

Moral ambiguity in as i lay dying essay sample

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Although almost every character in the novel *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner could be considered morally ambiguous, or seen as having mixed morals, Addie Bundren tops the list. She narrates only one chapter in the book which is juxtaposed by the description of her by other narrators in preceding and following chapters. Faulkner makes a strong point this way concerning moral ambiguity as it seems, in the novel, that she is the pivot point on which other characters' morals lie.

In Addie's chapter, placed in the center of the novel, she delves into, and answers, many of the underlying questions that Faulkner has left open-ended. Addie is morally confusing, or it seems she herself is confused. She loves Cash and she loves Jewel, two of her sons (different fathers), while the rest of her children she "loves," Darl, Dewey Dell, and Vardaman. Addie marries Anse; however, neither she nor Anse love each other in the correct form of the word. In fact, Addie has an affair with the reverend from town, Whitfield, the end result being Jewel. Although Addie cares for her family, as supposedly seen in other chapters, Faulkner makes it clear that she is indeed morally ambiguous. Who doesn't she love? Within the confines of the novel it is hard to tell.

Anse's morals are unclear as he revolves around Addie as her husband. Whitfield's morality hinges on his affair with Addie. Dewey Dell's issues with her pregnancy/abortion all follow along with Addie's sickness and death. Jewel's morals are completely directed towards his mother and no one else, whereas Darl's actions surrounding his mother reflect unclear, potentially psychopathic morals. Addie is the pivotal point for most characters in the novel *As I Lay Dying* in that all of their morals are in reaction, or have a

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direct correlation, to her actions. Addie is the most important person in the novel because not only is she herself morally estranged, but by simply being she causes those around her to stray from their own ethics.

The reason that Faulkner employs a protagonist as such an influential morally ambiguous character is to express the fact that people will have a lasting impact on you, even after they are no longer living.