptions. It is not realities, circumstances, that astonishes us; it is the conclusion of what we should have known, if we had not been so busy believing what we later discover we had taken as truth for no other reason than that we happened to be believing it at that moment." qtd. in Urgo. p 12.

"We are country people," Dewey Dell thinks to herself, "not as good as town people." (53) If one reads *As I Lay Dying* within a certain context, within the context that Faulkner was in fact as "class-conscious as any Marxist," one can see that "class critique" in *As I Lay Dying* is a central theme. (qtd. in Hubbs 462) Faulkner *most adeptly* critiques and subverts notions of class through his use of voice.Although some critics denounce *As I Lay Dying*'s narrators as unreliable, I assert that the change in diction and speech from simple country language to abstract, obscure poetic language within a single narrator is indeed purposeful on Faulkner's part. The cacophony is not a result of hasty experimental writing, but of pointed criticism of classism. Rendering sophisticated language to the unsophisticated sounds strange to class-conscious ears; Faulkner disallows any feeling of superiority (in terms of linguistic ability) the reader may assume to the otherwise poor and uneducated Bundren family. Faulkner does not allow the reader to wholly view the Bundrens, as the townspeople in the novel do, "according to stereotypes that country people are inarticulate." (Hubbs 465)

> Viewing rural whites as obsolete and alien offers a means by which urban whites, who are in some cases only slightly different from their country counterparts… establish a claim of radical and irrefutable cultural superiority. (Hubbs 465)

Faulkner manipulates voice, one of the most powerful toolsin prose, to achieve this pointed criticism of the claim of "cultural superiority." He does this through subverting the reader's expectation of the Bundrens'inferior language ability. Faulkner informs the reader of his intentional manipulation of (andhis layering and estrangement of) voice — in one of Darl's early internal monologues:

> Tilting a little down the hill, as our house does, a breeze draws through the hall all the time, upslanting. A feather dropped near the door will rise and brush along the ceiling, slanting backward, until it reaches the down-turning current at the back door: so with voices. As you enter the hall, they sound as though they were speaking out of the air about your head. (16)

In order to comprehend the "jangle of human realities" (Urgo 13) represented in *As I Lay Dying*'s polyphonic narrative, one mustunderstand the many *voices within voice* Faulkner employs. One must make sense of not only the overlapping "voices… speaking out of the air" but the layered voices, both literal and figurative, within each narrator. The multiple "voices" within individual narrators can be separated into three distinct categories: mimetic, symbolic (non-mimetic) and textual. I shall investigate these three voices as they relate to disrupting classist notions thoroughly, and have divided the remainder of this paper into three sections, each corresponding to a "voice" within the text.

Mimetic Voice: Public Perception

Mimetic voice, in *As I Lay Dying*, is most frequently represented in the character's "public self." (Hale11-12) That is, mimetic voice is an "objective" mimicry of voice; a literal interpretation of voice. Bits of dialogue between characters (or between public selves) are the only true examples of mimesis throughout the novel. Dialogue between characters in *As I Lay Dying* is often terse and rife with regionalisms: "Come on," Jewel says. "Let's get *outen* here." (146; emphasis mine). This use of language is also exemplified in the following exchange:

> "I *never said nothing* to him. I never seen him before."
>
> "*Fore* God," pa says; "*Fore* God." (216; emphasis mine)

Additionally, each character is tight-lipped when communicating outside their inner world, seeming, to the outside world, to have little to say. To the reader, these snippets of dialogue are in keeping with cultural expectations of diction and class.

Even in the recording of dialogue, however, verisimilitude of *perceived* sound takes precedent to objective recording. Throughout the novel, the diction of Anse, for example, changes depending on who is reporting his dialogue. At times, Anse seems to speak in a way not *too*deviant from Standard English, when his speech is recounted by a family member. "'She's counted on it,' pa says. 'She'll want to start right away. I know her. I promised her I'd keep the team here and ready, and she's counting on it.'" (13) At other times, as in the case when Peabody, a man from town, narrates, Anse's English is highly irregular and *distinctly aberrant* from Standard English. "'I jest keep a-thinkin… She's goin, is she?'" (39)The reader notices the changes in Anse's spoken voice as the *perception* of Anse changes from viewer to viewer. To country folk, to Anse's family, there would be no reason to drop the 'g' in "*counting* on it" because they would not perceive a difference in Anse's pronunciation of "counting" and its official or accepted pronunciation. That is, Anse's pronunciation is standard to them. To Peabody, presumably a more educated man (who has a different set of rules governing accepted pronunciation of words), Anse's diction is strange and full of idiosyncrasies. He drops the 'g' in the word "thinking" because he *perceives* a deviation from the standard pronunciation of the word.

The reader may be perplexed by Anse's change in diction. What does Anse's voice sound like *in reality*? What does his voice *truly* sound like? Faulkner, of course, refuses to present any *true* voice of Anse, or any other character for that matter. Reality lies in perception; there is no universal truth, especially when dealing with social (or public) speaking. As Urgo states in

William Faulkner and the Drama of Meaning: "[*As I Lay Dying*] is a drama where human understanding is created and projected by the mind…What is *real* in Faulkner is not external 'reality,' and neither is it any particular view of reality." (13)The reader is only supplied with perceptions of voice, but no one perception is considered more or less "real" than another. We see different perceptions of class projected onto Anse by different narrators, but there is no stable reality or meaning regarding his class or his ability to communicate effectively. These perceptions are entirely subjective to the narrator, whether it be Darl, a country boy, or Peabody, a doctor from town.[2]

What is so potentially irksome about this lack of "external reality" is that it may present a sort of "formal nihilism, where one would have to 'know better' than to believe in anything fixed… as true." (Urgo 14) This may seem to disrupt the narrative, as we see multiple, and wildly different perceptions of Anse's speaking, as elucidated above. There is no concrete portrait of Anse's speaking, we are given no reference points for the reality of his speech. This "nihilism" that Faulkner presents is merely a rejection to accept that, as Toni Morrison eloquently said in *Beloved*, "[D]efinitions belong to the definers — not the defined." (225) In *As I Lay Dying*each narrator defines his own personal reality (even if the narrators happen to be assigned to the "defined" and not the "definer" category).Faulkner provides no reference point of reality from which these narrators deviate. Thus, the "truth" that country people are "inarticulate," as an *objective fact*, is rejected. Class, and the diction associated with it, live only

[2]We see other examples of shifts in perception of reality as it relates to class in Cash's craftsmanship. Tull, a man from the country, praises his well-made coffin. "Cash made it clock-shape… with every joint and seam beveled and scrubbed with the plane, tight as a drum and neat as a sewing basket." p 79. Moseley, a man in town, however, has a very different perception of the coffin, stating, "It must have been like a piece of rotton cheese coming into an ant hill, in that ramshackle wagon that Albert said folks were scared would fall all to pieces before they could get out of town, with *that home-made box*…" p 191. (emphasis mine).

inside a narrator's mind. One narrator's perception of reality may be completely contrary to the notions of another. This conflict of perception is never resolved; Faulkner does not attempt to explain to the reader how Anse "really sounds" and so the perceptions of the narrators never cohere. (Hale, 9)This lack of cohesion or this "formal nihilism" or perhaps more accurately, its solipsism, confronts the reader with his or her own beliefs regarding the lower classes and their concomitant way of speaking. According to Urgo, "the reality projected in the novel comes into perpetual conflict with the reader's own 'better judgement.'" (14)

Symbolic Voice: Saying the Unsayable

Even more challenging than understanding mimetic dialogue in the novel is to parse the meaning from Faulkner's interior monologues. In *As I Lay Dying* the inner voice is symbolic rather than literal.That is, it is non-mimetic, and represents more than a character's "voice" in the traditional definition of the word.

The symbolic voice in *As I Lay Dying*resembles Joyce's stream-of-consciousness narration in many aspects. Joyce's interior monologues, however, are an attempt to record the stream of thoughts without censure. Thus a character's stream-of-consciousness voice sounds more akin to a jumbling of unsaid and plausible thoughts rather thanimplausible,internal verbalizations of the "unsayable." (Hale 9-11)Faulkner, unlike Joyce, bequeaths onto *As I Lay Dying*'s characters excessively figurative and tortuous language, language the reader assumes would not be available to poor white Mississippi farmers.Interior monologues flow from the characters endlessly and facilely, completely at odds with the novel's mimetic dialogue.The effect of these vastly different "voices" within a single narrator being that it clearly delineates the public and private self.

> Faulkner's goal is the same as that of other modern novelists who employ the extended interior monologue form: the point of representing an individual's private and public life… the language that a character uses in dialogue is with his 'true' voice of himself hidden… By making a character's speaking voice mimetically appropriate and by rendering his internal voice in a stylized, non-mimetic manner, Faulkner distinguishes the private self from public criterion of plausible language use. (Hale 9)

This clear separation of public and private self disrupts one's idea of class as a personal truth or as something that extends beyond the public sphere. What is spoken internally is not a product of what is spoken externally, and does not adhere to, as Hale puts it, the "public criterion of plausible language use." Furthermore, the notions of class as part of identity, and of class as a part of the equation that produces "plausible" speech are broken down. Faulkner relies on the readers preconceived notions of what is and is not in a countryperson's lexicon, and manipulates these assumptions with symbolic voice. Simultaneously, the symbolic voice acts as a way to express the inexpressible, which can only be expressed in figurative, non-mimetic language, and to warp assumptions about class.Darl, for example, has deep and abstract metaphysical inquiries regarding existence and non-existence during his meditation on the nature of sleep using his "true" but not "mimetically appropriate" voice:

> In a strange room you must empty yourself for sleep. And before you are emptied for sleep, what are you. And when you are emptied for sleep, you are not. And when you are filled with sleep, you never were. I don't know what I am. I don't know if I am or I am not. (73)

Whether or not these words or expressions are available to Darl in a literal sense is immaterial. What is important is the form the words take, and the impression they leave on the reader. As

Addie says in her posthumous monologue, words in a literal sense are “just a shape to fill a lack.” (160) Words used in a symbolic, non-mimetic fashion, are more than, as Addie phrases it, “what they are trying to say at.” (159)So the hollow “shape” of the words are not of import to Faulkner. The impression, the meaning given to these words, the context in which they are spoken are far more important. (Olsen 95-101) The impression made by Darl’s symbolic voice in the above monologue is the abstract *form* of Darl’s experience of death. To many critics this use of symbolic language is merely an obfuscation of meaning, and underscores the limits of language. (Olsen 96)Olsen responds to claims that Faulkner’s uses “language as an obstacle” and instead asserts that his “unique prose style” utilizes language not only as “a signifier” but as a means to “create a new dimension to human existence.” (95) The reader may recognize this but still may feel Darl’s musings are “out of character.” (Ross, “Narrative Texts” 303)The assumption being that Darl would not literally string those specific words and thoughts together in that particular fashion. As in, the *real*Darl would not say these words *in actuality.*But by thinking this, the reader is projecting his or her perceived reality of class onto a fictional character, just as Peabody does to Anse when recording his speech. If the reader attempts to establish a concrete social reality within Faulkner’s fictional world, especially in regards to the novel’s interior monologues, he or she will most certainly fail in his or her task. (Ross, “Narrative Texts” 304) The efforts of the reader to do so are akin to the failed efforts to merge and make sense of subjective (personal) and “objective” (social) “realities” of the characters in *As I Lay Dying*. The most prominent example of failing to reconcile these “realities” being seen in Darl’s personality split and inevitable institutionalization.

The reader sees an even more dramatic shift from mimetic to symbolic voice in Vardaman's inner ruminations on the nature of consciousness as he studies and describes Jewel's horse:

> It is as though the dark were resolving him out of his integrity, into an unrelated scattering of components— snuffings and stampings; smells of cooling flesh and ammoniac hair; an illusion of coordinated whole of splotched hide and strong bones within which, detached and secret and familiar, an *is* different from my *is*. (51)

These different"voices" within a single character trouble and confound the reader.Even if a voice is non-mimetic (as in the cases of Darl's "sleep monologue" and Vardaman's description of Jewel's horse), and simply acts as a symbol of the character's "unsayable" feelingsand unspoken interior life, it is, most importantly, not in keeping with social expectation. Darl's "sophisticated vocabulary, complex metaphorical imagery, and moments of philosophical investigation" possesses "all the complexity and intelligence of a Stephen Daedalus."(Hale 11) This is completely at odds with his simple country vernacular.Moreover, Vardaman's impossibly complex depiction of a horse is seen by some critics[3] as an unsettling shift in character, rather than an abstract representation[4]of a young boy coming to the (universal) conclusion that life and

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[3]R.W. Franklin, mentioned earlier, is a vocal critic of Vardaman's poetic prowess. Hale criticizes this citing his ignorance of more subtle shifts in voice, writing: "Yet while balking at the sudden and exceptional sophistication of Vardaman's descriptive powers, Franklin accepts without question Darl's regular use of implausible diction." Hale goes on to cite Cohn, another critical of Faulkner's shift in external mimetic to internal non-mimetic voice, "According to Cohn, to be 'valid,' to seem authentic, the language that represents and individual's subjective apprehension must be the same as 'the language he speaks to others.'" pp 7-9.

[4]Ross explains the idea of "unsayable" thoughts and interior monologue as symbolic voice in *As I Lay Dying* in *"Voice" in Narrative Texts*:"Vardaman perceives, or feels, the horse as 'an unrelated scattering of components' even though he could never say such a phrase 'out loud'… We 'hear' in our reading whatever is necessary for a full portrayal of a character's intuitive consciousness." He goes on to address the criticisms of symbolic voice, "The objection raised here is very simple. Vardaman as a person could not talk in this way; therefore he is poorly employed as a narrator." p 303.

consciousness exist outside of one's own ego.Vardaman and Darl's "ontological reveries challenge… urban stereotypes of country people" by elucidating unique curiosities of the complexities of existence completely contrary to "the dismissive urban categorization of rural poor whites as a singular and inferior whole." (Hubbs 466)

The reader is frustrated by the intermixing of literal (mimetic) and figurative (non-mimetic) voice[5]as it blurs the boundary between the real events of the story and imagined fantasies of the characters, or perhaps, Faulkner himself. (Ross, "Narrative Texts" 304-305) Critics of *As I Lay Dying*may point out that this blurred boundary is a result of poor writing, that Faulkner interrupts the flow of narration by supplanting his characters' voices with his own.[6]If read in the context that Faulkner may have well intended, however, the interplay of these voices within a single narrator create a sense of universality of experience[7] and, in effect, eschew cultural fabrications and preconceived notions of class.[8]In Faulkner's shockingbreach of social expectation, he forces the reader to acknowledge the absurdity of applying an external, contrived and unnatural "reality" ofsocial class onto an internal, subjective and natural experience of ego.

Faulkner is not merely saying the "unsayable" through the use of symbolic voice to give form to the ineffable thoughts and uncommunicable experience of consciousness. Faulkner is aware of his reader,and while symbolic voice serves to convey the inner lives of the Bundren

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[5] Specific examples of the mixed diction that may trouble the reader are listed by Hale, "Colloquial expressions such as 'come up' and 'laidby cotton' stand side by side with sophisticated vocabulary like 'dilapidation,' 'undulation,' and 'endured.'" p 7.

[6]"We could turn to 'authorial' discourse for a haven from this array of voices at levels of dialogue and narrative, especially given the recognizable 'Faulknerian' ring to so much of the diction and phrasing… The common expectation that every voice emanates from a single human source… if we detect discourse inappropriate to character or narrator, we look behind the fiction for an author... Faulkner's method, critics tell us, is nothing but 'omniscience in disguise.'" Ross, "Narrative Texts."pp 304-305.

[7] "Faulkner's principal purpose seems… to enforce… an interpretation of the Bundren family… at a much higher and universal level." qtd. In Urgo. p 21.

[8] Faulkner's view of social constructs could be summarized in his writings in 1925, "[M]ankind lives in a world of illusion. He uses his strange and puny powers to create… a bizarre place." qtd in Urgo. p 11.

family, it also serves to *purposefully* frustrate the reader's idea of identity and personhood. (Volpe 120) Faulkner is subtly attacking the notion that socioeconomic class is ingrained into one's personhood through his juxtaposition of mimetic and symbolic voices within a single narrator. The reader's rejection of, or immediate aversion to, the symbolic voice as a part of a character's identity is central to the conflict Faulkner foists upon the reader. What is identity? Is class truly a part of identity? Or merely an external projection completely irrelevant to internal monologue?

Textual Voice: Reading Between the Lines

Mimetic and symbolic voice, mix, merge, meld and disrupt each other throughout the novel. Underlying these voices is the *textual* voice. Textual voice is "the aspect of the printed text" in which the reader generates signification. (Ross, "Narrative Texts" 306) Usually, if a novel does not deviate from standard formatting and physical presentation, the reader is unaware of the physical text itself. In other words, there is no real interaction between the physical text and the reader. The physical act of reading does not usually inform the reader's understanding of the narrative or of the novel's meaning in any conscious way.

> Writers… have long experimented with visual effects, with how they eye reads text… Attention to literature's printed surface… has too often been regarded as a trivial enterprise. But a thoroughgoing poetics must confront literature as inscribed object and recognize that it can be engaged only through *reading*. (Ross, "Narrative Texts" 307)

Faulkner, however, recognized the potentiality of textual voice, and experimented heavily with the physical presentation of his prose. Indeed, Faulkner experimented with punctuation, textual modulation and even wished to print *The Sound and The Fury*'s dialogue in different

colors. (Ross, “Narrative Texts” 307) Therefore, it is important to investigate the visual formatting and extract from it the intended textual voice in *As I Lay Dying*, as textual voice is of special importance to Faulkner.

This voice beneath voice is created through a number of experimental techniques. The chapter headings, for example,delineated by the name of the narrator (assumed to be speaking), implants in the reader an idea of jumping into a uniqueperception of events unfolding. According to Ross, “Readers have a strong tendency (a tendency Faulkner plays on) to ‘naturalize’ these features of textual voice by referring them to some represented ‘reality’ other than the text.” (Ross, “Narrative Texts” 307) Meaning, the reader wishes to imbue “real” meaning onto the section headers, for example, to represent a consciousness “belonging to” the named character, instead of something visual, unspoken.

Unusual punctuation, run-on sentences and the (sometimes abrupt) shift from normal roman print to italics further disrupt the “narrative flow.”Addie’s post-mortem monologue exemplifies Faulkner’s jarring textual experimentation in its employment of a blank space that acts as an actual word:

> The shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is the shape of a and I couldn’t think *Anse*, couldn’t remember *Anse*. (161)

Addie laments the limitations of language, then abandons words here altogether. The reader is forced to quite literally project meaning into a meaningless space. Additionally, the meaning of the italics in the passage is ambiguous. It seems to signify more than modulation in Addie’s voice. It seems that she may be trying to transcend the word “Anse” and describe the person *Anse*. Regardless of its meaning, Faulkner calls the reader’s attention to it by purposefully

altering the narrative's textuality. In fact, divining the meaning of the use of italics in this passage seems to be contrary to Faulkner's intention. That is, the meaning of the use of italics, like everything in *As I Lay Dying*, is subject to change.At times the use of italics seems to signify a change in perception, place or time, as in the example of Darl's omniscient monologue while traveling with Jewel:

> Pa leans above the bed in the twilight, his humped silhouette partaking of the owl-like quality of awry-feathered, disgruntled outrage within which lurks a wisdom too profound or too inert for even thought.
>
> "Durn them boys," he says.
>
> *Jewel, I say. Overhead the day drives level and gray, hiding the sun by a flight of gray spears.* (43)

The italics serve to place us in Darl's physical reality, riding with Jewel away from home. However, later in the same passage, italics are used to describe the events unfolding back at home. Faulkner experiments with not only the expected meanings of text (i.e. italics mean a vocal stress), but also newly-formed meanings (i.e. italics signifying a specific jump in time or place). This textual voice, serves to further texture mimetic and symbolic voice and, once again, subvert the reader's need to project perceived realities onto a fictional world.[9] "The italics do not equal anything," Ross declares. "They are arbitrary textual variations that articulate a difference." *As I Lay Dying*, he continues, "drives us away from 'represented realities.'" ("Narrative Texts" 308). Furthermore, Darl's inner monologue, which jumps in time and place,

[9] According to Ross, much in the way the viewer will attempt to tease out a shape or form in Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, a reader will attempt to give form or shape to textual symbols. He adds that the textual voice in *As I Lay Dying*breaks down the language read, and the meaning derived from that language, "the way a cubist painting shatters representational images" so that the viewer is left with only "the image itself.""Narrative Texts." pp 306-308.

but seems to take on (if loosely) the textuality of a typical monologue, is juxtaposed by the terse "list" format we see in Cash's first appearance as a narrator:

> I made it on the bevel.
>
> 1. There is more surface for the nails to grip.
> 2. There is twice the gripping-surface to each seam.
> 3. The water will have to seep into it on a slant. Water moves easiest up and down or straight across… (76)

The idea of an objective reality is,again, flatly refuted. The textuality of the narrative itself is not fixed. Rules of a character's discourse are made only to be broken. The formatting of Cash's interior monologue seems to represent the opposite of the free-flowing symbolic language employed by Darl, Vardaman, Dewey Dell and Addie. Meaning, the textual voice of the novel is subject to change from narrator to narrator, instance to instance. "As I Lay Dying is invested in calling the reader's attention to language itself," Olsen states, forcing the reader "out of the illusion of narrative space and into some contemplation of textuality." (103)

This forcing of the reader "out of illusion" is at the center of the textual voice's subtle subversion of classist notions. Boren notes, that forcing the "contemplation of textuality" onto the reader creates a "self-conscious" reading experience. (qtd. in Olsen 103) Although Boren is critical of this "self-conscious" reading experience as he contends it detracts from the narrative, this "self-conscious" reading experience is key to disrupting the reader's "illusions" of social identity.

Faulkner disrupts the reader's "illusions" of social identity with textual voice through specific techniques (some of which were mentioned earlier): irregular punctuation, run-on

sentences and missing or erroneous word placement. Readers may believe, as Franklin does, that these textual "experiments" are a product of hasty writing. That is, the text is not properly formatted; it does not *conform* with the norm. Faulkner, according to Hale, however, "redefines conformity… as hegemony." (21) Faulkner, in effect, thwarts the reader's desire for grammatical and social hegemony over *As I Lay Dying*and its characters. The reader is unable to project his or her expectations of proper grammar and diction not only on the characters, but the novel itself.

Conclusion: Mixed Diction and Classist Fictions

"My mother is a fish," Vardaman concludes on his journey to Jefferson. (76) Just as Vardaman failed to project his own fiction onto reality through the power of words, (Urgo 20)the reader fails to establish an objective reality using the words of the novel. Faulkner asks, what fictions about class do we project onto reality? "[Y]our illusions," Faulkner writes in *Absalom, Absalom!*, "are a part of you like your bones and flesh and memory." (277) Faulkner subverts the readers "illusions" by presenting them with conflicting realities, realities *As I Lay Dying*refuses to resolve.

Faulkner shows us the struggle between the Bundrens' public and private selves, and refuses to define either of them in any unequivocal way, without ever undermining or trivializing their hardships.

> Faulkner crafts a more enduring and nuanced portrait of "*the real conflicts* of men and women who work"… because he eschews offering answers to the ephemeral problems and instead engages in a more lasting interrogation of society and history. (Hubbs 470)

Faulkner's manipulation of voice, his use of mimetic dialogue, which changes based on perception, symbolic internal monologue and textual voice, serves to undermine the reader's

manifold "illusions" regarding members of the lower classes and their expected behavior. The destitute Bundren's have all the regionalisms of poor Southern farmers and all the eloquence and poetic wit of Hamlet. Yet each Bundren remains fiercely independent in character, each speaks, internally and externally in a unique and personal way, (Volpe 15)they are not a "singular and inferior whole." (Hubbs 466) They are concerned with metaphysical questions and endeavor to create their own definitions of reality. While some characters' private inner selves are defeated by the pressures of the public world to conform — as seen in Anse's quick replacement of his deceased wife and Cash's impassive remarks[10] about social expectation after Darl's being committed to a mental health facility in Jackson ("It's like it aint so much what a fellow does, but the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it.")[11]— their complexity is never forfeited. The complexity, depth and drama of their inner lives, and in some instances, the defeat of their inner lives, is equal to that typically associated with higher social classes. In this way, *As I Lay Dying* challenges the reader's notions of class and its relationship with identity.

[10] Urgo contends that "Cash will never challenge the way the world is defined for him, but he will master the definitions and skills handed down to him."
[11] Page 219

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