

# Narration and Character

# Words, Words, Words

- Why do I insist we focus on the text?
- A novel has something like 90,000 words.
- English syntax demands that some fraction of these words must be used in context; say  $1/3$  of them (no need to argue about the fraction)
- That means the AUTHOR MAKES 60,000 CAREFUL DECISIONS when writing a novel. It's worth paying attention to these decisions. The words are the atomic elements that combine to create the molecules, organs, and ultimately, the complete organism of the novel.

# The Author's Job

- Tell a story – somehow. “Narrate” it.
- Unless the overall narration is in the first person by one of the characters (which is not the case at hand), there is some voice, “Narrator” who tells us what the scene is and who is speaking.
- In Faulkner, we shall see that, very often, “Narrator” reports a story told by one of the characters. In this case, the speaking character becomes a “Meta-Narrator.”
- The Meta-Narrator may be telling a story about other characters, and about events far removed from the conversation.
- Is the Meta-Narrator reliable? *Sartoris* gives us a chance to test. The test is based on what we know about the character of the Meta-Narrator

# It can be a 4-layer cake

- Author decides on the persona and style of Narrator
- Narrator describes time, place and, sometimes inserts a Meta-Narrator
- Narrator and/or Meta-Narrator speaks of ...
- ... events and characters that may be remote from the time at which the Narrator or Meta-Narrator speaks
  
- Of course, Meta-narration levels can be nested, N introduces A, who tells of B, who tells a story about C, the story displaced in time and space from the overall narration.

# More On Narrators

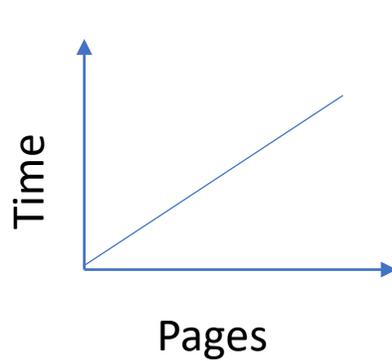
- Observant narrators
  - Omniscient – knows events and thoughts of all characters
  - Limited to a specific character’s point-of-view and thoughts
- Participant narrators (one or more of the characters)
  - Reliable – accurate reporter
  - Compromised in some way, hence “unreliable”

# How We Learn About a Character

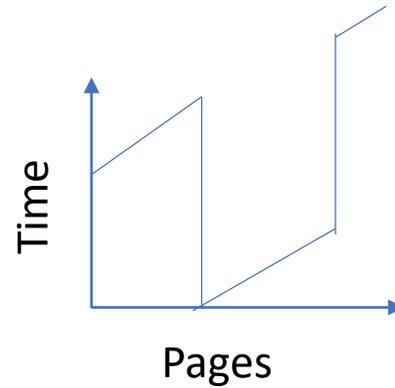
- What the character does
- What the character says (or thinks) about him/herself
- What other characters say (or think)
- What a narrator tells us (whether reliably or not)

# Faulkner's Treatment of Time

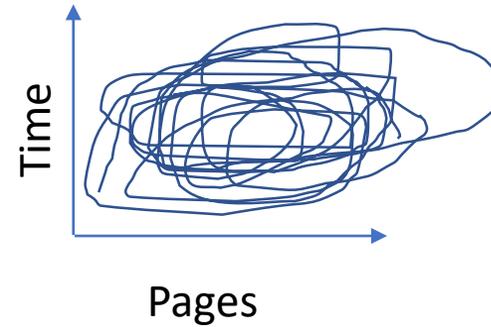
- I like to think of a graph: Time plotted against Pages



Simple Story



Flashback



Faulkner