

"as i lay dying" by william faulkner

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In Faulkner's "As I Lay Dying," he used animals to symbolize characters. Bundren children are obsessed with animals throughout the novel. Vardaman is convinced that his mother is a fish, Darl declares that Jewel's mother is a horse, and Dewey Dell relates to the farm cow as another woman. After each character learns of their mother's death they each relate an animal to situations apparent to their own lives. Vardaman sees Addie as a fish because of the way that she has been transformed from alive to dead. Vardaman catches a fish on the day his mother dies and cuts it up and brings it inside to be cooked.

The blood of the fish is all over his clothes and on the same day, Addie dies. Vardaman connects a fish with his mother and believes her to be a fish.

“ Vardaman comes back and picks up the fish. It slides out of his hands, smearing wet dirt onto him, and flops down, dirtying itself again, gape-mouthed, goggle-eyed, hiding into the dust like it was ashamed of being dead like it was in a hurry to get back hid again,” (p. 31).

In this section, Vardaman relates his mom to be a fish. Vardaman uses the death of the fish to symbolize the death of his mother.

“ Vardaman comes around the house, bloody as a hog to his knees, and that ere fish chopped up with the ax like it or not,” (p. 38).

Vardaman later grasps the concept of death and how it relates back to his own being. Although he seems to be young, Vardaman begins to attribute his now-dead mother to a now-dead fish.

“ I can feel where the fish was in the dust. It is cut up into pieces of not-fish now, not-blood on my hands and overalls,” (p. 53.)

The fish symbol is illustrated throughout the novel as being Vardaman's mother.

“ My mother is a fish,” (p. 84).

Next, Faulkner uses the Bundren cow to symbolize Addie's death, the bond between Dewey Dell and Vardaman. Dewey Dell is the character that relates most to the family cow. The cow just like Dewey Dell has something inside of them. The cow lows at the foot of the bluff. She nuzzles at me, snuffing, blowing her breath in a sweet, hot blast, through my dress, against my nakedness, moaning.

“ You got to wait a little while. Then I'll tend to you,” (p. 61).

The milk inside the cow's body is related to the baby growing inside of Dewey Dell. The milk is symbolic of the thing inside her body.

“ The cow nuzzles at me moaning. ‘ You'll just have to wait. What you got in you aint nothing to what I got in me, even if you are a woman too,’” (p. 63).

Even though Dewey Dell is pregnant now she finds that she has to be the maternal figure in the house.

““You go on to the house and get your supper. ‘ He draws back. I hold him. ‘ You quit now. You leave me be,’”(p. 62).

Jewel is unable to express emotion towards his mother, however, he has no problem portraying it towards his horse, even though his ways may seem violent.

“ Jewel with dug heels, shutting off the horse’s wind with one hand, with the other patting the horse’s neck in short strokes myriad and caressing, cursing the horse with obscene ferocity,” (p. 12).

Based on Darl's word, the horse is a symbol of Jewel's love for his mother. For Jewel, however, the horse, based on his riding of it, apparently symbolizes hard-won freedom from the Bundren family. Jewel is extremely possessive and passionate about his horse. He had spent his nights cleaning up a field in order to buy it with his own money. Anse takes the horse and trades it for a team of mules to bring the caravan to Jefferson.