A Damaged Youth

Growing up in a dysfunctional family can greatly influence a child's mind. It can make them more adaptable or simply damage them for life. In William Faulkner's book *As I Lay Dying,* the youngest Bundren child, Vardaman, is surrounded by the chaos caused by his father and older siblings. Without any emotional support through the death of his mother, he is sent down a spiraling path of mental instability, just as his brother Darl.

Jewel

*As I Lay Dying*, by William Faulkner, is a Southern Gothic novel about the Bundren family. Many of the character’s issues arise because of Anse’s lack of parental guidance, care, and leadership. Jewel is the illegitimate child of Addie and Pastor Whitfield. Jewel, throughout the novel, shows loving affection through violence. He is hardworking and independent but shows sacrifice and loyalty to his family in times of need.

Darl

In the novel *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner, there is a character that stands out from the rest of the Bundren family. Darl is different from everyone else in the book because he has the most chapters, speaks and thinks the most fluently, and is sent to a mental institution at the end. There is a lot of room for debate on whether or not Darl was truly mentally instable. However, there is sufficient evidence from the words Faulkner wrote that Darl is not actually crazy.

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Quoted material:

Through even a rainstorm in the darkness of night, "Cash looks at the sky, then at the lantern. The saw has not faltered, the running gleam of its pistoning edge unbroken. 'Get something to cover the lantern,' he says."

For example, Addie indeed had a special connection with Cash that needed no words, yet pride seemed to be a factor in her inability to say “I love you” to him or her husband. Addie explains, “Cash did not need to say it to me nor I to him, and I would say, Let Anse use it…”

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Jewel, another of Cash's brothers, views his dedication to the building of Addie's coffin as a morbid obsession. He states that Cash spends "all day... hammering and sawing." Directly after Addie succumbs to her illness, Anse instructs Cash to finish the coffin. While it is clear this is because Anse doesn’t know how to morn her death, Cash uses his dedication and craft to mourn for his mother. His first narrated chapter is a detailed list of the reasons he constructed the coffin in a specific way. Cash was showing his love for Addie through the quality of his work, putting it on a bevel to make it "a neater job." When Jewel's horse flings mud on the coffin, Cash removes it with his tools and fixes the stains with wet leaves. Through the Bundren's journey to transport Addie to Jefferson, Cash becomes fixated that the coffin is not perfect enough because it is "not on a balance." When Darl is taken away to an asylum, Cash processes the situation by comparing shoddy craftsmanship with proper technique and care. It is clear he doesn’t have the appropriate vocabulary to assess the situation in any other way.

Jewel, the bastard child and Addie’s favorite son, is described as a young man who uses violence as a way of showing affection and is the one who truly loves his mother. Darl is the one who gives the illustration of Jewel and often refers to him as “Motionless, wooden-backed, wooden-faced…” Throughout the novel, Darl is the one who repeatedly states how stiff Jewel is, and in fact, the first time Jewel is introduced, Darl describes he was “Staring straight ahead, his pale eyes like wood set into his wooden face, he crosses the floor in four strides with the rigid gravity of a cigar store Indian…” It is revealed later that Jewel is not Anse’s biological son, and Darl knows this; using these stoic, wood terms in a somewhat vague way is how Darl separates Jewel from the rest of the family, hinting that he does not belong among them.