

As i lay dying analysis essay

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February 18, 2013 Duty is a Four Letter Word with a Three Character Meaning In William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying, the Bundrens sacrifice a great deal to lay Addie in her final resting place at Jefferson. They obediently follow her burial orders despite the hardships along the way because of the moral obligation they have to their mother and wife. These ignorant people may not have had the task of taking their father's place in the Chinese army and fending off the Huns to defend the emperor, they just had to get to one place with a coffin.

However, the size of the sacrifice does not matter because duty is duty.

Helen Keller once said, " I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble. " This quote emphasizes the theme of duty in As I Lay Dying because even though the endeavor of taking their deceased family member to her home town was not an enormous achievement for the sake of mankind, it still significantly mattered to the Bundrens. Duty is considerably expressed by the characters DeweyDell, Darl and Jewel.

Dewey Dell makes a striking introduction into the minds of the reader when questions arise like " Why does she keep talking about cakes? to " Is this character a woman? " Faulkner first epitomizes Dewey Dell as the annoying girl who sat fanning her mother for days, not letting Addie get a break or the others a proper chance to say goodbye to their mother or wife. She slowly transforms into a more mature and astute character when Addie dies and she is forced right away to perform her duties as the woman of the house. Faulkner writes, " Pa looks down at the face, at the black sprawl of Dewey Dell's hair, the out-flung arms, the clutched fan now motionless on the fading <https://assignbuster.com/as-i-lay-dying-analysis-essay/>

quilt. “ I reckon you better get supper on,” he says. Dewey Dell does not move.

” But she does move.

She gets up and makes supper and the audience also sees a motherly role thrust upon Dewey Dell in two ways. One of which is through her unexpected pregnancy and the other is in how she has to take care of young Vardaman from then on. Cash, Anse or Jewel would not care about the wellbeing of Vardaman and so Dewey Dell has to watch the “ baby” of the family. She also exemplifies duty in her pregnancy by how alone she has to face the consequences. With a small bit of money from Lefe, she must go to drugstore after drugstore, quietly begging the pharmacist to get her the poson she is desperate for with the quiet of her eyes.

Faulkner seems to think that it is not a 50/50 split in responsibility between Lefe and Dewey Dell as he imposes duty on her so much as to even fall into the hands of such scum as MacGowan. Another character Faulkner instills duty on is Darl. Darl feels like it is his responsibility to keep track of every one. Unlike Dewey Dell or Jewel, he is incapable of interacting and participating in the family the way they do, but he contributes to duty in other means. He stayed on the farm and helped out his mother and father until the years grew by and he turned thirty.

He fulfilled his duty by helping out his parents for longer than should have been allowed, even prompting Cora Tull to say, “ Maybe Cash and Darl can get married now. ” His mother had taken over his life but his spite towards her and her fiendish ways could not distract Darl from doing his duty and

helping get Addie to Jefferson. The final Faulkner bombards with duty is Jewel. As one of the youngest siblings yet so close to manhood, Jewel was stuck in a transaction of being his mother's favorite to proving to his brothers he was a tough and serious person.

For some reason, it always seemed to be Jewel's duty to rescue his coffin-confined mother. When Addie lets loose in the water, Jewel has to be the one to save her because Cash could not swim, Vardaman was too small, Anse was a careless brute and she slipped right out of Darl's reach.

Then again, when the Gillespie barn begins to flare bright with flames, Jewel is the one to throw himself into the barn to get her out. He even does more than that, helping the men find the cow and get it to come outside.

In saving Addie, he sacrifices much more than exhaustion this time, suffering as described by this passage, " His back was red. Dewey Dell put the medicine on it. The medicine was made out of butter and soot, to draw out the fire.

Then his back was black. " Jewel's purpose in *As I lay Dying* is to salvage his mother time and time again even though he does not want to. He never returned his mother's affections and barely acknowledged her yet in her death he developed a sense of duty to his mother because he knew subconsciously that he was probably the only stable ' Bundren' left.

William Faulkner's *As I lay Dying* portrays the theme of duty in a very distinct and barely comprehensible way. His stream-of-consciousness narrations from the characters of Dewey Dell, Darl and Jewel plainly bring out the underlying forms of duty these siblings elicit. Even though some duties are

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larger than others as noticed by the quote, " I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble," by Helen Keller, other tasks have to be achieved not for the sake of size but for the sake of duty to others.