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Research Abstract

This paper will delineate the subject of Darl’s purported insanity by answering a series of questions: Do Darl’s actions in As I Lay Dying correspond to an expert (rather than a socially construed) definition of insanity? Is there enough evidence to support the conjecture that Darl was committed to an insane asylum purely because of his family members’ ulterior motives? If insane, can Darl’s madness be traced throughout the novel or does it only fully present itself in his last chapter? To answer these questions, I will analyze Darl’s actions and reasoning in the chapters immediately preceding the barn arson through his final chapter, as well as connect other characters’ portrayals of him to their individual interests throughout the course of the novel. “A Discourse Analysis of Darl’s Descent into Madness in Faulkner’s As I Lay Dying” by Shannon Terry Wiley will establish one potential mode for analyzing Darl’s insanity, while “Shaping the Life of Man: Darl Bundren as Supplementary Narrator in As I Lay Dying” by Laura Mathews will present rationales for his insanity within his role as a character and as a literary device. Based on preliminary research, I expect to find that Darl Bundren is indeed insane at the end of the novel, but was not necessarily so at the beginning and is not forever consigned to such a fate. If this conclusion can be reached, it will provide an important lens for understanding insanity as a changeable phenomenon rather than an irreversible quality, which would have implications both inside and out of the field of literature.