Pa Says: The Rhetoric of Faulkner’s Anse Bundren

As I Lay Dying is certainly a very funny novel, and most readers would agree that lazy, bumbling, toothless Anse Bundren carries the weight of Faulkner’s humor in this work. André Bleikasten calls Anse “unquestionably the great comic creation of the novel.”¹ However, if we agree with Robert Penn Warren’s assertion that “humor in Faulkner’s work is never exploited for its own sake,”² then we must consider how to understand Anse Bundren in the context of the novel’s meaning and purpose. Such an attempt raises many problems: Faulkner’s purpose, the function of various characters, the identity of the novel’s major character, and even the form of the novel have all been debated at length and with some heat. Thornton Parsons refers to “Faulkner’s austere refusal to do more than imply” in this novel and states that this refusal “throws an unusual burden upon the reader,”³ and my experience with this work shows Parson’s comment to be true. I found a kind of opacity in As I Lay Dying which forced me to sit barefoot on Anse’s porch, concentrating on bringing to my understanding of each voice and event all that I have learned about families, communities, and individual motivation. Without inflating the importance of Anse by claiming his centrality as some critics have done,⁴ surely to ignore the detail and abundance of the description of Anse by other narrators, or to reduce such richness to “unspeakable Anse,”⁵ is to refuse to read, and hear, and see the novel clearly.

As I Lay Dying, like all of Faulkner’s novels, has received its share of critical attention, ranging from early disparagement (The New York

³Thornton H. Parsons, “Doing the Best They Can,” Georgia Review, 23 (Fall 1969), 292.
⁴See, for example, Robert W. Kirk, “Faulkner’s Anse Bundren,” Georgia Review, 19 (Winter 1965), 446.
Times Book Review criticized Faulkner for spending “his rich inventive faculty on such a witch’s brew of a family”\(^6\) to contemporary discussions of the book in terms of “oral stages.”\(^7\) Not all of the critical treatment of As I Lay Dying has been so unfortunate, but scholars have not yet produced the full and taxing examination of Anse which Gail Morrison has made of Cora and Vernon Tull. This paper does not claim to be such a complete study; Anse is a major character, certainly, whose actions figure into almost every chapter of the novel. What I seek to accomplish here is to suggest some new directions for integrating the character of Anse Bundren with the novel’s treatment of family, community, and nature.

Anse is, as Bleikasten notes, “the most minutely described” character in the novel (p. 74). While certain features like Addie’s hands or Vardaman’s round eyes are often described, no other character is given the extensive physical description which Faulkner affords Anse. We know what Anse’s feet look like; they are “badly splayed, his toes cramped and bent and warped, with no toenail at all on his little toes”\(^8\); we wonder how his homemade brogans fit (p. 11). We know that “[s]ince he lost his teeth his mouth collapses in slow repetition when he dips” (p. 17), and we know that what he dips is snuff. We could draw a picture of Anse’s “awry hair” (p. 19) and stubbled face with “eyes like pieces of burnt-out cinder” (pp. 30-31), and we could pick his shirt out of the laundry because the sleeves would be too short, the part that covers his hump would be “faded lighter than the rest of it” (p. 16), and it’s probably the only one without a sweat stain (p. 30). His overalls would be easy to identify as well: “on one knee [is] a serge patch cut out of a pair of Sunday pants” (p. 28). Since all this detail is conveyed through the monologues of Anse’s family and neighbors, particularly those of Darl and Vernon Tull, we have ample reason to assume that Anse is a person whom other characters notice and see as significant.

The gestures which characterize Anse are even more telling and have the effect of animating Anse for the reader. These gestures are given force through repetition; Anse rubs his knees on page after page,


especially in the first third of the book. He “gazes out across the land” three times on a single page (p. 17). Anse couldn’t be expected to move too fast; we are told again and again that he “dassent sweat” (p. 25). Since his hair is always “awry,” we know that he has “pushed and matted [it] up on his head like a dipped rooster” (p. 43). When agitated, Anse “walks around. His shadow walks around” (p. 63), giving him that same kind of inescapable presence the adze assumes with its steady rhythm. But we’d most likely find Anse standing or sitting still, “like he dont aim to move again nor nothing else” (p. 31); he mustn’t sweat, remember.

Anse’s laziness is one characteristic critics often mention. Robert Kirk thinks that it stems from “lack of imagination” and that Anse’s laziness is not of the “temperamental” or “calculated” sort (p. 446), but most scholars disagree. Thornton Parsons sees Anse’s “laziness, stubbornness and dependency” as “unlikely credentials” of leadership but nonetheless successful (p. 300), while Cleanth Brooks, who holds Anse almost as low as a Snopes, feels

disgust for his essential callousness and cruelty, baffled admiration for the stubborn vitality which like that of some low order of organism allows him to fatten on what would starve nobler creatures and survive blasts that would kill more sensitive organisms, and, not least, a sense of simple awe at the sheer thickness of his skin. (p. 155)

Of Anse’s characteristic verbal expressions, “I am a luckless man” (p. 18), “I done my best” (p. 100), and, of the journey to Jefferson to bury his wife, it “was her wish” (p. 19), only the claim to being luckless is demonstrably true. As the string of misfortunes turns one hard day’s ride, or a two- or three-day journey by mule and wagon, into a ten-day endurance trial replete with flood, fire, buzzards, and a steaming unembalmed corpse, Anse’s lucklessness becomes harder and harder to doubt.

Certainly these gestures and characteristics have been noticed before, and their recitation as a kind of litany of Anse’s faults and ridiculous qualities reduces the Bundren progenitor to a Harry Crews grotesque. If Anse is to be more than a caricature, these same gestures must be examined more carefully and collectively than critics have yet attempted.

First, Darl provides some motivation for Anse’s laziness and fear of sweating. Anse “was sick once from working in the sun when he was twenty-two years old, and he tells people that if he ever sweats, he will die. I suppose he believes it” (p. 17). We can’t know if he believes it, since

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his sections don't address this directly, but sweat is an important topic about which Anse has much to say. As he drives past the flooded fields on the journey to Jefferson, he pictures the flood waters as "sweat of [a man's] body washed up outen the Lord's earth, where the Lord Himself told him to put it" (p. 104), which suggests a certain bitterness toward God, as well as an imagination and reflection that Kirk's essay and Joseph Gold's depiction of Anse as a "comic Job" deny. The image of sweat precipitates Anse's longest and, in many ways, most revealing speech:

Nowhere in this sinful world can a honest, hardworking man profit. It takes them that runs the stores in the towns, doing no sweating, living off of them that sweats. It aint the hardworking man, the farmer. Sometimes I wonder why we keep at it. It's because there is a reward for us above, where they cant take their autos and such. Every man will be equal there and it will be taken from them that have and give to them that have not by the Lord. (p. 104)

A Marxist critic wouldn't have to stretch too far to use terms like "alienation of labor" in relation to the passage above, and, indeed, this perspective provides motivation for Anse which has been too little explored. Sylvia Jenkins Cook has given brief mention to Anse's "class-conscious" thoughts, stating that "the implications of passages like the [foregoing] from Anse cannot be wholly dismissed by the irony of their emergence from a dishonest, parasitic, and irreligious man."[10] Darl informs us that Anse got his splayed and warped toes "from working so hard in the wet in homemade shoes when he was a boy" (p. 11), and Anse's bitterness toward town folk may explain his refusal to go to town for twelve years (p. 41), and perhaps even his dislike of the road. Anse's preoccupation with sweat is not entirely idiosyncratic; Tull looks across his land and his house "sweated outen it like it was the more the sweat, the broader the land" (p. 132), and Cash sees a man's sweat as such a valuable commodity that through it he comes to believe that Darl belongs in Jackson after all:

Because there just aint nothing justifies the deliberate destruction of what a man has built with his own sweat and stored the fruit of his sweat into. (p. 228)

If Anse has deliberately based his decision not to sweat on a bitterness

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toward God and the inequality of the economic system, a bitterness he shares with members of his family and community, rather than an irrational fear that sweat will kill him, his character must be reevaluated. Much of the discrepancy between Anse’s bumbling, inept buffoonery and the reflective, self-conscious decision not to sweat may be explained by examining Anse’s rhetoric and its purposes, and then examining how these purposes change.

As I Lay Dying contains several instances of Anse’s insincerity and use of words to obtain a goal. The passage in which Anse bullies Dewey Dell out of her abortion money constitutes a classic example:

“It’s just a loan. God knows, I hate for my blooden children to reproach me. But I give them what was mine without stint. Cheerful I give them, without stint. And now they deny me. Addie. It was lucky for you you died, Addie.” (p. 246)

This brief passage, of course, contains several blatant lies: Anse won’t repay the money, he never gave anything unstintingly in his life, and he doesn’t at all mind being reproached—at least, he doesn’t mind enough to desist. Yet Anse contrives to cloak these lies with appeals to Dewey Dell’s love for her mother and recognition of her father’s parental authority and, subtly, her guilt not even connected to this particular incident, and Anse finally persuades her to relinquish the money. Only a master manipulator of words and people can use language to such effect, giving the lie to Anse’s indecision and ineptitude. Anse’s passive resistance and skillful manipulation of people and events secures his revenge against God and man for the injustices he has suffered. Therefore, Peabody pays the Bundrens’ hotel bill in Jefferson; Vernon Tull, a man with no sons to help him at all, donates his time to a healthy man with three grown sons; and Anse maneuvers himself out of any significant work.

We see an example of this dynamic in work when Vernon Tull and Anse sit on the porch while the Tull women sit in the house with the dying Addie. Vernon says, “About that corn. . . . I tell him again I will help him out if he gets into a tight, with her sick and all. Like most folks around here, I done holp him so much already I cant quit now” (p. 32). Anse counters with, “I aimed to get to it today. . . . Seems like I cant get my mind on nothing.” Vernon, rightly interpreting this to mean that Anse has no intention of working the corn, pushes Anse a little: “Maybe [Addie’ll] hold out till you are laid-by,” to which Anse delivers the masterful and unanswerable salvo, “If God wills it” (p. 32), thereby absolving
himself and putting the blame onto God—or, if Vernon is so uncharitable as to refuse to help, onto Vernon Tull.

By involving God, Anse is also able to vent his bitterness toward religion and religious people. Anse states in one of his monologues, "I am not religious, I reckon" (p. 37), yet falling back and punting on God is one of his favorite plays. "I tried to do as she would wish it," Anse says. "The Lord will pardon me and excuse the conduct of them He sent me" (p. 100). Christians like Cora and Vernon are Anse's favorite dupes, just as one of Anse's favorite and oft-repeated phrases is, "There is Christians enough to help you" (p. 49). Anse loves to use this phrase as some businessmen love to inventory their assets.

Even for a master manipulator of language such as Anse, though, maintaining the support of his neighbors and friends can be a delicate matter requiring an extremely light touch. Anse finds himself in danger of becoming, like Alfred P. Doolittle in My Fair Lady, a member of the "undeserving poor." Anse is well aware that country people's notion of Christian duty is a bit like the Internal Revenue Service's idea of a charitable deduction: not all causes qualify, and the good isn't measured solely by intention. This accounts for much of Anse's shuffling, mumbling way, an act critics have learned to recognize with black men manipulating white men but one which we find more difficult to identify in a white Southerner such as Anse. In one of Darl's early sections, he recounts the decision that he and Jewel would leave for a load of lumber. Jewel hitchs the team and comes to the porch. Darl looks to Anse to obtain his permission for the trip. Anse "mislike[s] indecision," but Vernon is a very attentive bystander to this event and one whom Anse cannot afford to alienate. Anse takes a passive role, letting Jewel and Darl appear to make the decision. Actually, of course, the decision remained Anse's all along; as everyone was well aware, all Anse had to do was say no. By withdrawing, he gave tacit consent. Cora adopted the attitude that Anse had wanted to avoid; she said that "Anse Bundren was driving [Darl] from his mother's death bed, never to see her in this world again" (p. 20). Anse, through his careful handling of the scene, was able to maintain a precarious balance in his relationship with Vernon Tull, but that both parties knew what had really transpired is evident in the conversation between Anse and Vernon in Tull's section after Jewel and Darl have left. Anse compels Tull to absolve him verbally of sending his sons away when everyone knew Addie would want them to remain. Tull is caught in the net of Anse's words.
As many incidents in the book confirm, Anse has no real trouble making decisions when being decisive works to his advantage. He's able to trade with Snopes, notorious as a difficult man with whom to dicker, and Anse can, with a minimum of fuss, persuade two women to marry him. As Adamowski notes, "no member of the family ever openly criticizes Anse (except for the dead member), not even Jewel, whose manner suggests that Anse keeps him in a state of outrage" (p. 219).

Instead, it is the neighbors who criticize Anse among themselves or in their monologues, obliquely acknowledging Anse's power over them and obtaining a mild sort of revenge. Armstid calls Anse a "durn fool" and is happy in believing that Jewel has escaped Anse's influence (p. 183). Tull, returning from the funeral, thinks, "[Addie] has hern.... Wherever she went, she has her reward in being free of Anse Bundren" (p. 86). Uncle Billy is more direct in his criticism: "It's like a man that's let everything slide all his life to get set on something that will make the most trouble for everybody he knows" (p. 84). Peabody's estimation of Anse is harsher still as the doctor treats Cash's broken and brutalized leg:

"God Almighty, why didn't Anse carry you to the nearest sawmill and stick your leg in the saw? That would have cured it. Then you all could have stuck his head into the saw and cured a whole family.... Where is Anse, anyway? What's he up to now?" (p. 230)

The men gripe about Anse, but the women are more cognizant of Anse's motives. When Vernon tells Cora that the funeral journey was Addie's "own wish.... I heard Anse say it was," Cora replies, "And you would believe Anse, of course.... A man like you would" (p. 22). When Armstid tells Lula that Anse is "doing the best he can," Lula replies, "Do?.... Do? He's done too much, already" (p. 179). Lula Armstid and Rachel Samson are united in their opinion that the journey to bury Addie in Jefferson is "a outrage.... A outrage" (p. 111).

What the women understand (but the men are a little slower in grasping) is that Anse is not on a heroic quest, that he is not "doing the best he can" (Parsons, p. 292). Anse is turning his bitterness upon Addie and using his manipulation of words to gain revenge as well. Thus, he tacitly agrees to Jewel and Dari's leaving home the day of their mother's death. Even before the catastrophes (broken wheel, flooded stream, etc.) accumulate, Anse has begun to mock characteristics of Ad-
die's which he found hardest to live with: "She was ever a private woman" (p. 18), and "she will rest quieter for knowing ... that it was her own blood sawed out the boards and drove the nails" (p. 19), when she had already repudiated the family bond by refusing to be buried with Anse's folk. As the rain comes and the stream floods, Anse becomes ever more determined to take Addie's corpse to Jefferson; when he rides up to the flooded river and sees that the bridge is washed out, "He was looking at it like he had believed all the time that folks had been lying to him about it being gone, but like he was hoping all the time it really was. Kind of pleased astonishment he looked ... " (p. 117). Anse knows that Addie would not have wanted him to persist in the burial journey under such adverse conditions. She did not want to be reduced to an "it" in a box, a corpse whose putrid smell lingered behind her for days. Darl opposes the trip. Cash feels there's something ungodly about the journey, although he doesn't actively oppose it (Cash: "it seemed to me that when Jewel worked so to get her outen the river, he was going against God in a way" [p. 223]). That Anse feels no true emotion for Addie is obvious; she has barely stopped breathing when, without any sign of distress, he informs Cash of her death and asks Dewey Dell to fix him something to eat.

Addie's neighbors uniformly testify to Anse's lack of love for his wife. Peabody says he's seen women like Addie before, "clinging to some trifling animal to whom they never were more than packhorses" (p. 44). Vernon's daughter, Kate, prophesies that Anse would "get another one [wife] before cotton-picking" (p. 32). Rachel Samson doesn't finish telling us what she'd do to "all the men in the world that torture us alive and flout us dead, dragging us up and down the country—" (p. 111), but her husband has the good sense to say forthrightly, "I got just as much respect for the dead as ere a man, but you've got to respect the dead themselves, and a woman that's been dead in a box four days, the best way to respect her is to get her into the ground as quick as you can" (p. 110). Cleanth Brooks is right in saying that the burial journey is "preposterous" and that the Bundrens "persist in it in obvious violation of common sense" (p. 141). It is a mark of Anse's control over his family, and their own peculiar brands of Bundrenism, that his children allow—even, in Dewey Dell's case, encourage—the burial journey to Jefferson. And it's a mark of Anse's deep bitterness and need for revenge that he continues the journey and even appears to take delight in it.
Anse can move about when he needs to; he proves that in his courting of Addie and the second Mrs. Bundren. Certainly by all rational standards, any motive he has for going to town would be more easily accomplished with his late wife's body safely rotting in the graveyard at New Hope. Courting the new Mrs. Bundren would have to be easier without a ten-day-old corpse parked outside and his children in tow. The only motivation Anse could have for persisting in the burial journey is revenge for Addie's apathy, contempt, and hatred for him, all of which she exhibited at one time or another during their marriage. Thus, the burial journey is not an example of the “mourning husband folk motif”\textsuperscript{11} but, instead, a mockery of it from first to last.

Since Anse's children won't stop the journey, only one potential source of opposition exists for Anse, and to neutralize that opposition requires the most wonderful balancing act Anse has yet been required to perform. We have already looked at community opposition to the burial journey. By insisting on the journey's continuance in the face of all odds, Anse risks opposition and more; he risks losing the community assistance which he is accustomed to receive through his manipulation of his neighbors. I have already demonstrated that Anse's neighbors recognize his true nature even though they do not openly confront him. Even Peabody, whose protests are the most direct, still gives Anse's family assistance when they arrive in Jefferson. Indeed, the community's assistance is essential to the successful completion of the journey, and it may seem puzzling to us that Addie's friends, family, and neighbors do not stop Anse and even continue to aid him. Again, an explanation for the discrepancy between the desires and the actions of members of Anse's community can only be found in Anse's shrewd manipulation of his neighbors.

Anse's first problem is the trip to Jefferson, for which the support of his neighbors is essential. Since community opposition is clear, Anse's only method of obtaining assistance is to play the part of the grieving widower, a part necessitated by his former status in the community as an object of pity and charity (the recipient of charity is not held to be an autonomous being, as most recipients of charity know). The neighbor who helps plow the field for free feels obliged to throw in some advice for good measure; the needy recipient must appear to take the advice

seriously, since the dependency of a charity case reduces him or her to a childlike status. As long as Anse’s position in the community is defined by his need for outside help, he cannot hope to persuade his neighbors to accord his decision to bury Addie in Jefferson the same respect his neighbors would expect for their own decisions.

However, a different kind of neighborly assistance is proffered and accepted from time to time, and that is the sort Cora refers to at Addie’s deathbed:

Why, for the last three weeks I have been coming over every time I could, coming sometimes when I shouldn’t have, neglecting my own family and duties so that somebody would be with her in her last moments . . . . Not that I deserve credit for it; I will expect the same for myself. (p. 21)

Cora refers, of course, to the assistance a neighbor always feels obligated to offer another neighbor in extremity—not the help offered to a stranger, the plate at the back door, and not the help Tull and Uncle Billy and Peabody have so often given to Anse, which carries the implicit meaning that Anse is not independent and resourceful enough to take care of himself. No. This is the consideration the Tulls or Armstids or Peabodys expect from one another in time of illness and death. The grieving widower can be allowed his eccentricities; the mystery which wraps about a community member who is suffering can, within limits, insulate that member from censure. By claiming that status, Anse is claiming a status equal to, even temporarily exceeding, that of his neighbors.

Thus Anse changes his demeanor and appearance when Addie dies:

Anse meets us at the door. He has shaved, but not good. There is a long cut on his jaw, and he is wearing his Sunday pants and a white shirt with the neckband buttoned. It is drawn smooth over his hump, making it look bigger than ever, like a white shirt will, and his face is different too. He looks folks in the eye now, dignified, his face tragic and composed, shaking us by the hand as we walk up onto the porch and scrape our shoes, a little stiff in our Sunday clothes, our Sunday clothes rustling, not looking full at him as he meets us. (p. 81)

Or, as Vardaman describes it, “Pa shaves every day now because my mother is a fish” (p. 95). Another noticeable change is Anse’s sudden interest in what his children are doing—this from the father who didn’t even look at Vardaman when the child learned his mother was dying. Anse is very much concerned that what the family does at this stage should appear in good form. He doesn’t want Dewey Dell to sell Cora’s cakes, Jewel to ride his horse, or Cash to tell anyone he’s coming back
to work on Tull's barn. Anse "told [Jewel] not to bring that horse out of respect for his dead ma, because it wouldn't look right" (p. 99; emphasis added), and many references are made to showing respect for their dead mother.

Anse insists that he is following Addie's request, that his word is sacred, and that he won't be beholden for shelter and food. These statements are purposeful and considered; Anse wants to make it clear he does not come as a supplicant, but as a neighbor who has suffered a loss which must be honored. When he refuses lodging or food, those community traditions and values which allow everyone to feel some measure of security and protection force Tull, Armstid, and the others to press aid upon him.

Occasionally, and in comic fashion, Anse oversteps this new role. At Armstid's Anse is initially very steadfast in refusing any help. He only asks "if you'd give them [Addie's children] a little snack." When Armstid finally talks him into eating with them, Anse says, "It's for her. . . . It's for her sake I am taking the food. I got no team, no nothing. But she will be grateful to ere a one of you" (p. 174). And as Vernon and Anse cross the washed-out bridge and walk up the other bank to the ford, Anse chides Vernon for not loaning them his mule, only to retract his statement in a way sure to entrap poor Tull: "I ain't asking it of you . . . I can always do for me and mine. . . . It ain't your dead" (p. 131). Of course, Anse gets the best of Vernon and his mule. Later, as they near the ford, Anse says, "I give her my word . . . It is sacred on me. I know you begrudge it, but she will bless you in heaven" (p. 133). One of the most fascinating aspects of Anse's role-playing is his ability to switch back and forth. When he needs charity, he "mumbles his mouth," but when he needs community respect and support, his rhetoric shows imagination, forethought, and a ruthless will.

Anse faces another problem, of course. He has ridden roughly and cavalierly over his neighbors' kindness and forbearance, stirring up a good deal of animosity in the process. Returning to the old easy days of idleness and the bitter satisfaction of watching someone else sweat into his fields may not be easy. It is here that Anse exhibits true virtue. When he introduces the "duck-shaped woman . . . with them kind of hard-looking pop eyes," he is introducing his ticket back into the fold of the childlike, ridiculous, deserving charity case. The new Mrs.
Bundren and the teeth serve as excuses for the burial journey. A man who would make such a journey for no more than a duck-shaped woman and a pair of false teeth is a fool, in need of community guidance. The man who kept his wife unburied ten days for revenge can take care of himself.

We may miss the movement and power of Anse’s mind because of Anse’s identification with the land. Although we have seen that his motivation, as Bleikasten suggests, cannot be “reduced to an idée fixe” (Bleikasten, p. 74) the repetition of his gestures can be. Over and over we read the same simple phrase: he looks out over the land. Peabody describes Anse standing beside a tree:

Too bad the Lord made the mistake of giving trees roots and giving the Anse Bundrens He makes feet and legs. If He’d just swapped them, there wouldn’t ever be a worry about this country being deforested someday. (p. 41)

Only three pages later, when Peabody describes the country in which Anse has lived all his life, the image of Anse’s rootedness, his staring out over the land, his aversion to roads and horizontal objects that move, all begin to merge to create an identification between Anse and the land:

That’s the one trouble with this country: everything, weather, all, hangs on too long. Like our rivers, our land: opaque, slow, violent; shaping and creating the life of man in its implacable and brooding image. (pp. 43-44)

When Darl describes crossing the flooded stream, Anse is in that description as well:

We hold to the rope, the current curling and dimpling about our shoulders. But beneath that false blandness the true force of it leans against us lazily. I had not thought that water in July could be so cold. (p. 151)

He is, as David Middleton describes him, “inert, he is unquestionably inactive, but Anse is actually a perverse version of a life force. . . ” (p. 49). He is like the land, which accepts the sweat of men and lets them think they’re winning for a time, then floods the fields and mockingly gives the sweat back again. He is, as Darl describes him following Addie’s death, “disgruntled outrage within which lurks a wisdom too profound or too inert for even thought” (p. 48).

Perhaps the best image of all for Anse is that of the buzzard. Anse “loomed tall above us as we squat” (p. 156). Vardaman describes buzzards as “little tall black circles of not-moving” (p. 185), an image which could
describe Anse as well. There's something powerful and inescapable about a buzzard, like Anse moving his little pilgrimage across the farms of his neighbors, willy-nilly, whether they like it or not, or Anse pulling up to the house where the duck-shaped woman lives "like he knowed," making Cash wonder if "a working man could see work as far ahead as a lazy man can see laziness" (pp. 225-226), or, perhaps, as a buzzard can smell a free meal.

One fellow in particular reminds me of Anse, of all the Anse Bundrens in the world. He's a mysterious fellow, that buzzard Samson encounters in his hallway after the Bundrens have left, an odd little bird that looks over one shoulder and then the other as though searching for the best of all possible angles on the world:

When I walked into the hallway I saw something. It kind of hunkered up when I come in and I thought at first it was one of them got left, then I saw what it was. It was a buzzard. It looked around and saw me and went on down the hall, spraddle-legged, with its wings kind of hunkered out, watching me first over one shoulder and then over the other, like a old bald-headed man. (p. 112)