Lucy Nevrly.

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**End of Summer Report: Storytelling in William Faulkner’s Novels**

Over the summer I completed a close reading of five of William Faulkner’s novels: *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *A Light In August*, and *Absalom, Absalom!*. The goal of my project was to explore the ways in which William Faulkner discusses the roles, responsibilities, and consequences of telling a story. I was also looking at how his interest in writing about storytellers and storytelling shifts overtime throughout the course of the five novels written within a seven year period. For example, I specifically tracked the reappearance of the characters of Mr. Jason Compson, Shreve MacKenzie, and Quentin Compson between the first novel *The Sound and the Fury* and the final novel *Absalom, Absalom!*. I looked to analyze what Faulkner believes it takes and means to be a storyteller by following both his storytelling and listener characters. During the reading section of this project I annotated and kept detailed notes on my findings. After completing all five, I intended on looking at outside scholarship and completing an extended work of literary analysis detailing my observations, findings, and conclusions.

By the end of my FURSCA project period, I was able to finish all five novels and produce a twenty-page work of analysis about my findings. Due to timing and increased workload with the FURSCA presentation and Q&A session, I had to extend my reading period by one week, which has pushed the exploration of scholarship into my thesis timeline starting in the fall.

One of the most significant observations my advising professor and I made throughout all five novels was Faulkner’s interest in the act of telling a story interrupted versus uninterrupted. This shifted the focus of my work on not only the storyteller, but the listener as well. My final writing work follows numerous moments of interruptions in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, comparing and contrasting their influence on the character’s ability to tell or follow a story. I have included an excerpt here:

For example, when Quentin sets up the story Sutpen told Quentin’s Grandfather about his first wife and son, Shreve can’t resist interrupting him. “‘That time when the architect escaped, tried to, tried to escape into the river bottom and go back to New Orleans or whatever it was, and he—’ (‘the demon, hey?’ Shreve said. Quentin did not answer him, did not pause, his voice level, curious, a little dreamy yet still with the overtone of sullen bemusement, of smoldering outrage: so that Shreve…watched him with thoughtful and intent curiosity) ‘—sent word…’” (*Absalom, Absalom!*, 177). This is not the first or last time Shreve refers to Sutpen as “the demon,'' however in this moment the interruption itself is phrased in the form of a question. Despite Shreve making space for a reaction, Quentin’s act of ignoring Shreve’s comment is twofold. Not only does the narrator explicitly tell the reader that Quentin does not even pause, let alone stop and answer Shreve, once the parenthetical in which interruptions, and many like it, take place is closed, Quentin’s dialogue continues on as if Shreve's comment was never made. However, it is important to note that while Shreve’s interruption doesn’t affect Quentin, Quentin’s lack of response and the lack of change to his volume level and tone of voice does impact Shreve in a way that engages him further into the story. Quentin, however, is likely unaware of this change in Shreve, showing that when ignored, interruptions can be learning experiences, moments of change or clarification for the interruptor, rather than just for the interrupted.

For more general examples, in a crucial moment of *Sanctuary*, Faulkner preemptively acknowledges the existence of interruptions while rendering them invisible from the actual act of storytelling itself, in order to allow that character to speak as freely as possible. In *The Sound and the Fury,* Faulkner explores the way in which a character can work to be able to have their memories integrated into their thought process instead of interrupting their life completely. In *Absalom, Absalom!* listening characters will interrupt storytellers for clarification on simple facts or to add in jokes or commentary that is often ignored by the storyteller and can also be phrased in ways that preserve the story’s momentum. In both *Absalom, Absalom!* and *A Light in August* storytelling is displayed as a group effort, whether within a large community or just between a small group of people.

I began this project having previously read only two of Faulkner’s novels, not knowing for certain if the rest of them would be as interested in any sort of storytelling as the first two. What I found in the completion of all five of them is that some had numerous moments of storytelling while others were clearly *about* the act of storytelling, and that Faulkner is clearly interested in what it means to be a storyteller and a listener.

My intention is for this project to turn into my final Prentiss M. Brown Honors Program thesis and ultimately be presented at Elkin Isaac in the spring of 2023. I will use the twenty-page literary analysis as part of the drafting process of my thesis. I also have plans to use the final thesis based on this project as a potential writing sample as I apply to graduate school programs to continue my English education. This project allowed me to explore in-depth an author whose work I have been interested in since high school, with Dr. Jessica Roberts, a professor I greatly admire but thoroughly enjoyed working with. In a practical sense, planning and completing a project of this scope and difficulty has helped me to develop and elevate my reading and writing skills. Not only that, but the work of focusing on one author and developing a deeper understanding and connection to his work has only increased my confidence in my abilities, as well as solidified my love for this type of work. I am eager to see how I can apply what I’ve learned through FURSCA into the process of writing my thesis, as well as in my English classes at Albion and beyond.