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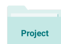

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As I Lay Dying: Faulkner's Tour de Force One-Man Show

JOHN D. ANDERSON

William Faulkner's 1930 novel As I Lay Dying *can be read as a ventriloquistic performance by the character Darl, a performing consciousness who role-plays the other voices in the novel in an effort to resolve his fragmented self into a cohesive whole, an effort which ultimately fails and ends in madness. The essay (1) defines performing consciousness; (2) presents evidence that Darl's is a performing consciousness; and (3) considers the implications of Darl's performance in terms of shamanism or ecstatic role-playing. Darl attempts to fulfill the function and purpose of a shaman and demonstrates shamanic processes of ecstatic performance; his failure to achieve a cohesive self mirrors Faulkner's successful negotiation of his own identity as an artist.*

Faulkner was fond of describing *As I Lay Dying* as a tour de force: "Sometimes technique charges in and takes command of the dream before the writer himself can get his hands on it. That is *tour de force* . . . " (Meriwether 244). The term can signify a feat of strength or skill or, more pejoratively, merely an adroit accomplishment. When used to describe a performance, "tour de force" can connote vulgar self-display, as when Wallace Bacon warns that "the performance ought not be a *tour de force* glorifying the performer" (311). In a more positive sense, "tour de force" can suggest that the performer displays an unusual range of technical skill in presenting multiple roles. Solo-performance scholar John Gentile defines "tour de force" as "a show of strength for the performer" ("Emlyn Williams" 82), as in Emlyn Williams's recreation of Charles Dickens's famous readings or Hal Holbrook's of Mark Twain's. In both performances, Williams and Holbrook display an impressive virtuosity of performance technique. Not only do they convincingly impersonate the historical authors, but they also present an array of characters created by them.

The example of Emlyn Williams as Charles Dickens is particularly apt, since Dickens himself was a tour de force performer, whose facility at playing multiple roles was evident in his amateur acting as well as in his famous readings of his own

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works. According to Leigh Woods, as an amateur actor Dickens was partial to "personation parts" consisting of a single core role surrounded by a filigree of up to six disguises, and to playing multiple roles in serial fashion in one evening, one in a full-length play and others in farcical afterpieces (88–100). As a professional reader, Dickens's strength, Gentile claims, "arose from his talent in assuming a multitude of different characters in quick succession" (*Cast* 13). For my purposes, then, tour de force performance implies multiple roles, sometimes in succession and sometimes layered over each other.

Although it is possible in theory to separate out the various layers of performance and to arrange them in a hierarchy ranging from author to implied author to narrator to character, audience members perceive these levels as a non-differentiated gestalt, or aural palimpsest, with one layer foregrounded in their perceptions in any given moment. Granted, the author's original performance is in the past–distanciated as a *text,* as Paul Ricoeur would say–and yet is experienced as a present *event* through a reader/performer's act of appropriation. Thus, the author "speaking" behind the narrator is a very real layer of the palimpsest, most obviously when an author performs his own work (i.e., Dickens) or when a performer impersonates an author performing (i.e., Emlyn Williams). Superimposed over the narrative voice are the characters quoted by the narrator. All of these layerings are present simultaneously, although foregrounded to varying degrees.

The challenge of a tour de force performance is to conjure all of these voices in turn in a dazzling series of transitions, or gestalt switches. This essay will demonstrate that a reader (silent or otherwise) can perform *As I Lay Dying* as a tour de force solo performance by Darl, both reader and Darl thus enacting Faulkner's original one-man show.[1] In this way, performance can open up a literary text, both conceptually and literally. The key to this performative reading of *As I Lay Dying* is to hear Darl as a "performing consciousness," a role player who performs all the other voices of the novel. Thus, the essay will include three sections: first, I will define performing consciousness, using a combination of psychological, anthropological, and aesthetic perspectives on performance. The psychological perspective involves a look at the role of the selfobject in the formation of the self; the anthropological perspective entails an examination of the cross-cultural role of the shaman, or ecstatic role-taker; and the aesthetic perspective leads me to discuss Pierrot, the *commedia dell'arte* character who personifies the sensitive artist manqué. Second, I will present the evidence that Darl's is a performing consciousness. Finally, I will consider the implications of Darl's performance primarily in terms of shamanistic purposes, functions, and processes, but also in terms of self-psychology and in relation to Pierrot as a western archetype of the performer. In taking this performative approach to *As I Lay Dying,* I join a long-standing critical conversation about one of the most explicated of modern novels.[2]

PERFORMING CONSCIOUSNESS

The notion of a performing consciousness implies self-reflexivity. The present participle form "performing" indicates an ongoing process, a process of becoming, of an identity forming, that shapes the project of this consciousness and thus any novel within which it speaks. This process has the playful nature of Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of transformation-into-structure: "transformation of such a kind

that the identity of the player does not continue to exist for anybody. . . . The players (or poets) no longer exist, but only what of theirs is played" (100). I am applying Gadamer's notion both intrinsically and extrinsically to *As I Lay Dying;* that is to say, I am identifying performing voices *within* and *of* the text. The process of performing enables certain voices *in* the text to "transform into a structure" in the sense of metamorphosing into a self–they become what they play–and performance *of* the text enables the transformation of the reader as well.

The term "performing consciousness" has a double meaning. It indicates both a consciousness that happens to be performing at a given time and also a consciousness defined or identified by the process of performing. Compare, for example, how the phrase "traveling man" can refer both to a man who happens to be traveling as well as a man defined by his traveling. The performing consciousnesses in certain novels of voices (i.e., multiple first-person novels) such as *As I Lay Dying* both perform other voices and become selves through performance.[3] To perform other voices is to move out of the self (as in the root meaning of "ecstasy": out of stance); to be defined and shaped by performance is to return to a dynamically emergent self. My use of the term is thus related to shamanism–defined by Mircea Eliade as a "technique of ecstasy" (4)–as I will discuss in the third part of this essay.

Initially, I was tempted to use the more familiar term "central consciousness" to describe these unique voices, because they seemed to occupy a central position in these novels of voices akin to the hub of a wheel. However, that term evoked too many associations with a spatializing and visualist conception of point of view. A *performing* consciousness, on the other hand, suggests a comparison with ventriloquism–like shamanism, an appropriately oral/aural and performance-related metaphor. It is as if in the novel there is a ventriloquist character who speaks for the other characters. However, these other characters exist in the world of the novel as fully as the performing consciousness. They are as "real" in that fictive world as he or she is. They are not figments of the imagination–although it is the performing consciousness's hypersensitive powers of imagination and empathy that allow the reader to know them so intimately. The performing consciousnesses get the other voices "right" through a kind of art, specifically a highly intuitive type of performance art.

The idea that performance gets these voices right, that performance is a kind of knowing, is what prevents these performing consciousnesses from being merely solipsistic, closed in upon themselves. Furthermore, this idea implies an epistemological claim for performance, but one born of dialogism rather than positivism. Rather than the visualist epistemology implied by the concept of point of view, a performing consciousness implies an aural kind of knowing that comes from a dialogical I-Thou relationship. The knowledge derived is that produced by art rather than science.

It is as if, in *As I Lay Dying* and other novels of voices, the author decided not to use an omniscient narrator, but instead to create a character who receives the privileges of omniscience by virtue of being an artist her- or himself, a performing artist with the gift of voices, the ability to sense and present what it is like to be another person. In effect, the performing consciousness is a *dramatized* omniscient narrator. However, because s/he is a dramatized character, this speaker's omniscience is qualified. Performing consciousnesses possess what is stereotypically called an artistic sensibility, a preternatural sensitivity so great as to be immobilizing, casting them in relatively passive roles in the action of the novels. They seem to react to others, more

than to act themselves. This reaction takes the form of "feeling into" others to the extent of speaking in their voices, ventriloquizing them, appropriating the experiences of others as their own.

Having this kind of artistic sensibility, however, does not guarantee access to a recognized outlet or medium for exercising these tendencies. As a result, performing consciousnesses can be people who are (sometimes unwittingly) groping their way toward an undefined role as artist by playing the roles of everyone they encounter. Even if they identify their medium (as Bernard says he is a writer in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, another novel of voices), they tend to be artists manqué–merely aspiring, would-be, or failed artists. If they could successfully express their artistic tendencies in some kind of artwork, they might complete the rite of passage from incipient to full-fledged artist. In a strong sense, these figures are alter egos of their creators, expressions of their hopes and fears of being an artist, means by which the generating authors explore the implications of defining themselves as artists, vicarious "actings out" of the author's personal quest for identity as a literary artist.

This emphasis on self-definition in certain novels of voices reinforces their self-reflexivity, which leads me back to performance. Another way of identifying the artistic tendencies of these performing consciousnesses is to say that their medium of artistic expression is themselves, their voices. According to Gregory Battcock, "[b]efore man was aware of art he was aware of himself. Awareness of the person is, then, the first art. In performance art the figure of the artist is the tool for the art. It *is* the art" (ix). A performing consciousness practices performance art–in Battcock's very loose sense. Paradoxically, though, the performing consciousness's narcissistic awareness of self is routed through others. The result is a truly *negative* capability–an obsession with otherness to the extent of risking a coherent, unified self.

Informing my understanding of the role of the self in performing consciousness is American psychoanalytic theorist Heinz Kohut's "self psychology," a reaction to Freudian drive-and-defense Oedipal psychology. Kohut focuses on the pre-Oedipal process by which the self emerges and gains strength. At the center of Kohut's theory is the concept of the "selfobject," others experienced as part of the self. Kohut's colleague Ernest S. Wolf gives a helpful example:

> . . . a child's ability to function comfortably and age-appropriately with a subjective sense of well-being and confidence–in other words, to function as a whole, cohesive self–may, at a particular time, depend on the presence in the room of its mother. If the mother leaves the room, this child will suddenly feel restless, tense, begin to act awkwardly, and may soon manifest signs of psychological distress such as anxiety or depression. Stated in terms of a psychology of the self, one can say that the formerly cohesive self of the child is now fragmented . . . due to the absence of the selfobject. Indeed, the mother, though present, may somehow communicate a relative lack of concern for the child, which may be experienced by the latter as the functional absence of the selfobject and result in similar distress to the child's self. (Wolf 43–44)

In order for a child to develop a cohesive, structurally sound self, the child must receive two kinds of support from a selfobject: first, *mirroring* (or echoing) responses that confirm the child's sense of its value, importance, even illusionary greatness and perfection; and then the availability of an *idealized* selfobject, a calm, omnipotent, admired parent imago who takes over the child's assumed self-perfection and with whom the child feels merged and thus itself in possession of these admired

qualities. These two kinds of support meet what Kohut considers healthy narcissistic needs. Failure to get either or both kinds of support from a selfobject can result in impairment of the cohesion, vigor, and harmony of the self. Cure for such damage to the self, according to Kohut's method, "entails the slow internalization of missing psychic structure (which he calls 'transmuting internalization)" (Layton 5). Although the way that Kohut achieves this transmuting internalization in psychoanalysis is to create a self-selfobject relationship between the patient and the analyst, Ernest S. Wolf and Ina Wolf claim that creative artists can achieve a self-cure through artistic production that completes the self "with the artistic product as selfobject" (Wolf and Wolf 262). The roles taken on by a performing consciousness, then, are to varying degrees selfobjects and can help the role-player in his or her efforts to develop a cohesive self.

In addition to object relations theory, I rely on two archetypal performers to help me explicate the concept of performing consciousness: the shaman and Pierrot. The essence of the shamanic role for my purposes is the phenomenon of ecstatic role taking. The ecstatic experience at the heart of shamanism is universal to forms of mysticism found all over the world. In the third section of this essay, I will discuss the purpose, function, and process of shamanism in relation to Darl. The other archetypal performer, Pierrot, is a Western theatrical type rather than an anthropological, cross-cultural one. One of the stock characters of the *commedia dell'arte,* a largely improvised form of popular theatre, Pierrot has had a varied history and yet retains "a persistent and a continuous identity, despite the ravages of his fortuitous and very uneven existence," according to Robert F. Storey (68). At the peak of the cult of the commedia that arose between 1890 and 1930, as traced by Martin Green and John Swan, "Pierrot embodied the artist, all artists, in humanity; he was the emblematic hero of sensibility" (9). As such, Pierrot appeared directly in William Faulkner's apprentice work and in various guises in his major novels, as I will demonstrate later. Most tellingly for purposes of definition, though, both the shaman and Pierrot are role players, archetypes of performing consciousness.

DARL AS PERFORMING CONSCIOUSNESS

As I Lay Dying presents in Darl a performing consciousness who risks self and goes mad. Darl fails to integrate his empathic powers of ventriloquism through the cohesion that art provides; as a result, he drowns in the babble of voices. In tracing his descent into fragmentation, the novel follows the pattern of a failed quest for identity, for a unified self. Darl asks "Who am I?" and in effect answers, as did Rimbaud, "Je est un autre," or perhaps more accurately, "I am Others." Otherness for Darl leads to chaotic multiplicity and disintegration.

It is not immediately apparent that Darl is the performing consciousness of *As I Lay Dying.* Rather, the more obvious way to read *As I Lay Dying* is as a collection of equal voices, with no one being privileged over the others. To hear Darl as the performing consciousness, then, is a *possible* interpretation of the novel, as opposed to a *certain* one, to apply Beverly Whitaker Long's continuum of interpretive choices (267–82). However, such a reading explains not only the progression of the narrative as a performance, but it also clarifies certain textual features better than any other explanation I know, specifically, Darl's privileged role in the novel and the sophisticated language of the text. I will discuss Darl's special status first.

That Darl's voice in the novel is at least privileged, if not central, has been widely noted by critics. According to Catherine Patten, "[t]he fullness of Darl's presence at any moment in *As I Lay Dying* combines with his great number of sections to give him a special claim on the reader's attention" (20). The evidence for Darl's special role in the novel includes: 1) the relative amount of his discourse, 2) his extrasensory perception, 3) the structure of the narrative, 4) his closeness to Faulkner, and 5) his madness.

First, Darl's voice begins the book and speaks 19 of the novel's 59 sections, almost one third, and the frequency of Darl's monologues is such that we never leave his consciousness for long. No more than four other voices ever speak in a row before Darl takes over again.

Second, Darl displays powers of extrasensory perception that set him apart from the other characters: an uncanny omniscience that allows him to narrate scenes at which he is not present; the telepathic power to communicate mentally with others; and a clairvoyant power to read minds, to sense other characters' secrets, such as Dewey Dell's pregnancy and Addie's adulterous affair with Whitfield that produced Jewel. The most dramatic example of Darl's omniscience is his narration of Addie's death, a scene at which he is not present. Both Darl's telepathy and his clairvoyant reading of secrets are revealed in Dewey Dell's account of how she got pregnant by Lafe: "It was then, and then I saw Darl and he knew. He said he knew without the words like he told me that ma is going to die without words . . . " (26). Darl confirms her perception a little later in the novel, adding the implication that she is pregnant (which he seems to know clairvoyantly) and wants to go to Jefferson to get an abortion: "I said to Dewey Dell: 'You want her to die so you can get to town: is that it?' She wouldn't say what we both knew" (38–39). Darl also seems to have a telepathic link with Cash, who at one point is able to respond to what Darl is thinking. The mysterious communication occurs at the riverbank as Jewel urges his horse into the current (137).

In the case of Addie's important secret, even before it is revealed, Darl states when he clairvoyantly learned it: "That night I found ma sitting beside the bed where [Jewel] was sleeping, in the dark. . . . And then I knew that I knew. I knew that as plain on that day as I knew about Dewey Dell on that day" (129). The secret is finally revealed indirectly in Addie's and Whitfield's sections (166–71). What Darl knows about Addie, then, is later independently confirmed. Thus, we can establish that Darl has powers of extrasensory perception.

The third indication of Darl's pivotal role in the novel is the structural placement of key sections–specifically the flashbacks about Jewel's acquisition of the horse and the triptych consisting of Addie's monologue as framed by Cora and Whitfield. This nonchronological placement of these two units implies a plot progression that is centered around Darl's jealousy of Jewel. The horse story and the triptych frame the climactic river crossing in such a way as to emphasize the sibling rivalry for the mother and to make Darl's jealousy of Jewel the driving force of the novel. The best explanation for the seemingly arbitrary placement of these flashbacks is their importance for Darl: his consciousness is at work in the ordering of these episodes, remembering that when Jewel obtained the horse was when Darl clairvoyantly learned the source of Addie's favoritism for Jewel: "And then I knew that I knew" (129). I will return to this key revelation later in my discussion.

The fourth factor supporting my claim that Darl is a performing consciousness is that Darl is closely identified with Faulkner himself as artist and role player. Besides exhibiting a poet's sensitivity to language, Darl is also an exemplar of the artist's problematic role in society, a role Faulkner was struggling to define for himself during his long apprenticeship as a writer of, at first, poetry. Judith Sensibar's study of *The Origins of Faulkner's Art* reveals that the "nagging question of identity–so central and so imaginatively pursued in Faulkner's mature work–hindered him in these early years" (4). She argues that Faulkner was himself an inveterate role player in real life, posing as "wounded officer, British aesthete, and penniless poet during the years 1918–1925" (5). This nagging question of identity entered his poetry in the form of a recurring voice or mask, Pierrot, "the quintessential masker himself": "In his poetry Faulkner often, but not always, calls him by his rightful name. Nonetheless, Pierrot's character, even when disguised, informs and animates the protagonists of much of Faulkner's apprenticeship work" (xvii), as well as more maturely conceived characters such as Darl, Quentin Compson, and Horace Benbow (20).

Since the Pierrot figure appearing in Faulkner's early work was the embodiment of the artist, "the emblematic hero of sensibility" of the twenties and thirties, according to Martin Green and John Swan (7), then, when Sensibar finds Pierrotesque qualities in Darl, she is also identifying him as a "would-be artist," as she explicitly labels his fellow-Pierrots Horace Benbow and Quentin Compson. Thus, Darl is one of a group of Faulknerian heroes of artistic sensibility and, by extension, a representative of Faulkner himself at the stage in his own development when he was exploring his role as artist.

This link between Darl and Faulkner strengthens my case for Darl's unique, pseudo-authorial, role in the novel. Andre Bleikasten discerns this connection also: "Of all the characters in *As I Lay Dying,* it is surely this rustic Hamlet who has the closest affinities with his creator. Faulkner makes him his principal narrator and to some extent one of his *alter egos:* If Cash is an image of the craftsman-novelist, Darl represents the novelist-poet" (*Faulkner's* 90). Furthermore, Judith Sensibar's identification of Darl as a Pierrot figure supports the idea, since she sees Faulkner's early Pierrot narrators as, "like [Keats'] Endymion, the young poet disguised" (9). As author-surrogate, Darl's voice reinforces the romantic aspects of the novel of voices. If, as George Herbert Mead claimed, romantic thought is a way of knowing through playing roles, then Faulkner is doubly romantic in that he plays the role of a role player. Sensibar has documented the influence of Keats on Faulkner's apprenticeship work, and I think that the influence extends to an application of Keats's idea of negative capability. Bleikasten uses the term explicitly, saying that "[o]f the gifts it takes to be a creative novelist, Darl possesses the most precious: the faculty of vision, the 'negative capability,' the power of speech" (*Faulkner's* 90). Faulkner avoids speaking directly in his own voice in the manner of "the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime," preferring to play the "camelion Poet" who, because he has no identity, is continually filling some other body (Keats 405). In other words, Faulkner adopts the mask of a performer, someone with the negative capability of projecting his subjectivity into the objective world of others.

Finally, the identification of Darl with Faulkner as artist and role player is related to Darl's so-called madness. In Plato's *Phaedrus,* Socrates describes poetic inspiration, as well as prophecy and love, as kinds of madness. In the provincial world of

Yoknapatawpha County, artistic sensibility amounts to certifiable insanity. For most of the novel, to most members of Faulkner's authorial audience, Darl seems more rational and sane than the rest of his family, in spite of his obsessiveness about Jewel. However, his last monologue portrays him as a stereotypical raving lunatic. The most dramatic sign of his madness is that he refers to himself in the third person. Daniel Ferrer identifies this as evidence that "he has the ability to split into several personalities" (33). Ferrer concludes that "[t]he idea that all the different monologues come from Darl now becomes inescapable. It is not that he reconstitutes them; he lives them: they are his 'voices,' allowing him to reconcile contradictory modes of defence against an intolerable reality" (33). I find Ferrer's interpretation compatible with mine; we both see Darl as hearing/performing the other voices. However, rather than reducing the voices merely to the solipsistic ravings of a schizophrenic, I prefer to embrace the possibility of shamanism–i.e., that Darl is able to "channel" these voices (at least Addie's, since hers is the only voice that speaks from beyond death)–or of performance, in its aesthetic as well as anthropological senses. Even Darl's final "mad scene" strikes me as Darl performing the stereotypical role of madman, shaking the bars of his cell and foaming at the mouth. Thus, Darl's so-called madness is not only evidence of his privileged role in the novel, but is itself one of his roles as the performing consciousness.

If Darl is the performing consciousness of the novel, however, why are there two monologues after his final "mad cell" section, one by Dewey Dell and one by Cash? Also, as the novel progresses, the prominence of Darl's voice diminishes somewhat. If the progression of the novel is seen as Darl's gradual disintegration and fragmentation, then it makes sense that his voice would undergo a change. There is a gradual escalation of the tension between Darl and Jewel throughout the novel. Darl narrates the first section after the triptych in which Addie is the centerpiece; Darl's obsession with Jewel is especially highlighted (to the extent of being italicized) in that section. The next section is Armstid's account of Jewel's furious reaction on learning that Anse has traded his horse for a new team of mules. It is significant that this is the only point in the main action of the novel where Darl and Jewel are separated. In keeping with Darl's obsession with Jewel, Darl does not narrate again until Jewel returns, and he begins with "'Jewel,' I say, 'whose son are you?" and ends with *"Jewel, I say, Who was your father, Jewel?"* It is as if Jewel's presence is necessary for Darl to narrate at this point in the novel. Also, Darl gets more daring in his taunts at Jewel. Darl escalates the conflict by alluding to Jewel's illegitimacy, an allusion that is heightened by Jewel twice calling Darl a "son of a bitch." Darl's next section is the barn-burning scene in which Jewel rescues Addie's corpse from cremation. This episode marks Darl's breaking point, as we learn in Vardaman's next section in which he reveals that Darl is crying on Addie's coffin. This is Darl's only outburst of grief in the novel. His next section is devoid of emotion; he describes the approach into Jefferson in a defeated voice, speaking mostly in second person until Jewel provokes the fight with the town's man. His intercession on Jewel's behalf is uncharacteristic of his previous attempts to disrupt the journey; he seems to have given up on whatever was previously driving him to taunt Jewel.

His last section, his mad scene, is contrastingly histrionic–he laughs maniacally and foams at the mouth. Thwarted in his competition with and for Jewel, he loses what sense of self he had and adopts with a vengeance the role assigned him: that of a

madman. Dewey Dell's and Cash's monologues act as punch lines to the sick joke that the journey has become to Darl, playing out Anse's final indignities of stealing Dewey Dell's abortion money and remarrying. It is appropriate that the novel end with other voices than Darl's, who has lost the ability to speak in a voice of his own. To my mind, the end of *As I Lay Dying* is similar to the final scene of Hitchcock's film *Psycho* in which our last view of Norman Bates is of him conversing with his mother/himself. At the end of the novel, Darl has so little sense of himself he can *only* speak in the voices of others.

In addition to the issue of Darl's privileged role in the novel is that of Faulkner's distinctive language, which has led many critics to argue that all the voices in *As I Lay Dying* speak in an unmistakably–and unrealistically–Faulknerian manner. If Faulkner had adopted a third-person narrative voice in this novel as he did in, say, *Light in August*, this would not be a necessarily damning criticism. However, in *As I Lay Dying*, as in the first three sections of *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner writes in various first-person voices, opening himself to the criticism that the voices are unrealistic, that the child Vardaman, for example, could not realistically say of a horse that "[i]t is as though the dark were resolving him out of his integrity, into an unrelated scattering of components" (36). One response to this criticism is that Faulkner is attempting to convey various levels of consciousness, including preverbal or subconscious levels, and that he uses an expressionistic convention whereby he renders in "writerly" language perceptions characters might feel but could not express for themselves. This explanation makes sense to me up to a point, but I take it a step further.

With the possible exception of Addie's, Darl's is the only voice in the novel with a poetic sensibility, the only voice in which the eruptions of Faulknerian language do not seem incompatible. "Several critics have called Darl an artist or poet," as Watson Branch has pointed out, citing six examples (117).[4] Branch attributes "the substance and the mode of [Darl's] vision of reality" (111) in large part to his experiences in France during World War I (mentioned only in Darl's last section in the novel). Branch makes a convincing case that Darl probably had been exposed to cubist art in France, as Faulkner had been. Darl's "trip to France could well have provided him with the experience of those art objects which he uses as images to embody his vision of life in Yoknapatawpha County" (114). Not only did his exposure to Cubism probably enrich his store of imagery, as in his comparison of Addie's coffin on the sawhorses to "a cubistic bug" (Faulkner 209)[5], but according to Branch, it would also have given him "a new *way* of seeing reality." Branch cites Darl's description (which opens the novel) of himself and Jewel walking to the house as an example of multiple perspective. Branch connects the way Darl's mind works to theories behind Cubism.

> Multiple point of view is apparent in Cubism from its earliest, Analytical period for the purpose of representing "profound" reality, reality as it is conceived by the mind, the senses operating in conjunction with the memory and imagination, rather than as it is perceived by the eye, from one fixed viewpoint at one instant in time. (49)

If Branch is correct, this cubist influence on Darl extends to his representing "profound" reality by performing it, i.e., adopting the voice and point of view of all the other speakers in the novel in turn. In this way, Cubism informs not only Darl's individual way of seeing the world, but also the whole world that is the text, as

mediated through Darl's performing consciousness. In effect, the novel of voices, defined in visualist terms, is the cubist novel (Broughton "Cubist" and "Faulkner's"), and Darl, being the only character in the novel with the breadth of experience and the poetic sensibility realistically to speak Faulknerian language and think cubistically, is also the only character capable of being the performing consciousness of the work.

I find, then, that the sophisticated language of *As I Lay Dying* and Darl's central role within the novel (especially his links with Faulkner and Pierrot) are evidence that he is the performing consciousness of the novel. I now want to consider the implications of this role, specifically in terms of the shamanistic characteristics Darl exhibits.

IMPLICATIONS OF DARL'S PERFORMANCE: DARL AS SHAMAN

In *As I Lay Dying*, Darl at least attempts to fulfill the purpose and function of shamanism, and he enacts processes following shamanic structures and using shamanic techniques such as rhythmic, sensuous language, eroticism, and images of birth, death, and natural cycles. First, Darl attempts to fulfill the larger purpose and the more specific functions of the shaman. In the larger social context, he is trying to establish equilibrium in the face of social upheaval. In a more specific sense, Darl is discovering Addie's (and the rest of the family's) secrets and escorting Addie to a resting place. In addition, Darl is attempting to cure himself of his own psychic disturbances.

The social disruption that Darl must address in *As I Lay Dying* is elemental and specific–the death of the mother. Although Addie's death is essentially a family matter, the ordeal of escorting Addie to her resting place affects the rural community of the Bundrens' neighbors as well as the people of Jefferson at the very least by having to endure the outrageous smell of her passing coffin. Darl's role in this ritual is a negative one, however, in that he tries to come between Addie and Jewel at a time when social custom dictates that a family bond together. Darl prevents Jewel from being present at Addie's death, abandons the coffin during the river crossing, and sets a barn on fire in an attempt to burn her body. These events distort the structure that society depends upon (burial of the dead), and Darl's response is an understandable if antisocial way to establish equilibrium.

More specifically, though, Darl's shaman-like purpose is to uncover the secrets of his family, particularly the secret that Jewel is not Anse's son, but rather the product of an adulterous liaison between Addie and Rev. Whitfield. This secret is pivotal because it represents Darl's exclusion from a relationship with an adequately mirroring, idealized selfobject, to use the language of object relations. Thus, Jewel is for Darl the focal point of all that Darl has been denied, the symbol of his damaged self. Jewel has the favored relationship with Addie that Darl needs in order to integrate his fragmented self. Furthermore, Dewey Dell's secret pregnancy echoes Addie's deceitful pregnancy, and thus Darl's clairvoyant discovery of his sister's secret reenacts the pivotal discovery. To support this claim about Darl's shamanic purpose entails further exploring his dominant obsession with Jewel and his secondary obsession with Dewey Dell. This exploration will also shed light on Darl's Pierrotesque qualities.

Eleven of Darl's nineteen sections of the novel open with his preoccupation with Jewel (Bleikasten 88–89). The reason for Darl's obsession with Jewel is not revealed until section 32, almost the dead center of the novel, in one of its rare flashbacks. The

family stands at the riverbank, about to commence the catastrophic trial by water that will cripple Cash and drown the mules (whose loss must ultimately be replaced at the cost of Jewel's horse). Tull narrates the preceding section, reporting the discussion about whether to cross. One of the last statements quoted by Tull is Darl's only speech in the section: "Jewel's going to use his horse. Why wont you risk your mule, Vernon?" The next section picks up the thread of Darl's preoccupation with Jewel and his horse: "He sits the horse, glaring at Vernon, his lean face suffused up to and beyond the pale rigidity of his eyes" (120–21).

The next sentence begins the flashback to three years before when Jewel "took a spell of sleeping." When Cash and Darl realize that Jewel is sneaking out at night, they assume that Jewel is "rutting" with a married woman. It is striking in light of Darl's clairvoyance elsewhere in the novel that he does not have the power to read Jewel's secret. Watson Branch explains the discrepancy indirectly when he implies that the source of Darl's clairvoyance is madness, triggered by his traumatic experience in the war,[6] which must have occurred after this episode. Branch points out that "Darl is mad in the opening section, though he is certainly more in control of himself than he will be in the closing sections. But he is not mad [and hence not clairvoyant] in the flashback scene (121–29) in which he describes Jewel's working to buy his horse, a section that predates the wartime trip to France" (43). I have no doubt that Darl's wartime experience may well have contributed to his psychic fragmentation, but more significant to my mind is Darl's discovery of Addie's capacity for deceit, since it is Addie's emotional neglect of Darl that her secrets represent for him. She covers up for Jewel's undone chores:

> It was ma that got Dewey Dell to do his milking, paid her somehow, and the other jobs around the house that Jewel had been doing before supper she found some way for Dewey Dell and Vardaman to do them. And doing them herself when pa wasn't there. She would fix him special things to eat and hide them for him. *And that may have been when I first found it out,* that Addie Bundren should be hiding anything she did, who had tried to teach us that deceit was such that, in a world where it was, nothing else could be very bad or very important, not even poverty. (123, emphasis mine)

Addie's deceit is indicative of her denying him the mothering he needed in order to develop a strong self. His discovery that Addie is capable of deceit, of keeping and hiding secrets, sets him on an obsessive search for the secrets of others in order to repair the damage to his fragmented self. At this point, his telepathic powers emerge. Later, when Jewel fails to show up to work in the field, Darl mentions that "now it was like we had all–by a kind of *telepathic* agreement of admitted fear–flung the whole thing back like covers on the bed and we all sitting bolt upright in our nakedness, staring at one another and saying 'Now is the truth'" (127, emphasis mine). Thus, Darl's telepathic power stems from a fear of being excluded, shut out from his mother's affections. Darl compensates for the absence of his mother's love by appropriating her secrets, by stripping her naked, an image with revealing sexual overtones.[7] Darl becomes a psychic voyeur. That night, when he finds Addie crying beside the sleeping Jewel, he makes a traumatic realization: "And then I knew that I knew. I knew that as plain on that day as I knew about Dewey Dell on that day" (129). The secret, however, is not yet revealed to the reader, but the reference to Dewey Dell's secret is a clue to its sexual nature.

Darl consciously connects knowing Addie's secret with knowing something about

his sister. Dewey Dell's secret had been revealed in her first monologue: it was the outcome of going with Lafe "on into the secret shade."

> It was then, and then I saw Darl and he knew. He said he knew without the words like he told me that ma is going to die without the words, and I knew he knew because if he had said he knew with the words I would not have believed that he had been there and saw us. But he said he did know and I said "Are you going to tell pa are you going to kill him?" without the words I said it and he said "Why?" without the words. And that's why I can talk to him with knowing with hating because he knows.
> He stands in the door, looking at her [Addie].
> "What you want, Darl?" I say.
> "She is going to die," he says. . . .
> "When is she going to die?" I say.
> "Before we [Darl and Jewel] get back," he says.
> "Then why are you taking Jewel?" I say.
> "I want him to help me load," he says. (26–27)

Notice that Dewey Dell identifies Darl's telepathic communication (speaking "without the words") with two messages: his knowledge of her sexual activity and of Addie's impending death. In addition to his telepathic powers, Darl has prescient knowledge of when Addie will die, another case of Darl appropriating Addie's secret life, involving in this case a secret that even Addie doesn't know. Darl's first allusion to Dewey Dell's secret pregnancy further cements the connection with Addie:

> "Jewel," I say . . . . "Do you know she is going to die, Jewel?"
> It takes two people to make you, and one people to die. That's how the world is going to end.
> I said to Dewey Dell: "You want her to die so you can get to town: is that it?" She wouldn't say what we both knew. "The reason you will not say it is, when you say it, even to yourself, you will know it is true: is that it? but you know it is true now. I can almost tell you the day when you knew it is true. Why wont you say it, even to yourself?" She will not say it. (38–39)

Darl associates Addie's death ("she is going to die") with sex ("It takes two people to make you") and both with Dewey Dell's planned abortion ("so you can get to town"). Darl's shamanic powers are thus intimately linked with biological processes of sex, birth, and death.

His mother and his sister are the only two characters in the novel whose hidden secrets Darl uncovers through telepathy.[8] This suggests that Darl's telepathic power has incestuous overtones; certainly any number of critics have commented on Darl's repressed incestuous desires.[9] Darl clearly is aware of Dewey Dell's sexuality. For example: "She sets the basket into the wagon and climbs in, her leg coming long from beneath her tightening dress: that lever that moves the world; one of that caliper which measures the length and breadth of life" (98); "Squatting, Dewey Dell's wet dress shapes for the dead eyes of three blind men those mammalian ludicrosities which are the horizons and valleys of the earth" (156). Yet Darl expresses this awareness in a voyeuristic manner peculiarly lacking in eroticism. Sensibar relates a tendency toward voyeurism to the modernist Pierrot mask, using evidence from Storey.

> Laforgue's Pierrot is an obsessive voyeur who prefers to look rather than act. Thus he constantly assumes "a stylized pose of total, deathlike, amused passivity." Thus Pierrot's sexual orientation was compatible to both Eliot and Faulkner. (xviii)

Yet, such looking is also an assertion of power. Robert J. Stoller, M.D., explains that a voyeur typically compensates for feelings of inadequacy with the opposite sex by "robbing the woman of her privacy, forcing her to give up what she wouldn't give *him* voluntarily" (21). This explanation fits with Darl's tendency to taunt Dewey Dell with his clairvoyant knowledge.

Darl's voyeurism also seems to focus mysteriously on Jewel. As revealed in the flashback just before the river-crossing, Darl's obsession with Jewel began with Darl's discovery of Addie's capacity for deceit. Addie, "who had tried to teach us that deceit was such that, in a world where it was, nothing else could be very bad or very important" (123), has herself deceived the family in an as yet undisclosed way. The effect on Darl is equivalent to a primal scene. The section ends with Darl's memory of finding "ma sitting beside the bed where [Jewel] was sleeping, in the dark. . . . And then I knew that I knew. I knew that as plain on that day as I knew about Dewey Dell on that day" (129). This intuitive discovery concludes Darl's flashback account of how Jewel acquired his horse. It is only after the disastrous river-crossing that we learn what Darl knew.

The voyeuristic nature of Darl's obsession with Jewel is most explicit in a scene early in the novel when Anse's question "Where's Jewel?" launches Darl into a stream-of-consciousness revery. Before Darl answers (" 'Down to the barn,' I say. 'Harnessing the team.'"), he remembers masturbating as an adolescent, and then he has a clairvoyant vision of a kind of primal scene between Jewel and his horse. It climaxes with the following passage:

> Then they are rigid, motionless, terrific, the horse back-thrust on stiffened, quivering legs, with lowered head; 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.
>
> They stand in rigid terrific hiatus, the horse trembling and groaning. Then Jewel is on the horse's back. He flows upward in a stooping swirl like the lash of a whip, his body in midair shaped to the horse. For another moment the horse stands spraddled, with lowered head, before it bursts into motion. (12)

This episode has blatantly sexual overtones. In it, Darl voyeuristically intrudes upon a scene of ferocious eroticism, as opposed to just knowing the secrets of Addie and Dewey Dell. Jewel and his horse symbolize for Darl the matrix of secrets from which Darl is excluded. This only becomes apparent to the reader after the river-crossing, when another atemporal section occurs. As one Faulkner scholar describes it,

> [t]he Bundrens cross the river almost at the exact center of the book. The major revelations in the novel frame the event. Darl recalls the story of Jewel and his horse just before they cross the river; the *Cora/Addie/Whitfield* sections immediately follow the daring of the river. Both the information contained in these sections and their placement in the novel make clear their importance. After the triptych, the reader can evaluate more accurately the characters' perceptions and understand more clearly the pattern of relationships that is being worked out during the journey. (Patten 10)

The framing of the river-crossing with these two atemporal sections emphasizes Darl's performance of the voices. It is *his* perceptions of Jewel that we come to understand in light of the pattern of Darl's relationship with Addie. The physical trauma of the river-crossing conjures in Darl's consciousness his performance of the

source of his psychic trauma: Addie. Her lack of mirroring of Darl is evident in her monologue:

> Then I found that I had Darl. At first I would not believe it. Then I believed that I would kill Anse. It was as though he had tricked me, hidden within a word like within a paper screen and struck me in the back through it. But then I realised that I had been tricked by words older than Anse or love, and that the same word had tricked Anse too, and that my revenge would be that he would never know I was taking revenge. And when Darl was born I asked Anse to promise to take me back to Jefferson when I died, because I knew that father had been right, even when he couldn't have known he was right anymore than I could have known I was wrong. (164–65)

In this paragraph, Darl (as the performing consciousness) juxtaposes not only Addie's failure to mother him, but he also presents the whole grotesque journey to bury Addie as her revenge on Anse. How could Addie have known when Darl was born that the journey to bury her would be such a trial–that rain would delay starting and wash out the bridge? She could be clairvoyant too, but I suggest that the better explanation is that Darl is projecting this foresight on Addie by having her predict that Jewel will save her "from the water and from the fire." Of course, Jewel just *has* saved her from the water, and the fire from which he will later save her is started by Darl. Darl as the performing consciousness is foreshadowing what he plans to do.

Darl's resentment of Jewel stems from unmet narcissistic needs, which prevent Darl from developing a strong self. His lack of a self is epitomized when he says "I dont know what I am. I dont know if I am or not. Jewel knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know whether he is or not" (76). Jewel is the embodiment of a cohesive, opaque self, unlike Darl. The recurring image associated with Jewel is that of woodenness and rigidity (Simon 105).

All of Darl's major actions in the novel intrude on Jewel's secret relationship with Addie (and, by transference, the horse). He takes Jewel away from Addie's deathbed; in the river crossing, he keeps urging Jewel to cross ahead of the wagon, risking the horse; he contributes to losing the mules, which are replaced by trading Jewel's horse; and he sets fire to Gillespie's barn to destroy Addie's corpse. After the horse has been traded, Darl's taunting of Jewel escalates, changing from "It's not your horse that's dead" (88) to "Your mother was a horse, but who was your father?" (202). In the barn fire, Darl tries to prevent Jewel from rescuing Addie's corpse; later, we learn from Vardaman, Darl lies on the coffin ("on her," Vardaman says) weeping.

Darl's specific shamanic purpose (to uncover secrets) focuses on Addie and Dewey Dell, and the voyeurism which is his Pierrotesque legacy, on Jewel. Darl's voyeurism and obsession with uncovering secrets is evidence of a damaged self.

Another shamanic purpose driving Darl is healing, the search for a cure for illness. Unlike most shamanic rituals of healing, however, Darl's is in his own behalf. Darl's appropriation of the secret lives of others functions for him as an attempt to restore a damaged self. By role-playing other voices, he merges with these others (in an outward motion) and appropriates their secrets in an attempt to achieve an integral self, the secrets representing the missing pieces of his fragmented self, pieces denied him by Addie and Anse. Then he must return to his own restored self (the corresponding inward motion). Even though Darl does not make it back, does not heal himself, that is the function of his role-taking in shamanic terms.

George Hutchinson argues that Walt Whitman's ecstatic role-playing had a healing effect on both the nation (in the throes of the Civil War) and on Whitman's own psyche, that Whitman's discovery of his role as shamanic prophet met both social and individual needs for equilibrium (33). Of course, Darl ultimately fails in his attempts to achieve personal psychological equilibrium, and he does not seem to have much success in the larger social arena either. What he does seem to exemplify is a failed initiation into shamanhood. According to I.M. Lewis in *Ecstatic Religion,* "[t]he attainment of the shaman's calling is normally the climax of a series of traumatic experiences and 'cures' in the course of which the extent of his control of trance progressively increases" (qtd in Hutchinson 127–28). Darl fails to master the dangerous art of ecstatic role playing and is lost on the liminal threshold of shamanism.

Darl is a successful shaman in his ability to conjure the spirits of the dead, however. Through his ecstatic role-taking, he penetrates the boundary separating the human world and the spirit world, and in the case of Addie, a voice from the dead does speak. Similarly, death is the symbolic landscape of *As I Lay Dying,* as even the title attests. Since the thematic importance of death in this novel is well documented,[10] I will only mention the overriding importance of Addie's death as the ongoing process that the novel enacts. The funeral and burial are part of this ritual process, and Addie's corpse remains a central and vital presence throughout the journey. "The journey is the passage from one world to another, and in *As I Lay Dying* this applies not only to the dead but also to the living," according to Andre Bleikasten (121). Thus, the whole family is making a rite of passage which, in symbolic terms, entails a passage through–and a trial by–the landscape of death. Darl's performance in the novel is then an exercise of shamanic powers stemming from symbolic contact with the land of the dead.

As a performing consciousness, Darl functions in ways analogous to that of a shaman. The comparison illuminates his role in the novel and, through their corresponding performances, the roles of the author and readers. All seek social and psychic equilibrium through contact with aesthetic and spiritual powers. Furthermore, at each level of role-playing, these functions are accomplished by means of shamanic processes and techniques: rhythmic, erotic evocations of natural cycles of birth and death.

Shamanism is a technique of ecstatic role playing often symbolized as a horseback ride, a coming out of oneself, a dissolution of the boundaries of self. Shamans exploit such ordinary sources of ecstasy as music and sex (as well as psychedelic drugs in some cases) to induce trances. As a performing consciousness, Darl makes analogous use of the rhythmic and sensuous properties of language, sometimes conveying erotic imagery, to transport him into the altered state of consciousness entailed by performance.

In *As I Lay Dying,* Darl demonstrates the process of ecstatic role taking through his use of rhythmic, erotic language. In the opening scene, a repetitive sound dominates, a sound which seems to hypnotize Darl, the sound of Cash making Addie's coffin:

> He . . . takes up the *adze*. A *good* carpenter. *Ad*die Bundren *could* not want a *better* one, a *better* box to lie in. It will give her confidence and comfort. I go on to the house, followed by the
>
> *Chuck.* *Chuck.* *Chuck.*
>
> of the *adze*. (Darl 4–5)

The weave of these sounds is loose, but there is still a discernable pattern of repetition. Individual phonemes further embellish the pattern. The alliteration of /b/ is most obvious ("*B*undren," "*b*etter," "*b*ox") because it is placed initially, but there is also a subtler, overlapping repetition in medial and final positions of /d/ ("a*d*ze," "goo*d*," "Bun*d*ren coul*d*," "confi*d*ence," "followe*d*," "a*d*ze") and /n/ ("carpe*n*ter," "Bu*n*dre*n*," "wa*n*t," "o*n*e," "i*n*," "co*n*fide*n*ce," "o*n*"). Finally, a sequence of initial /g/ followed by two initial /k/ sounds frames the whole passage ("*g*ood *c*arpenter . . . *c*ould"; "*g*ive her *c*onfidence and *c*omfort"). I suggest that these phonemic repetitions, as well as the sound of the adze, help Darl achieve the condition of ecstatic role-playing, which begins immediately after this passage with Cora's voice. (The "chuck" sounds of the adze also suggest clucking, the sound of the chickens Cora is so concerned about; the mindlessness of Cora's chatter is also itself like the clucking of a hen). When Cora's monologue is over, Darl speaks again, and we discover the first examples of his omniscience, also linked with sexual imagery.

The next passage, mentioned above in the context of Darl's voyeurism, merits a closer look here at its erotically charged shamanistic techniques. Darl is drinking from a gourd dipped in a water bucket. Anse asks "Where's Jewel?" and Darl slips into a revery in which he remembers getting up at night as a boy to drink from the bucket, liminal in that it is sandwiched between Anse's question and Darl's answer. Also, Darl's description of the bucket at night suggests an opening into another world:

> It would be black, the shelf black, the still surface of the water a round orifice in nothingness, where before I stirred it awake with the dipper I could see maybe a star or two in the bucket, and maybe in the dipper a star or two before I drank. (11)

In the next sentence, Darl makes an abrupt shift to a memory of adolescent masturbation.

> After that I was bigger, older. Then I would wait until they all went to sleep so I could lie with my shirt-tail up, hearing them asleep, feeling myself without touching myself, feeling the cool silence blowing upon my parts and wondering if Cash was yonder in the darkness doing it too, had been doing it perhaps for the last two years before I could have wanted to or could have. (11)

This is a paradigmatically shamanic moment for Darl–he looks into another world and sexual energies propel him toward discovery of secrets, particularly sexual secrets. Darl's vision of Jewel and the horse, the most vivid erotic passage in the novel, occurs immediately after this revery, a further revelation of Darl's shamanism.

As I pointed out earlier, the "primal scene" between Jewel and his horse has associations with Addie. Thus, Darl's technique of ecstatic role-taking also exemplifies the shamanic link with biological processes of sex, birth, and death. This becomes most explicit in Addie's monologue in which she talks about her marriage with Anse, the birth of her children, and her death. Furthermore, these references to biological processes are reinforced by recurring references to nature, particularly liminal images of nature in which one element blurs into another. According to Andre Bleikasten,

> [e]verything happens as if the elements were disputing Addie's corpse: air (the possibility of the body being left prey to the buzzards), water (the coffin immersed in the river), fire (cremation narrowly avoided in the fire scene), and earth, in which the dead woman is eventually buried, none of the "four countries of death" is missing from the novel. (120–21)

The blurring of the elements occurs through figurative language. Thus, Darl describes the river as composed of "troughs" and "hillocks," as partaking of the solidity of earth. Similarly, fire becomes like wind and rain in Darl's descriptions: "Overhead the flames sound like thunder; across from us rushes a cool draft: there is no heat in it at all yet, and a handful of chaff lifts suddenly and sucks swiftly along the stalls . . . ." (209); "a faint litter of sparks rains down" (210); "The sound of it has become quite peaceful now, like the sound of the river did" (211); "the rain of burning hay like a portiere of flaming beads" (211); "the sparks rain on [the coffin] in scattering bursts" (212); "the sparks raining on [Jewel] too in engendering gusts, so that he appears to be enclosed in a nimbus of fire" (212).

Darl demonstrates techniques for inducing ecstatic performance: rhythmic, sensuous language; erotic stimulation; and a preoccupation with liminal imagery. These manifestations of shamanic process are closely connected to the shamanic function and purpose discussed earlier. The shamanic process serves to induce a blurring of boundaries, especially in the realms of sex and death. Another major boundary straddled in ecstatic role-taking is that between sanity and madness. I want to conclude my discussion of *As I Lay Dying* with an examination of this threshold in the novel and how it relates to tour de force performance.

TOUR DE FORCE AS A "PERMISSABLE TRICK": MADNESS IN/AND PERFORMANCE

Roger Shattuck argues in his essay, "The Prince, the Actor, and I: The Histrionic Sensibility," that a new path to self-discovery emerged around the year 1800 in France "through the convergence of two previously unconnected strands: the fledgling science of mental medicine and the ancient profession of acting" (114). At this time, revolutions occurred that transformed the way society regarded and treated both the mentally ill and actors. Before this period, the insane were imprisoned and actors were social outcasts, both widely regarded as lacking selfhood and respectability. "Thus around 1800," according to Shattuck, "the conscious individual self asserted its presence in places that represented the opposite extremes of emptiness in human nature and lack of social status: madness and playacting" (116).

Shattuck's historical argument suggests a relationship between performance and mental health, echoing the Pierrotesque qualities of performing consciousness in the novel of voices. Shattuck notes that performance theorists ranging from Stanislavsky and Meyerhold to Artaud, Brecht, Grotowski, and Brook have made connections between therapy and acting (118). From this perspective, the ultimate goal of the role playing of a performing consciousness is to know the self through the other. In the cases of the writer and the reader/performer of a novel of voices such as *As I Lay Dying*, this process offers positive potential for greater integration of self. In the case of Darl, it leads to fragmentation of self, to madness. Julian Jaynes could be speaking for him:

> We hear voices of impelling importance that criticize us and tell us what to do. At the same time, we seem to lose the boundaries of ourselves. Time crumbles. We behave without knowing it. Our mental space begins to vanish. We panic, and yet the panic is not happening to us. There is no us. It is not that we have nowhere to turn; we have nowhere. And in that nowhere, we are somehow automatons, unknowing what we do, being manipulated by others or by our voices in strange and frightening ways in a place we come to recognize as a hospital with a diagnosis we are told is schizophrenia. (405)

If performance offers a means of forging a self, how do we reconcile the contradiction that it reduces Darl to madness?

The shamanic dimension of performing consciousness offers a partial explanation. Shamanism is a form of ritual death which poses the risk "of being lost to madness and the underworld, the chaos gaping like a great maw beneath the power of symbolization and self-control" (Hutchinson xxvi). Robert Langbaum elaborates further in *The Poetry of Experience* when he says that in romantic role playing

> there remains, however, the hard-headed critical awareness that the self is something other than the object, that the identification has been deliberately undertaken and is only temporary. . . . [W]hether the romanticist projects himself into the past, nature, or another person, he never forgets that he is playing a role. The result is that the experience makes him more acutely aware than ever of his own modernity and his own distinctness from the external world. The process of experience is for the romanticist a process of self-realization, of a constantly expanding discovery of the self through discoveries of its own imprint on the external world. (25)

Like the romantic and decadent versions of Pierrot, Darl's mistake is to forget that he is playing roles or, more accurately, to lose the sense of a self apart from the role. Darl addresses this uncertainty about self several times in the novel. In the seventeenth section of the novel, he says "I dont know what I am. I dont know if I am or not" (76), and the following exchange later occurs between Vardaman and Darl:

> "Then what is your ma, Darl?" I said.
> "I haven't got ere one." Darl said. "Because if I had one, it is *was*. And if it is was, it can't be *is*. Can it?"
> "No," I said.
> I am. Darl is my brother.
> "But you *are*, Darl." I said.
> "I know it." Darl said. "That's why I am not *is*. *Are* is too many for one woman to foal." (95)

Darl's sense of self is too protean to be contained in one son born of woman, i.e., Addie. As Melvin Backman says:

> Lacking a self and purpose of his own, Darl feeds compulsively on the others, especially on Jewel, feeling and generating resentment. These 'lacks' induce a fundamental contradiction within him; he multiplies 'selves' by entering into the others' secret emotional lives but cannot fill his own emptiness, cannot realize a self. (16)

Darl embodies the dangerous potential of the romantic way of knowing with which Faulkner was experimenting in his own life. Judith Sensibar indicates that "[i]n some ways Faulkner's behavior resembles that of pathological impostors" (43). Lionel Finkelstein defines such an imposter as

> a person who assumes a false name or identity for the purpose of deceiving others; he is a type of pathological liar who hopes to gain some advantage from his deception. His role playing differs from more normal forms of pretending and acting a part, which are forms of mastery or play, because it involves driven, repetitious behavior that stems from unresolved pathological inner conflicts. (qtd. in Sensibar 234 n9)

Sensibar argues that, in choosing to write, Faulkner also chose not to become an

imposter. Furthermore, as he wrote, his ambivalence about his identity

> move[d] tentatively toward resolution as he gain[ed] the distance needed to begin to give it an artistic rather than a neurotic form. . . . By 1927, Faulkner had completed the work necessary to achieve a creative identity separate from his youthful idealized images: the warrior and the poet Pierrot. In doing so he at last gained full control of his fantasy material. (Sensibar 43–44)

In *As I Lay Dying,* as in *The Sound and the Fury, Light in August,* and *Absalom, Absalom!,* Faulkner successfully portrayed the tragedies of men and women who "live through others, . . . [fanatically devoted] to private untranslatable dreams. . . . But worst of all, they never know who they are" (Sensibar 55). By transmuting his real-life role playing into art, Faulkner avoided being destroyed by it and provided readers with the opportunity to experience "a constantly expanding discovery of the self" through their personal performances of *As I Lay Dying.*

In short, Darl goes mad because he lacks "the hard-headed critical awareness that the self is something other than the object, that the identification [of performer with role] has been deliberately undertaken and is only temporary," as Langbaum says. The author who creates such a fragmented performing consciousness avoids, as did Faulkner, becoming a pathological imposter by realizing his identity as an artist, by finding a way to translate his private dreams into literature. Darl has no such integrating identity because he has no outlet for his artistic tendencies. He is, in fact, defined more by what he is not, than by what he is.

In his conferences at the University of Virginia in 1957–58, Faulkner was once asked how Darl could narrate Addie's death when he wasn't present at it. Faulkner replied:

> Who can say how much of the good poetry in the world has come out of madness, and who can say just how much of super-perceptivity the–a mad person might not have? It may not be so, but it's nice to think that there is some compensation for madness. That maybe the madman does see more than the sane man. That the world is more moving to him. That he is more perceptive. He has something of clairvoyance, maybe, a capacity for telepathy. Anyway, nobody can dispute it and that was a very good way, I thought, a very effective way to tell what was happening back there at home–well, call it a change of pace. (Gwynn 113)

His response connects Darl's special powers with both madness and poetry, and also by implication with Faulkner's own creative process, his own "good poetry." "A trick," he concludes, " but since the whole book was a *tour de force,* I think that is a permissable trick" (113). Faulkner's tour de force one-man show in *As I Lay Dying* tricks the reader as well as Darl into creating a dizzying array of roles. Like a shaman or a virtuoso solo performer, Faulkner does not hesitate to use technical "tricks" in the service of healing or art.

NOTES

[1]*As I Lay Dying* has often been adapted for group performance in various media. Jean-Louis Barrault adapted, directed, and performed in (as both Jewel and Addie) a 1935 Paris pantomime production that was enthusiastically reviewed by Antonin Artaud (Barrault 30–44). Truman Capote was less than enthusiastic about Valerie Bettis's 1949 dance version (Capote 49). In 1991, a concert operatic version, composed by David P. McKay with a libretto by Laura Jehn Menides, was presented at the 18th annual Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference at the University of Mississippi in Oxford (Ingalls). I am aware of three professional dramatic adaptations. In addition to the 1995

Steppenwolf Theatre Company production in Chicago adapted and directed by Frank Galati, a decade earlier Peter Gill directed his own adaptation for the National Theatre's experimental Cottesloe Theatre in London (Mackinnon 1208). Thirty years before that, in the 1960s, novelist Robert Flynn's adaptation (entitled *Journey to Jefferson*) toured Europe in a production directed by Paul Baker and has been staged in a variety of venues since (Logan). I know of no full-length solo performances of the novel.

[2]For an overview of the criticism of *As I Lay Dying*, I recommend Cox, Bleikasten's *Faulkner's "As I Lay Dying"*, condensed and updated in Bleikasten's *The Ink of Melancholy*, 149–209; and Wadlington.

[3]For a discussion of performing consciousness in other novels of voices as well as *As I Lay Dying*, see Anderson.

[4]Branch cites Bleikasten 90; Blotner 635; Brooks 145–56, 398–99; Handy 445; Reed 90; and Simon.

[5]Branch argues that "Faulkner makes no specific mention of Darl's ever having seen art works in France, but the internal circumstantial evidence points in that direction even more strongly than it does regarding the war. Such an exposure would provide Darl with a realistic source for certain imagery–imagery that is the major qualitative feature that sets his language apart from that of the other characters. Allusions to Greek friezes and Cubistic bugs, to carved tableaux and painted canvases, seem highly inappropriate for a country boy and have led even so astute a critic as Olga Vickery to say, 'The images are not derived from Darl's experience but rather snatched from some region beyond his knowledge and comprehension' " (113). Furthermore, Branch argues convincingly that Faulkner, himself a graphic artist, probably saw the artwork of the cubists, futurists, and vorticists while he was in Paris in the twenties.

[6]Branch points out that "[t]he traumatic experience of war puts Darl in the company of other characters Faulkner created during this early period of his writing, characters such as Bayard Sartoris III, Donald Mahon, and Elmer Hodge. They return home from war unfit to cope with life as they find it, and they escape it one way or another" (112). Branch also supports his claim by citing Michael Millgate's remark about "the extraordinary persistence with which the First World War pervades Faulkner's work both as subject-matter and as theme–as a point of reference, a gauge of morale, a phenomenon at once physical and psychical with which his characters must come to terms" (qtd. in113).

[7]The image of Addie's nakedness occurs earlier in the novel as well. In one of Darl's sections, Darl describes Addie's coffin as resisting the effort to lift it "as though within it her pole-thin body clings furiously, even though dead, to a sort of modesty, as she would have tried to conceal a soiled garment that she could not prevent her body soiling. Then it breaks free, rising suddenly . . . as though, seeing that the garment was about to be torn from her, she rushes suddenly after it in a passionate reversal that flouts its own desire and need" (91–92). Again the image of shedding clothes acquires a sexual overtone.

[8]Granted, he also knows that Anse wants to get "them teeth," but Anse talks about saving money to buy the false teeth in Armstid's section, so it seems likely that he had complained about it on other occasions as well. Thus, Anse's selfish preoccupation is not really a secret.

[9]See particularly Irwin and Backman.

[10]See the section on "Death and Madness" in Andre Bleikasten's chapter on "Themes" in *Faulkner's As I Lay Dying* 115–26.

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