Abstract

My project is designed to fulfill two goals: (1) to offer a comprehensive, scholarly website about the Faulkner-Cowley literary relationship and (2) to offer a paper that explores how Cowley’s approach to one Faulkner text in particular is problematic. As the website mission statement claims: the site is designed to explore the relationship between author William Faulkner and literary critic Malcolm Cowley. Through an intense study of Cowley’s approach to Faulkner, in his writing and in his life, modern readers can gain an understanding of how we can approach Faulkner as both an author and a person.

In this essay portion of my project, I argue that Cowley’s approach to time in The Sound and the Fury is somewhat troublesome. Using my analyses of the Malcolm Cowley Papers, I argue that Cowley attempts to reconstruct temporal elements in the Benjy section of the novel so that they fit into a traditional chronological structure. Additionally, he encourages Faulkner to create the controversial “Compson Appendix” for his edition of the Portable Faulkner, which helps present the events of the Compson family in a linear manner. Both Cowley’s reconstruction of time and the Compson Appendix causes readers the following significant problems while reading the novel: we lose important insight into the workings of Benjy’s psyche and the nature of trauma, we mischaracterize an important narrative comparison point that is designed to help readers understand the narrative of the entire novel, and we overlook the importance of stasis in the work.