

## **‘April Seventh 1928’ and the Sound and Fury of Interpretation**

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Donald M. Kartigarnner claims that the “most difficult task” when reading William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) is to “get beyond its opening section.” As they open the novel, readers are indeed confronted with the confusing and infuriating ‘April Seventh 1928.’ Narrated by thirty-three-year-old ‘idiot’ Benjy Compson, the opening section rambles and bounds across nearly three decades, charting a family’s decline in Yoknapatawpha amid the seemingly inconsequential search for golf balls.

This paper will focus on the myriad of readings that purport to attribute meaning to ‘April Seventh 1928.’ It will consider both the text and its ensuing critical debate, a process motivated by two questions. First, if Faulkner himself – both in print and in his novel’s title – suggests that Benjy’s narrative is meaningless and “signifies nothing,” then what has driven critics since the publication of *The Sound and the Fury* to perpetually search for meaning in ‘April Seventh 1928’? And second, why does any affront to meaning posed by Faulkner’s opening section cause such anxiety in critics, driving their ever more furious attempts to contain, restore, and neutralise the nihilism and meaninglessness buried in the endlessly *un*-knowable elements of Benjy’s discourse?

Benjy Compson’s ‘April Seventh 1928’ is undoubtedly infuriating. But has critical debate, in attempting to interpret that which is precisely *un*-knowable, in fact participated in an elaborate joke; one that Faulkner took great delight in setting up, and whose punchline, while not in the least bit funny, continues to revel in the *sound and fury* of its own interpretation?