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LAW IN FAULKNER'S SANCTUARY

Noel Polk*

In 1979 I suggested in an essay on Faulkner and the Law that the courthouse and the jail in Jefferson "stand throughout most of William Faulkner's fiction as the central axis of his narrative and thematic concerns, and they are connected to each other by the strongest and most irresolvable ties."¹ I went on to argue that the courthouse represented in Faulkner's work man's impulse toward the ideal of justice, that is, the need for security; the jail, the opposite impulse toward aggression and destruction.

It is a mistake, however, I now believe, to accept this generalization about the jail-courthouse polarity as being true for Faulkner's entire career, for it now seems clear to me that although the courthouse and the jail are indisputably important architectural components of the Jefferson landscape from the very inception of Yoknapatawpha County, they did not assume the thematic dimensions I identified until somewhat late in Faulkner's career. Indeed, my comments then grew out of my work on *Requiem for a Nun* (1951), a late work which is Faulkner's attempt to bring some consistency to the rag-tag history of Yoknapatawpha County he had developed in bits and pieces over the course of the previous quarter-century, and in doing so to make Yoknapatawpha conspicuously a part of the rest of the world. The symbolic relationship between the courthouse and the jail is thus retrospective; it does not appear to be one which existed from the beginning. Indeed, one is struck with the relative *absence* of the courthouse from the Yoknapatawpha of the twenties, thirties, and even forties; it exists as an architectural fact, but it is more often taken in its association with the four-faced clock atop it or with the Confederate monument on its Southern side, or, simply, with the town square of Jefferson of which it is the center; it is a constant factor in the geographical landscape, but not much of one in the psychological, moral, or even, finally, legal landscape.

The same is not true, however, of the Jefferson jail, which looms considerably larger than the courthouse in the consciousness of the Jefferson townfolk of the early novels; it is no exaggeration to say that the image of the jail overwhelms *Sanctuary*. Perhaps it is only coincidental that Faulkner chose to explore the relationship of jail and courthouse in *Requiem for a Nun*, the play-novel

* Professor of English, University of Southern Mississippi.

1. Noel Polk, " 'I Taken An Oath of Office Too': Faulkner and the Law," in *Fifty Years of Yoknapatawpha*, eds. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1980), p. 159.

which resurrects Temple Drake, puts her back on the witness stand if not actually in the courthouse, and forces her to tell the truth this time, as she had not earlier; more particularly, Temple is in *Requiem* harassed by a lawyer, related in many obvious ways to Horace Benbow, who responds with disgust and outrage similar to that of Benbow at the Temple of *Sanctuary*, but who is psychologically strong enough to do what Horace only fantasizes about, namely, as Horace puts it, to humiliate, to punish Temple for her part in his own professional and personal humiliation:

He would sub-poena Temple; he thought in a paroxysm of raging pleasure of flinging her into the court-room, of stripping her: This is what a man has killed another over. This, the offspring of respectable people: let them blush for shame, since he could never blush for anything again. Stripping her, background, environment, all.²

This is, of course, precisely what Gavin Stevens, rightly or wrongly, does to Temple in *Requiem for a Nun*. It may or may not be significant that Temple Drake is at the center of both of these novels which are concerned with the functioning of the legal system.

What is indisputably significant, however, for our understanding of Faulkner's treatment of the Law in *Sanctuary*, is the peculiar historical relationship Faulkner describes, in *Requiem*, between the jail and the courthouse. You will recall that the jail is the first to be built by Jefferson's earliest settlers. Even though it is an insubstantial structure — it is a "morticed-log mud-chinked shake-down"³ building — and even though the settlers use it only for the relatively few "amateur" bad guys they have to deal with, they nevertheless recognize the practical necessity of having one, human nature being what it is. The courthouse begins in Jefferson as merely a place to store some useless records: it is a "small . . . leanto room like a wood- or tool-shed . . . against one outside wall"⁴ of the ramshackle jail: hardly a worthy embodiment of hope and aspiration, much less any assurance of justice or security. In the complicated aftermath of the jailbreak, the settlers decide that they must have a new, stronger jail, and decide to build not just a new jail, but to add to the new structure a second room, which would be their courthouse, and to create a town; thus at the official founding of Jefferson, the jail and the courthouse are in a single structure, separated only by a single wall. As the settlers and then the newer arrivals build a succession of

2. Noel Polk, ed., *Sanctuary: The Original Text* (New York: Random House, 1981), p. 255.

3. William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 4.

4. *Id.*

courthouses worthy to embody their dreams and aspirations, they gradually, perhaps deliberately, begin to avoid the jail; they shun it not so much for its actual place in their civilization, but for its symbolic potency, its constant reminder of the factor in human nature which makes jails necessary. So completely does Jefferson repudiate the jail that it separates the courthouse building from it; in building a new courthouse, they move not just the building but the entire town itself to a new site, leaving the old jail building "not even on a side-street but on an alley,"⁵ where most citizens would not have to pass it and so think about it during a normal day. During the subsequent history of Jefferson the courthouse building is rebuilt and expanded; the jail building remains the same: it is merely whitewashed over, and so retains, through the years, its symbolic relationship to something, whatever it is, that those good Jefferson folk want, need, to forget.

Faulkner saw, in 1951, the profound relationship between jail and courthouse as he perhaps had not seen it during the work of his early years, and it is significant, I think, that he saw that relationship arising out of the prior existence of the jail, the prison, not of the courthouse: indeed, the jail does not have merely a *prior* existence: "[T]here was no town until there was a courthouse," he writes in *Requiem*, and "no courthouse until [the courthouse was 'reft from the log flank of the jail'] (like some un sentient unweaned creature torn violently from the dug of its dam)."⁶ The jail is thus mother/progenitor of the courthouse; and so is the mother/progenitor of civilization itself: no town without a courthouse, no courthouse without a jail. Thus civilization, in this sequence, may be seen as a result of man's awareness of his capacity to break laws, a result of his own collective or individual guilt which seems to derive from somewhere far anterior even to consciousness. I have suggested elsewhere that the first prologue to *Requiem*, entitled "The Jail," is, on one important level at least, a fable of the founding of western civilization; I think I know now how true a thing that was.

The connection between all this and the notion of law in *Sanctuary* lies, I hope to show, precisely in man's sense of his capacity to sin, the sense of guilt he feels for having sinned or even for having wanted to sin, and in the various forms of punishment he imposes on himself—on himself as an individual, and on society in general — to try to curb his uncurbable impulse to break laws.

There are ways in which it is very easy to generalize about "The

5. *Id.* at 214.

6. *Id.* at 213.

Law” in *Sanctuary* — ways, indeed, in which it may be considered one gigantic pot-shot at the American legal system. In its pages appear a rogue’s gallery of some of the most bizarre lawbreakers in American fiction, and a cast of coldblooded and corrupt lawyers, politicians, policemen, judges, detectives, and legislators of which Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler would have been proud. Indeed, it is perhaps in the pervasiveness of corruption in the legal system itself, more than the wickedness of its various moonshiners, murderers, and madames that has created for *Sanctuary* a general reputation as Faulkner’s most profound study of the nature of Evil. This is a reputation which few readers will question, and I do not intend to challenge it here today — not directly, anyway.

Not, of course, that there is not plenty of “evil,” however defined, in *Sanctuary*: whores and thieves and bootleggers and murderers and rapists, sex and violence in quantities so perverse and outrageous as to be almost a parody of reality — some of it is as cartoon-like as the name of the novel’s arch-villain, Popeye, and it is at times outrageously funny — and so gratuitous as to suggest that it is indeed not intended to represent reality, but rather some quality of reality distorted by fantasy and dream, and turned into nightmare. This quality, I suggest, arises from the novel’s attempt to present not a real world at all but rather a nightmarish world which erupts out of the fantasies of its major character, Horace Benbow. I hope I can in the next few minutes suggest something about the sources of Horace’s fantasies and, in doing so, point to some connections between the idea of law in *Sanctuary* and the foundation of civilization as depicted in *Requiem for a Nun*.

Sanctuary is less concerned with either crime or justice than it is with punishment. The original version of *Sanctuary*, with which I shall be concerned, begins and ends with the image of a man in jail, waiting, peacefully, without anxiety, without fear of death, to be hanged. To be more precise, the novel begins by noting Horace’s near obsession with the jail and with the window in which lie the hands of a Negro who has murdered his wife:

Each time he passed the jail he would look up at the barred window, usually to see a small, pale, patient, tragic blob lying in one of the grimy interstices, or perhaps a blue wisp of tobacco smoke combing raggedly away along the spring sunshine. At first there had been a negro murderer there, who had killed his wife; slashed her throat with a razor so that, her whole head tossing further and further backward from the bloody regurgitation of her bubbling throat, she ran out the cabin door and for six or seven steps up the quiet moonlit lane.⁷

7. Polk, *Sanctuary: The Original Text*, p. 3.

This is an astonishingly detailed recollection, particularly of the gruesome aftermath of a gruesome murder, the more astonishing because it is rendered so quietly, so lovingly, almost as a moonlight idyll; clearly it is a crime which has touched something in Horace's imagination. We may infer from the rest of the novel, in which his relationships with a variety of women, all of whom are actually the same woman, as we shall see, are developed, that much of Horace's interest in the Negro and in the murder arises from his desire to be passionate enough, masculine enough, to solve his own marital and sexual problems so neatly and efficiently; doubtless too, given both what Horace has behind him and what he has now to face, the Negro's position in the security of the jail, with all need for striving over, with nothing to do but wait to die, is one that Horace, at some psychological level at least, finds attractive. Some evidence of the connection between Horace and the Negro murderer may be inferred from the fact that the second chapter opens with the portrait of Horace looking out the window of his own prison, albeit a different one, the house in Kinston which he attempts, unsuccessfully, to escape.

Also in that jail at the opening of the book are three others in various stages of punishment: Lee Goodwin, Ruby Lamar, and their child. Lee is awaiting trial for the murder of Tommy. He believes the law will do justice in his case and free him, but he fears punishment from Popeye if he should tell all he knows: he is "waiting for Popeye to come and shoot him with an automatic pistol;"⁸ their pathetic infant son is frequently described as "crucified." Later Ruby, believing that she might compromise Horace's position in Jefferson if she is seen too often with him, and not wanting to betray Lee to Popeye by telling Horace about Temple, tells Horace just to let them be: "You've been kind. You mean all right, but . . . I guess I've got just what was coming to me. There's no use fighting it."⁹ The phrase stops one: it is very Puritan of the seemingly unpuritan Ruby to take this so personally, to feel that she somehow *deserves* to be left alone with her baby after Lee is killed, either by Popeye or by the state of Mississippi. What has she done to deserve her punishment? And why does she consider it a punishment to be free from a man like Lee Goodwin? Clearly her feeling springs not from anything specific that she has done, but rather perhaps from her own demonstrably low opinion of her own worth, her own need to cling to Lee to maintain her hold on his love, no matter what the

8. *Id.* at 4.

9. *Id.* at 11.

cost to her dignity or her physical wellbeing. Perhaps Ruby's sense of having deserved her punishment and her history of self-flagellation are, like Horace's obsessions with the Negro murderer, manifestations of a desire to be punished for some sin, real or imagined; if this is so, she joins a host of other Faulkner characters with tendencies toward self-destruction, including Quentin Compson, Joe Christmas, Bayard Sartoris and, as we shall see, others in *Sanctuary*.

I want to turn now to another scene in *Sanctuary*, this in chapter 18 of the original version, in which Temple Drake relates to Horace Benbow her experiences in the Old Frenchman Place on the night before her rape by Popeye. Whether what she tells actually happened or is her fantasy about that experience does not matter. She tells Horace about Popeye's approach to the cornshuck-filled bed on which she is lying, taunting him to come ahead and get it over with:

I kept on saying Coward! Coward! Touch me, coward! I got mad, because he was so long doing it. I'd talk to him. I'd say Do you think I'm going to lie here all night, just waiting on you? I'd say. Let me tell you what I'll do, I'd say. And I'd lie there with the shucks laughing at me and me jerking away in front of his hand and I'd think what I'd say to him. I'd talk to him like the teacher does in school, and then I was a teacher in school and it was a little black thing like a nigger boy, kind of, and I was the teacher. Because I'd say How old am I? and I'd say I'm forty-five years old. I had iron-gray hair and spectacles and I was all big up here like women get. I had on a gray tailored suit, and I never could wear gray. And I was telling it what I'd do, and it kind of drawing up and drawing up like it could already see the switch.

Then I said That wont do. I ought to be a man. So I was an old man, with a long white beard, and then the little black man got littler and littler and I was saying Now. You see now. I'm a man now.¹⁰

Temple's fantasy here involves a number of component parts of interest to us. The first, that of becoming a full-grown, menopausal woman, leads to her becoming a school teacher; in turn she becomes an old man. All of them, old woman, school teacher, and old man, are Temple's transformations of herself into figures of authority, doubtless projections corresponding to similar figures in her own background, who seem to her, from her particularly vulnerable position at the Old Frenchman Place, to be capable of dealing with a world that threatens. Clearly she wants to strike out at those who want to do her violence, to wreak vengeance.

But is this, indeed, crystal clear? In fact, in her fantasy she does not want to strike out directly at Popeye or Lee or Van, who are her immediate threats; she rather transforms Popeye alone not just into a child, but into "a little black thing like a nigger boy,

10. *Id.* at 217.

kind of,"¹¹ and obviously gets a great deal of pleasure out of taunting her victim and watching him anticipate his punishment: ". . . I was telling it what I'd do, and it kind of drawing up and drawing up like it could already see the switch." It could be a simple inversion, trading her vulnerability for Popeye's power, in order to wreak revenge; but it is much more complicated than this, I think, and we may get at its complication by reference to a similar and more directly revealing passage in *As I Lay Dying*,¹² a novel Faulkner wrote between the two versions of *Sanctuary*.

The passage in *As I Lay Dying* is one, as I have argued elsewhere, with direct connections to *Sanctuary*; Addie Bundren, the chief female character in *As I Lay Dying*, is similar in many ways to Temple. Addie, who is actually a school teacher, uses an image like Temple's to describe her rather sadistic relationship to her students: "I would look forward to the times when they faulted, so I could whip them."¹³ But she reveals what Temple does not, that the sadistic impulse which makes her want to punish her students is in fact potently mixed with, is perhaps an inversion of, an intense masochistic pleasure: "When the switch fell I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it was my blood that ran"¹⁴

A recent article by Robert J. Kloss¹⁵ has suggested that Addie's speech can be understood by reference to Freud's essay "A Child Is Being Beaten."¹⁶ I agree with Professor Kloss, and would like to propose that Freud's essay is a useful starting point for understanding what goes on in *Sanctuary* as well, indeed for understanding much of Faulkner's work during the period between 1927 and 1931. The significance of Freud's essay may be appreciated by any reader who has noticed the unusually unpleasant lives children in the Faulkner of this period have; childhood is invariably a time of nearly unrelieved torment, of repression, of domination, of complete vulnerability to the whims of adults and other children. It is an important theme in Faulkner.

I have no time, however, to summarize Freud's extremely complicated arguments in "A Child Is Being Beaten." I can only note his conclusions, and trust that that will suffice for our present purposes. Fantasies of child-beating are, according to Freud, very

11. *Id.*

12. William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (New York: Random House, 1964).

13. *Id.* at 162.

14. *Id.*

15. Kloss, "Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*," *American Imago* 38 (1981): 429-44.

16. Sigmund Freud, "A Child is Being Beaten," in *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Trans. and ed. by James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955), XVII: 179-204.

common indeed, even among people who were not themselves subjected to such beatings as children; they are invariably related, Freud maintained, to incestuous fantasies arising from the Oedipus complex and from the subsequent and mostly unconscious feelings of guilt which are the psychological legacies of our sexual attachments, as infants, to our parents. Thus in one phase of the child-beating fantasy the child being beaten is a competitor for the love of a parent, probably a sibling or perhaps the other parent, the beating itself confirming for the fantasist that that parent does not love the other, but only the fantasist. In another phase, the most crucial one, the one which is at the core of the fantasy, the child being beaten is in fact the person having the fantasy; the fantasy itself is the neurotic's response to his guilt over having wanted, as an infant, like Oedipus of the Greek legend, to slay the parent of the same sex in order to have complete sexual and emotional possession of the parent of the opposite sex.

All infants go through an Oedipal stage: most outgrow it in the normal course of development; in others the Oedipus complex remains well into adulthood, a vestige of that infantile sexual compulsion. Thus the person who fantasizes about children being beaten is in effect expressing an unconscious need to be punished; a need to be punished not for a sin or sins actually committed, but for sins he *desired to commit*; the desire and the deed are one and the same. Freud constantly reiterates that in his view the Oedipus complex is thus the root cause of all neurosis.

Whence the guilt? Freud is not able, in this 1919 essay, to say with any certainty. But he speculates about its relationship to the human personality in terms which will make it possible to go immediately back to *Sanctuary*: guilt, he wrote,

[s]eems to correspond to a scar-like formation which is similar to the sense of inferiority. According to our present orientation in the structure of the ego, which is as yet uncertain, we should assign it to the agency in the mind which sets itself up as a critical conscience over against the rest of the ego . . . which cuts itself loose from the ego in delusions of being watched.¹⁷

Guilt, then, is the component in the makeup of the personality that Freud was later to call the super-ego, which is, essentially, the policeman of the personality, the agency which forces the ego to strive for perfection, forces it toward some ideal standard of behavior: a relative standard, to be sure, which is based upon some notion of right and wrong imposed on the personality by some agency or circumstance *outside* the personality, and which reminds

17. *Id.* at 194.

the ego, constantly, how far short of perfection it falls. Guilt, as Freud would have it, then, and as we shall see, derives directly from the sexual and emotional conflicts which constitute the Oedipus complex.

If guilt manifests itself, as Freud argues, in "delusions of being watched," then we have only to note the overwhelming emphasis on voyeurism in the novel in order to posit a connection between *Sanctuary* and Freud's ideas. Consider only, for example, the number of characters who *watch* Temple Drake do one thing or another — the townspeople, the local boys, through whose eyes we *see* Temple the first time she appears in the novel; Tommy, who watches her through the window of the Old Frenchman Place as she makes ready for bed; Lee Goodwin, who follows Temple to the woods to watch her urinate; and Popeye, who watches from the foot of the bed as Temple and Red make love. If there is plenty of watching in *Sanctuary*, there is also Temple's own constant and unflagging awareness of *being watched* throughout her time at the Old Frenchman Place (she even puts on a show for the doomed Tommy). One has only to consider the number of times eyes are mentioned to be able to measure the significance of this theme in the novel — and one cannot escape the intimate association between eyes and the central dark figure of Popeye.

Oedipus himself is everywhere in the novel, in a variety of references and guises that leave no doubt about his central significance in the scheme of the novel's complex meanings. Oedipus is present, first of all, in the number of fathers and father-substitutes whose actions betray, in one way or another, the Oedipal situation: step-father Horace's longing for step-daughter Little Belle; Ruby's father, who kills the man trying to take Ruby away from him; and a variety of father-figures for Temple herself: her real father, who is conspicuously a "judge," and of whom she is always conscious — a super-ego if there ever was one — and who overprotects her behind a wall of four mountainous brothers; her blind "Pap," the man who in her imagination watches as she is violated by Popeye; then Popeye himself, whom Temple actually calls "Daddy" a number of times throughout the novel and who, as a father surrogate, actually fulfills her Oedipal fantasies — though obviously not in the manner she had intended.

If we can accept my suggestions about the centrality of the Oedipus complex to *Sanctuary's* meanings, we may be able, finally, to make some sense out of the scene during which Temple is actually raped: Popeye and Pap, whose names are not dissimilar, — "Pop" is itself frequently a soubriquet for "father" — are in-

volved equally in her violation; their eyes — one is blind, one is a pop-eyed voyeur, eyes strained with bulging to see more and more of what she is doing — make them the opposite sides of the same Oedipal coin. Thus in Temple's unconscious mind the part of her father whom she wants to see her as a desirable woman capable of accepting his sexual love, the part she wants to seduce, the part she wants to respond to her teasing and her taunts, is the part which actually violates her — and it is significant that the Oedipal violation takes place in a "crib." As *this* part of her father fulfills her fantasy, she immediately becomes conscious of the *other* part. It could not be more specific: at the very moment of her violation, Pap becomes fused in her mind with her judge father, "sitting in his chair . . . his hands crossed on the top of the stick."¹⁸ Pap is blind because he is the part of her father from whom she wants to hide both her behavior and her desires, the *judge* part, the super-ego, if you will, which condemns her and makes her feel guilt; it is Pap who dominates her mind at the moment of her rape.

This reading of her rape may also make it possible to understand why she lies on the witness stand during Lee's trial: why does she swear away Lee Goodwin's life? The question has played a central role in *Sanctuary* criticism for years. Her lying has never seemed to me to be mere cold-blooded disregard for truth or human life, although it has often been interpreted that way. I would suggest, rather that Temple's conscious mind *could not possibly* tell the truth about the events surrounding her rape, so completely has she repressed that truth. It is absolutely characteristic of the conscious mind that it disguises and transforms, often into their opposite, those unpleasant things that the unconscious knows and tries to force upon it. Thus Temple may not, as far as her conscious mind is concerned, be lying at all. The murder of Tommy is intimately tied up with her sexual desire for her father: her conscious mind, traumatized, censors the truth, displaces it with a convenient and plausible substitute. What Temple tells — and remember that she is telling her story to a judge, yet another symbol/displacement of her own father/judge — is not the truth, of course; but it may be no more a *lie*, in Temple's conscious mind, than the neurosis which connected Pap and Popeye with her father in the first place. And it seems clear, given all this, that just as in her testimony Temple substitutes Lee Goodwin for Popeye, so does she substitute the infamous corncob for the pater-

18. Polk, *Sanctuary: The Original Text*, p. 140.

nal penis of her fantasy — “It wasn’t *actually* my father after all!”

Finally, and directly connected with this, Oedipus Tyrannus is present in *Sanctuary* precisely in the entire spectrum of the legal system, representatives of which pervade every part of the novel: a capricious set of lawyers, judges, legislators, policemen, jurors, preachers, and even Jefferson society, all of whom, like fathers, make laws and break them with impunity, and who condemn and punish with no concern whatever to punish for crimes actually committed. Thus Lee Goodwin and Popeye are both executed for murders they did not commit, although to be sure they had committed others; Red is executed for actually making love to Temple, Tommy receives the identical punishment, from the identical hand, merely for having the desire to do so. Faulkner actually gives Oedipus corporeal presence in the novel in the person of the conniving and politically ruthless District Attorney, Eustace Graham, whose clubfoot identifies him as Oedipus so clearly I’m surprised no one — at least to my knowledge — has noticed it before. He is Oedipus the Tyrant indeed, willing to punish Lee Goodwin without regard to his guilt or innocence, and he is in fact the surrogate father who, with the assistance of Horace’s sister, does humiliate and punish Horace, in the courtroom, in front of a judge who cannot believe how incompetently Horace handles Lee’s defense, and who at one point even chides him publicly for his lack of effort. We are told, by Senator Clarence Snopes, that Horace’s father, like Temple’s, was a judge, so his humiliation here, in front of a judge, is significant.

Why does Horace crumble so quickly upon seeing Temple in the courtroom? Again we know no more certainly than we know why Temple lies, but it may be productive to speculate that here, in the courtroom, in the Yoknapatawpha County courthouse, where his own father would have presided, right smack dab in the center of the civilized world, in the very spot in all the world on which all the world’s disapproval of Oedipus’ two related sins would converge in a fury, *and* under the condemning eye of the judge/father, Horace is confronted with Temple Drake, whose story of her experiences at the Old Frenchman Place forced upon his conscious mind a clear awareness of his own incestuous fantasies, fantasies directed toward his mother and his sister, both of whom, in a spectacular scene, become fused in his imagination with Temple, Ruby, Belle, Little Belle and, significantly, with Popeye himself. Popeye bears a special relationship to Horace from the very moment they meet each other in that arresting scene during which they stare at each other for two solid hours across

a very symbolic spring: Popeye is, then, a substitute father not only in Temple's fantasies, but also in Horace's; he remembers Popeye from his time at the Old Frenchman Place as a threatening "black presence lying upon the house like the shadow of something . . . falling monstrous and portentous upon something else otherwise familiar and everyday."¹⁹ It is really no wonder Horace crumbles.

In *Sanctuary*, then, the complex of prohibitions originating in the infantile sexual relationships between parents and children is intimately, directly, and symbiotically related to the judicial system which originates in the absolute need of any society, primitive or modern, to have rules to govern human intercourse. I think this is no accident in *Sanctuary*, and once again we may turn to Freud for some explanation of what is going on. In his important book, *Totem and Taboo*, published originally in 1912, but published in English in this country in 1918, Freud addresses himself directly to the problems I have been outlining. Once again, I do not have the time to follow Freud's argument in detail and will have to rely on a fairly bald summary of his conclusions. I ask you to bear with me.

Freud's starting point in *Totem and Taboo* is what he and various anthropologists, Sir James G. Frazer of *The Golden Bough* most important among them, observed as the universal prohibition, in every known society, of incest. Freud argues that this prohibition may be understood by recourse to a paradigm of the peculiar relationships that must have existed, in the earliest families, between fathers and sons. He posits, for his argument, a primal family in which the only sexual restrictions were those imposed by the father; that is, the father held all power, all possessions, and claimed all sexual privileges with all women, including his own daughters, as his exclusive right. The sons, Freud would have it, counselled among themselves and determined that, their own libidos developing properly, this was an intolerable state of affairs, so in order to free themselves from the tyrannical rule of their father, they murdered him, all of them acting in unison. Their freedom from him they celebrated vigorously; yet they also felt remorse for their deed, for in spite of their fear of and resentment of their father, they also loved him, needed him, depended on him in all sorts of obvious ways. It is this ambivalence toward one's father, indeed, that makes of the Oedipus complex something much more complicated than a mere desire to mate with one's mother.

After the celebration, then, remorse conquered the sons: guilt

19. *Id.* at 9.

entered the world. Their remorse led them to try to atone for their collective guilt. This they did by making of the dead father a totem and by identifying him with a particular totem animal: they collectively forbade any repetition of their patricide by forbidding the killing of the totem. They raised their father, now safely dead, to the status of hero; they made him repository and symbol of all of their ideals, and began, in effect, in one form or another, to worship him — or, rather, to worship the totem which represented him. Significantly, at the same time they collectively renounced their claim to the women for whom they had killed him in the first place. I can do no better at this point than to quote Freud's lucid summary:

They revoked their deed by forbidding the killing of the totem, the substitute for their father; and they renounced its fruits by resigning their claim to the women who had now been set free. They thus created out of their filial sense of guilt the two fundamental taboos of totemism, which for that very reason inevitably corresponded to the two repressed wishes of the Oedipus complex. Whoever contravened those taboos became guilty of the only two crimes with which primitive society concerned itself.

The two taboos of totemism with which human morality has its beginning are not on a par psychologically. The first of them, the law protecting the totem animal, is founded wholly on emotional motives: the father had actually been eliminated, and in no real sense could the deed be undone. But the second rule, the prohibition of incest, has a powerful practical basis as well. Sexual desires do not unite men but divide them. Though the brothers had banded together in order to overcome their father, they were all one another's rivals in regard to the women. Each of them would have wished, like his father, to have all the women to himself. The new organization would have collapsed in a struggle of all against all, for none of them was of such over-mastering strength as to be able to take on his father's part with success. Thus the brothers had no alternative, if they were to live together, but — not, perhaps, until they had passed through many dangerous crises — to institute the law against incest, by which they all alike renounced the women whom they desired and who had been their chief motive for despatching their father. In this way they rescued the organization which had made them strong

Totemic religion arose from the filial sense of guilt, in an attempt to allay that feeling and to appease the father by deferred obedience to him. All later religions are seen to be attempts at solving the same problem. They vary according to the stage of civilization at which they arise and according to the methods which they adopt; but all have the same end in view and are reactions to the same great event with which civilization began and which, since it occurred, has not allowed mankind a moment's rest.²⁰

Thus the Oedipus complex is not just the “nuclear complex of the neuroses;”²¹ the murder of the primal father is in fact the “great event with which civilization began.” Freud makes this direct relationship between civilization and neurosis the basis of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, a study which develops the connection in considerable, and, it seems to me, irrefutable detail.

20. Freud, *Standard Edition*, XIII:143-45.

21. *Id.* at 129.

There are ways in which I have played unfairly with you today, particularly with you who are not Faulkner specialists. Because of time limitations and certain limitations imposed on anybody trying to convey by the spoken word ideas which are difficult to master even when you encounter them on the printed page and so have time and energy for a thoughtful consideration of what you are reading; because of this, I have asked you to accept on faith my summaries of certain of Freud's ideas; I've also had to assume on your part at least some acquaintance with *Sanctuary*. I've asked you to accept on faith my seemingly uncoordinated movements back and forth between Horace and Temple and numerous other suggestions I've made about doubles, substitutes, surrogates, sexual inversions, hermaphroditism, fantasies and other relationships among the characters in *Sanctuary* that have, at least to some degree, been commonplace in *Sanctuary* criticism for many years now. I don't know that I can now redeem myself in your ears by clarifying the Freud in any more detail, since Freud's arguments are long, carefully documented, extremely complex, and frequently based upon connections among causes and effects that you might not buy anyway; it is not, at any rate, the details of Freud's arguments that concern me, but only the larger principles contained in his conclusions — just as I believe those are the things that would have interested Faulkner.

Perhaps I can redeem myself a bit as regards *Sanctuary*, however, in these closing minutes. I think I can impose at least some form of order on the chaos that is that novel by arguing, simply, that Horace Benbow is the center of *Sanctuary*, and that all of the characters in the novel, himself included, are emanations from his own haunted mind; they are all, male, female, and otherwise, projections of his unconscious. As Lawrence Kubie, the well-known psychoanalyst, pointed out in a short essay on *Sanctuary* in 1934, *Sanctuary* contains all the distortions of reality one associates with all dreams in general and with nightmares in particular.²² Faulkner even tells us as much in *Sanctuary* itself: Horace, returning to Jefferson after having heard Temple's gruesome story in Miss Reba's brothel, thinks of Temple's tale as "a dream filled with all the nightmare shapes it had taken him forty-three years to invent."²³

This sort of structural device is not new to literature. *Sanctuary*,

22. Kubie, "William Faulkner's *Sanctuary*: An Analysis," *Saturday Review of Literature*, 11 (October 20, 1934): 224-25. Reprinted in J. Douglas Canfield, ed., *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Sanctuary"* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1983), pp. 25-31.

23. Polk, *Sanctuary: The Original Text*, p. 219.

for example, seems to me to partake of the peculiar quality of dreams described by playwright August Strindberg in his preface to his drama, *A Dream Play*:

[T]he author has . . . attempted to reproduce the detached and disunited — although apparently logical — form of dreams. Anything is apt to happen, anything seems possible and probable. Time and space do not exist. On a flimsy foundation of actual happenings, imagination spins, and weaves in new patterns: an intermingling of remembrances, experiences, whims, fancies, ideas, fantastic absurdities and improvisations, and original inventions of the mind.

The personalities split, take on duality, multiply, vanish, intensify, diffuse and disperse, and are brought into a focus. There is, however, one single-minded consciousness that exercises a dominance over the characters: the dreamer's.²⁴

I am far from arguing that Strindberg's play or introduction was an influence on Faulkner; I am merely interested in the confluence of their interest in dreams and in the peculiar terms of his description of what goes on in *A Dream Play*, which seems to me to describe *Sanctuary* very well indeed.

A real source for what Faulkner was trying to do in *Sanctuary* might lie much closer to home, in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, a poem whose influence on Faulkner, even on *Sanctuary*, has been demonstrated over and over again. In one of the notes to his poem, Eliot explains his use of the classical character Tiresias, the blind seer of ancient literature, who announces catastrophe to so many of the ancient nobles, and who watches the events of section III of *The Waste Land*. You'll recall Tiresias' story: having been first a male, he was then female for seven years before becoming a man again. Jove and Juno, arguing about whether men or women got greater pleasure from sex, asked Tiresias to arbitrate; he agreed with Jove that women indeed got greater enjoyment, whereupon Juno blinded him; Jove, to compensate him for his loss of sight, gave him the ability to know the future. Tiresias, Eliot explains,

[a]lthough a mere spectator and not indeed a "character," is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem.²⁵

What Horace sees, then, I would suggest, is the substance of *Sanctuary*: although he shares his blindness with Pap, he is the Tiresias figure, the hermaphroditic, the sexless; all the characters, male and female, in *Sanctuary*, are Horace; all the women are

24. Strindberg, *A Dream Play*, reprinted in John Gassner, ed., *A Treasury of The American Theatre* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 1111.

25. T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1963), p. 72.

his mother, all the men are his father, and in him the two sexes meet; all characters are eventually the same character: that is why one melts into the other, why Ruby and Temple and Narcissa and Belle and Little Belle and Horace's mother and Popeye himself become fused in Horace's imagination. They are all the same person, they are all Horace. It is Tiresias, you will also recall, who knows the secret of Oedipus' misfortunate life.

Horace waking is not the center of things in *Sanctuary*, however, but rather Horace sleeping, offstage, whose nightmare features himself performing a series of frantic movements none of which are efficacious, none of which serve to extricate him from the sexual and emotional morass that his nightmare places him in. Faulkner had used this device before, in one of his earliest works, a play, *The Marionettes*, which features two avatars of the central male character, Pierrot: a drunken one situated to one side of the stage, slumped over a table in a stupor, and another, who plays out on stage the fantasy of the drunken one.

Horace, then, is unquestionably the central consciousness — or unconsciousness — of *Sanctuary*: Horace the neurotic, Horace the lawyer, Horace the son of a judge, Horace the idealist, Horace the conscious defender of all the things civilization stands for, which are, ironically, the prohibitions of the very things that Horace's unconscious is urging him most powerfully to do; who in fact clings to civilization, to the law, to concepts of justice, as a sort of totem to prevent him from yielding to those primal impulses which are so dominant a part of his unconscious life.

Whether Faulkner read Freud, no one knows for certain, I for one think it is indisputable that he had at least a working knowledge of Freud's basic concepts and I am convinced that he had at least at one time a fairly detailed grasp of a number of Freud's major texts such as *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Whether he read Freud or not, however, it seems to me undeniable that the picture he paints of the relationship of civilization itself, the whole panorama of laws under which we govern ourselves, to the makeup of the human personality, can be understood by using Freud's terms. In *Requiem for a Nun* Faulkner makes the jail the mother of the courthouse, and so, like Freud, makes the recognition and then the suppression of the human instinct of aggression the starting points for any social organization; in *Sanctuary* Faulkner, like Freud, understood that that instinctive aggression is specifically a sexual instinct, and that the sexual instinct itself is intimately connected with the overwhelming desire to do things which are forbidden: which — the desire alone, even if unaccompanied by

the act — causes guilt. The courthouse, in *Requiem*, is the tribal totem, the repository of the settlers' worship of their ancestors and of their mutual recognition of their inherited sense of guilt. In *Sanctuary* there is no totem, or at least it exists only in Horace's feeble protestations about justice and civilization. There is no ideal, not even, really, offstage; there is only guilt.

In "Delta Autumn," a distraught and anguished Roth Edmonds finds himself agreeing with an unsympathetic Legate that "it's only because folks happen to be watching him that a man behaves at all Is that it?" "Yes," Edmonds replies, "A man in a blue coat, with a badge on it watching him. Maybe just the badge."²⁶

Watching. Being watched. Roth Edmonds thinks there ought to be a policeman standing behind everybody, looking over their shoulders and hitting them with a billy-club every time they misbehave or even think about misbehaving. In *Sanctuary* that policeman is already there, firmly enshrined, punishing and vengeful, unsleeping and vigilant. The Law in *Sanctuary* is an all-encompassing pair of eyes.

26. William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Random House, 1942), p. 346.

