Fusiojn Of Time And The Modern Man Essay, Research Paper

Fusion of Time and the Modern Man Einstein’s Dreams by Alan Lightman discusses Einstein’s various theories abouttime and how they effect the everyday world. His ideas range from the progression of timein reverse to the end of time in totality. Like Lightman, William Faulkner s The Sound andthe Fury contains differing concepts of time expressed in various narrative perspectives.By calling attention to Faulkner’s and Alan Lightman s interpretation of time through theirnarrative focus, one can highlight their points of contact in relation to it and underscorehow a limited view of time will inevitably present an obstacle for the modern man. Benjy, whose section opens the book, lives outside of time. For him, the past is asreal as the present; it has no distinction. Time does not exist for Benjy because he livesonly in his senses, thus the present is his only reality (Hornback, Jr. 49). Being incapableof distinguishing between past events and present events, earlier events are as current tohim as anything actually happening in the present. In 1928 he stands at the gate, stillexpecting Caddy, who left home in 1910 (Faulkner 5). Because he is completely obliviousto time s significance, he is actually incapable of learning from his past and cannot makeprogress as an individual. As he begins his day watching the golfer s hitting on the field,events in the present trigger Benjy’s mind to focus on events of the past, though they donot have a role in altering in any way his current actions because to him they are one andthe same (Faulkner 3). Similarly, one world Alan Lightman provides as a possible scenario in his noveloccurs on the twenty-fourth of April in 1905. He proposes the existence of two times, mechanical and body with the first being unyielding and the second having the propertyof spontaneity (Lightman 23). If this were the case, then time would have no real significance in itself, due to the fact that the reality of time would constantly be uncertain.This second concept of time mostly relates to the Benjy section in that within his narrationhe almost totally disregards clock time. Lightman describes this philosophy as connectingtime to rhythms of . . . moods and desires rather than viewing it mechanically (23).Emotions trigger a past experience rather than the past having a lasting impact. Forexample, Benjy sees a barn which causes him to correlate that time with anotherexperience, when he tries to deliver a letter with Caddy (Faulkner12). This impedes hisunderstanding of the significance of his life as a whole. Benjy s way of viewing the pastcannot coexist with his environment, where the truths are not the same and theconventional approach to time influences the actions of men (Lightman 27). Sinceeverything happens for him in the present, all time is equal and does not make allowancefor change. In contrast, Quentin longs for the certainties of the past. He cannot live in thepresent, which invalidates his ethical code. Quentin’s mind, like his brother’s, is largely inthe past as he makes his daily rounds in the present. But whereas places and sensations inthe present propels Benjy back into the past, Quentin’s memories need no prompting. Hebegins his section by contemplating time, even breaking the hands off his watch in a futileattempt to “escape” time (Faulkner 80). Alone among the present-day Compsons, Quentinstill feels pride in his family’s noble and glorious past, but he recognizes that today nothingremains of that past; it is mere shadow. Upon giving him the watch, Mr. Compson relateshow he gives it to Quentin in order for him to forget [time] now and then for a moment and not aspire to conquer it (Faulkner 79). Mr. Compson tells that as time passes, Quentinwill forget his horror. The world of June twentieth in 1905 in Einstein s Dreams characterizes time asbeing a local phenomenon (Lightman 153). Distance separates clocks and allows themto tick at different rates. In this situation, man views time with differing perspectives withno agreement upon duration or its impact on human existence. This most closely resembles Quentin s experience in that his views are radically different from the otherscharacter s. For him time is the ultimate enemy. The past forces him to worry in hispresent life about how it will be negatively influence his future. In fact, his suicide seemsto be just that his escape from time. To forget the past would be unacceptable toQuentin because it would render his horror meaningless , and so he escapes time in theonly way he can, by drowning himself (Anderson 89). As this character feels such a vastseparation evolving between himself and his past, he is overwhelmed by thoughts that he

can no longer remain a part of his world because his life lacks meaning. Lightman affirmsthis notion of separation when he declares that if time s identity is contingent upon itslocation, a crucial temporal union would be lost (Lightman 154). Quentin graduallyloses this unity as he comes to the realization that a dissociation with his former struggleswould mean eternal isolation from his identity. He continues to ponder his father’spronouncements on the subject of his obsession, recalling how his father feels that beingtime-bound is the human tragedy, suggesting that “only when the clock stops does timecome to life” (Faulkner 105). But Quentin wants to stop the clock, not to bring time tolife, but to escape futility. In actuality, he wants to step into Benjy s situation of being outof time s grasp. Quentin cannot leave the past because his problems and memories aresuch a significant part of his life. Section three is told by the third Compson brother, Jason, and is set on GoodFriday. Unlike his brothers, Jason is much more focused on the present, offering fewerflashbacks than the preceding sections. Though he refers frequently to events in the past,Jason’s main interests are in the present. Jason is yet another character whose narrow scope of the significance of time causes him affliction. He equates it simply with anopportunity for financial gain and treats it as a commodity to be manipulated (Hornback,Jr. 51). The irony is that although Jason seeks to use time for his own purpose, by livingonly in the present without a past, time becomes the all-powerful ruler. Lightman touches upon this concept in Einstein s Dreams in the world of April 281905 where the central theme in the segment is that time is absolute (33) . Similarly toJason s interaction with time, here it is also an infinite ruler where people find its passingpredictable. Faulkner allows his character to become angry at others for being late and hashim constantly seeking out what time it is. Jason is regularly measuring time, the same wayhe’s always counting his money (Faulkner 185). This exemplifies Jason s attitude in thateach moment governs all action. Through his inflexibility, he depicts how he is time sservant by allowing it to control his emotions. Although Jason thinks that he can shuck offthe past, he, too, is in its grip. His advantage is that he knows the difference between pastand present in a way his brothers do not. For him time exists in a state of exquisiteregularity as does Lightman s universe (34). But the past still colors Jason’s priorities andviews of the present. He is punitive toward his niece Quentin, nasty to the world, andparanoid about business, because of his feelings about his siblings. At the end of hisnarrative, he makes it his mission to gain back the money stolen from him without regardfor the cost to his health or safety (Faulkner 245). This clearly shows how unpleasantrecollections drive his every action and motive. The memories may not dance before hiseyes, but old feelings are still calling Jason’s tune. For him, the notion that he canmanipulate time forces him to have difficulties with his social interactions (Anderson90). Thus he is left lacking personal relationships and a true sense of his self and his role inthe lives of others. The novel The Sound and the Fury, as a whole, moves through time erratically andfocuses on the moment and the present in which the past and the future meet. It emphasizes the role of history and of the past in molding the present. Modern man, in hisattempts to progress intellectually, often forgets that time is not an object of manipulation.The past runs its course for a reason: to improve the future. To attempt to change thisreality is not only impossible but self destructive as well. In religious belief, God is the ultimate creator of our world, and the chief controller of time. Einstein realized the centralimportance of time to humans, and he proposed many theories that explored the passageand flow of it. In his creativity and wisdom, he discovered how volatile and mobile timereally is, how it can seem to stop at times and then progress full steam ahead at others. Inmodern society, man faces the problem of ignoring the concept of time as a whole andonly placing emphasis on a small characteristic of the larger truth. Faulkner stresses thatsuch a confined view will lead ultimately to society s destruction and in order to escapethat fate, man must analyze the entire picture. Lightman s multi-fold theories of time,although they are imagined and impossible in actuality, their essence and idea effect thereader s perception about time. The book Einstein s Dreams offers the chance for one toexamine the different possibilities in order to move one step closer to understanding itsprogression in the real universe.