

ANALYSIS

Sanctuary (1931)

William Faulkner

(1897-1962)

“In *Sanctuary* and his book of tales, *These 13* (both 1931), while they show certain modernistic features...Mr. Faulkner has not chosen to make any marked use of the stream-of-consciousness technique. And this may be a significant fact. The relative popularity of this writer is a strange phenomenon, so almost unbearably painful is his subject matter. But he is one of the greatest literary talents of our day. *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* are distinguished books, but so are *Sanctuary* and *These 13*. If Mr. Faulkner’s abandonment of the stream-of-consciousness technique is permanent, it is a notable sign of the times.”

Joseph Warren Beach
The Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique
(Appleton-Century-Crofts 1932) 522

“The impassioned tension, which is Faulkner’s strength, stems either from enslaved powerlessness fully comprehended (the girl in the gangster’s house), or from irreparable absurdity (the corn-cob rape, the burning of the innocent victim, Popeye the fugitive stupidly condemned for a crime he did not commit... *Sanctuary* is the intrusion of Greek tragedy into the detective story.”

Andre Malraux
“A Preface for Faulkner’s *Sanctuary*,” *La Nouvelle Revue Francaise*
(1 November 1933)

“The story is in two parts. In the first a young college girl named Temple Drake is landed by her drunken escort, Gowan Stevens, in the hands of a group of moonshiners. Stevens abandons her there and, after many false alarms and episodes of terror, she is criminally assaulted by a member of the band named Popeye. Popeye is suspected of having some Negro blood. Also he is sexually impotent, and therefore must execute his purpose by indirect methods which are overwhelmingly brutal and revolting. Furthermore, just before the assault he shoots another member of the band, a kindly feeble-minded fellow named Tommy, who is trying to protect Temple.

In the second half of the book Popeye has carried Temple off to a brothel in Memphis. Goodwin, the head of the moonshiners, is accused of both crimes and is convicted on the false testimony of Temple herself, despite the efforts of a lawyer named Horace Benbow. Finally the innocent Goodwin is burned by a lynching mob, Popeye is hanged by accident for a crime he did not commit. Temple is taken abroad by her father, and Horace Benbow, after a brief effort to live a free life, goes back into bondage to his wife and sister. This is the skeleton of the story.

The first part of the book is a troubled, and sometimes confused, nightmare, a nightmare which at moments is vivid and gripping, but which occasionally verges on slapstick and burlesque, with somersaults out of haylofts, rats that spring in the dark, dim figures that can be smelled in blackness, eyes that gleam in lightless corners, and so on. Yet all of this buffoonery is in subtle harmony with the sardonic and excruciating denouement. For it is the uttermost limits of sour irony that this impudent, tantalizing and provocative young girl, who had played fast and loose with the men of her own world without ever giving them the gift she kept dangling in front of them, should escape the relatively honest erotic purposes of the healthy members of the band, only to taunt the impotent and tortured figure of Popeye into committing a criminal assault upon her by artificial means.

That Temple invited the assault with her provocative, if unconscious, exhibitionism, is unquestionable. Ruby Goodwin, the mate of the bootlegger, is made to say that if Temple had only stopped running around where they had to look at her all the time it would ever have happened, but that Temple wouldn’t stay any

place—that ‘she just dashed out one door and in a minute she’s come in from another direction.’ Horace Benbow noted that Temple told her story with actual pride, ‘with a naïve and impersonal vanity.’

Furthermore, in the face of danger, Temple had a momentary hallucination that her body had changed into that of a boy. The rude awakening from this dream, and the shocking rediscovery of her unchanged anatomy gave rise to a secondary phantasy (one which is familiar enough to psychoanalysts in their study of illness, but rarely encountered in literature), in which there was a fusion of the ideas of rape, castration, and death (cf. The coffin phantasy). From that moment, Temple behaves as though she herself were dead, and the blind, dead instrument of revenge. But the subtle and confusing thing is that she destroys first not those who have hurt her, but those who have helped her. She kills the lover that Popeye procures for her. She kills Goodwin, the bootlegger, by giving false testimony against him. She crushes the lawyer who tries to help. It is only indirectly and in the very end that her taunts help to drive Popeye himself into a virtual suicide.

In the story there is no effort to explain why she sacrifices Goodwin, the potent man, to the furies of the mob and saves Popeye, her impotent malefactor. Popeye’s disguised presence in the courtroom can hardly account for it. But Temple has by this time become an almost automatic engine of destruction. Perhaps one may venture the speculation that this paradoxical and perverted impulse to revenge herself on those who have not harmed her, but who are essentially normal in their masculinity, fits the whole history of her defiant, rebellious, and provocative attitude toward boys and men. Her career seemed to shape itself out of her hate of her father and her four stalwart brothers. It is almost as though she said, ‘To be a woman is worse than death or the same as death. Therefore I will take my revenge upon all you men who are really men. I will excite your desires, but I will not satisfy them. I will laugh in the face of your yearnings. I will gloat over you and scorn you as you drink yourselves into impotence. And finally I will be the instrument of your actual bodily destruction.’

One good and valiant, but again feeble figure—that of Horace Benbow—battles throughout the second part of the book. He is a well-intentioned but powerless lawyer. He was ‘given to much talk and no much else’; and he said of himself, ‘I lack courage—the machinery is all here, but it won’t run.’ Poor Benbow could not even scrub a floor, much less the community whose need for a scrubbing he felt so acutely. The story of Benbow, like the story of Goodwin, runs through the book as a contrast to the more essential tale of Popeye and Temple. In his forty odd years Benbow had gradually built up a weak, wide-eyed, but gallant impulse to tilt against the smug and hypocritical forces of society which his sister Narcissa represented. In defiance of convention he had married a woman who had had to seek a divorce in order to marry him; and again the defiance of convention he had now left her. In the face of the mounting hostility of the community toward Goodwin, Benbow tried desperately to save him from an unjust conviction. But he was not strong enough to achieve this, and in the end merely accelerated and expedited his death.

Here the tale is a dramatization of the impact between the forces of instinctual evil (which are represented as rising up out of the pits of the underworld through Popeye and Temple) and the forces of an evil and savage conscience, operating through the blind vengefulness of a misdirected mob. It represents graphically the struggle which in psychoanalytic shorthand is known as the struggle between the Id (the reservoir of instincts) and the Super-ego (the all but blind forces of a conscience whose operation is by no means always rational and clear). Between the two stands this weak and feeble effort at a realistic dealing with life, embodied in the figure of Benbow. He is the weak representative of the much-battered ‘Ego,’ that fragment of the personality which is so often ground to pieces in the battle.

Beneath it all one feels the incessant struggle of Benbow against his own impotence and powerlessness. He is unable to defy the women who cramp him on all sides. All adult women seem to thwart him, to manage his life, to force him into channels toward which he has a revulsion. To carry a box of shrimps once a week from the railroad station to his home for all the years of his marriage, loathing the smell of them, hating the drip of them, identifying himself with ‘the small stinking spots,’ which left a trail behind him on the sidewalk, constituted his picture of marriage. Far deeper than that lay his incestuous yearnings for his stepdaughter. These tie him up in horror phantasies in which he sees himself helplessly standing by while his stepdaughter, Little Belle, plays around with other men. In fact, it is this which finally drives him from home. And toward the end of the book he is stirred to a dim recognition of his own impulses when

her picture is described 'as leaving upon his eye a soft and fading aftermath of invitation and voluptuous promise.' At this point he becomes nauseated actively, and soon thereafter, giving in to the social pressure which forces him back to the hated protection of his sister, he returns to his wife. In other words, as he becomes conscious of his intolerable and unacceptable impulses, he experiences a direct revulsion of feeling which causes him to be sick, whereupon he gives up his frantic and compulsive rebellion against society.

The only figures in the book who take life in the body with simple, earthy realism, who hate and murder or love and make love wholeheartedly and without reservation, are Goodwin, the moonshiner, and his mate Ruby. They alone do not think that 'all girls are ugly except when they are dressed.' They alone do not subscribe to the parable that 'Adam paid no attention to Eve until she put on a fig-leaf.' They alone are not moved to revulsions of feeling by excrement, by hunger, dirt, and bleeding, or by any of the other natural phenomena of the body's living. They alone have no fear of the body, be it male or female. They recognize Temple's impudent coquetry in the face of danger, her blind exhibitionism, her invitation of the final disaster. On her Ruby heaps withering scorn for 'just playing at it'; yet she is jealous and fearful of Temple's presence because she knows that this tantalizing and provocative coquetry might in the end seduce Goodwin himself. Together they recognize the significance of that 'high, delicate head,' the 'bold, painted mouth and soft chin,' the 'eyes blankly right and left looking, cool, predatory, and discreet.' To them Temple is no innocent victim. They view her realistically. Perhaps that is why Goodwin must be killed, and Ruby cast out by the savage 'conscience' of the community.

It may seem to some readers that the author's claim that the book 'is a cheap idea, because it was deliberately conceived to make money' would invalidate any effort to study its contents seriously. This we cannot admit. The phantasy still remains as an expression of more forces than those which the author can consciously control. It is only when the nightmare becomes a little too garish, the horrors too gruesome with a touch of the slapstick, that one notes the tongue bulging in the author's cheek. Naïve youths who rent a room in a brothel thinking it is a boarding house, the incredible funeral of Red and its solemn, drunken sequel at Reba Rivers's afternoon 'tea' party—all make one chuckle a bit—but for the rest the tale stands firmly on its own unconscious sources.

We have suggested above that this literature represents the working out in phantasy of the problems of impotence in men, meaning by impotence a frailty in all spheres of instinctual striving. In the end, however, this impotence always is seen to have a direct relation to psychosexual potency. It is as though sophisticated and civilized man is conducting a constant struggle against a sense of impending impotence, a struggle which seems to have in it three direct objects of fear—a fear of women, a fear of other men, and a fear of the community and of society in general. All of these three fears are dramatized in this story.

Furthermore, when a man feels unable to achieve some goal toward which he is struggling, he can in his phantasy handle his sense of powerlessness in one of several ways. In the first place, he can people the whole world with other impotent figures, spreading his own sense of infirmity to include everyone, and thus reducing his feeling of painful humiliation. Thus we find in *Sanctuary* that ever 'respectable' man is in one way or another crippled, impotent, or silly. Only the Negro who is hung, and the moonshiner who is burned alive, and Red, the dance-fall boy who is shot, are potent. This is true not only of the major figures, such as Popeye and Benbow, but also of such minor figures as Cla'ence Snopes, or the lamed distinct attorney, or Gowan Stevens.

Or, secondly, he may comfort himself in dreams of the ultimate triumph of the weak over the strong, of the impotent over the potent. Thus, we have seen, in every line of the book evil and weakness triumph over goodness and strength. Or he can turn with his rage against the sources of his humiliation and imagine them overwhelmed with disaster. Consequently, all women are made to grovel before men, whether it be Reba Rivers who keeps the brothel; or Ruby Goodwin who, though triumphant and defiant toward others, is ready to lick the boots of her mate; or Narcissa, who is jilted and falls in love with fools like Gowan Stevens; or Temple Drake, whose lean and immature body exists in the book only to taunt and tantalize men with promises which are never fulfilled, until finally the fulfilling of the promise is taken out of her hands and worked upon her with savage and sardonic vengeance by the sinister figure of the impotent Popeye.... Or again the sufferer from a sense of impotence can turn with sour scorn against the whole

structure of society, seeing in it nothing but its pettiest aspects, corroding it with irony, taunting it with the failure of every decent effort at restitution or punishment, mockingly embodying all aspirations in the spirit of hypocritical and waspish women like Narcissa....

It is Popeye who shrieks like a child at a swooping owl, who in a panic shoots a harmless old dog who has sniffed at his leg, who sucks his cigarettes rather than smoking them, who tries to buy with gifts the girl he cannot woo, who is possessive and jealous, who suffers and yearns and wants and whinnies and froths, and all of whose frustrated yearnings turn to hate. And it is Popeye's very figure which is concretely described in the story in words which make it a graphic representation of the phallus whose impotence is the root of the whole tragedy.... In the end, Popeye is willing to escape, through the hangman's noose, the tyranny of fears which reigns in his heart....

Why 'Sanctuary' in a tale in which no one triumphs and everyone fails? Where in such a horror-driven conception of living is 'sanctuary' to be found? Perhaps it is not accidental that in the book the only figure who laughs is 'Tommy, the feeb,' the feeble-minded lad who sets himself to guard Temple and is shot for his pains. He suffers no unhappiness, but laughs even when his pet dog is shot, and undoubtedly would have chuckled over his own demise had he had time to do so. Perhaps here in this cloudy brain is the sanctuary which Faulkner had in mind. For the rest the term is a mockery which says, 'There is no escape from anxiety, no escape from horror'."

Lawrence S. Kubie, M.D.
"William Faulkner's *Sanctuary*"
Saturday Review of Literature
(20 October 1934)

"*Sanctuary*, which is unfortunately the most widely known and misunderstood of Mr. Faulkner's novels, is a failure... In simple terms, the pattern of the allegory is something like this: Southern Womanhood Corrupted but Undefined (Temple Drake), in the company of the Corrupted Tradition (Gowan Stevens, a professional Virginian), falls into the clutches of amoral Modernism (Popeye), which is itself impotent, but which with the aid of its strong ally Natural Lust ('Red') rapes Southern Womanhood unnaturally and then seduces her so satisfactorily that her corruption is total, and she becomes the tacit ally of Modernism. Meanwhile Pore White Trash (Goodwin) has been accused of the crime which he, with the aid of the Naïve Faithful (Tammy), actually tried to prevent. The Formalized Tradition (Horace Benbow), perceiving the true state of affairs, tries vainly to defend Pore White Trash. However, Southern Womanhood is so hopelessly corrupted that she willfully sees Pore White Trash convicted and lynched; she is then carried off by Wealth (Judge Drake) to meaningless escape in European luxury. Modernism, carrying in it from birth to its own impotence and doom, submits with masochistic pleasure to its own destruction for the one crime that it has not yet committed—Revolutionary Destruction of Order (the murder of the Alabama policeman, for which the innocent Popeye is executed.

Here Mr. Faulkner's theme is forced into allegory, not projected as myth. In this sense, the book is a 'cheap idea'—as Mr. Faulkner himself calls it in his preface to the Modern Library edition. Its defects are those of allegory in general. The characters are distorted, being more nearly grotesques than human beings, and they are not distorted to scale (Temple is only a type; Benbow is a recognizably human character, and so is Miss Reba, the keeper of the bawdy house); accordingly, the book lacks the 'self-subsistent reality' which may be found in a work like *Absalom, Absalom!* It is powerful, and it contains some passages of bawdy folk humor that are of a high order of excellence, but it is fundamentally a caricature."

George Marion O'Donnell
"Faulkner's Mythology"
The Kenyon Review I.3 (1939)

"The original text, in which Horace Benbow is the central character, was published in 1981. *Requiem for a Nun* (1951) is a sequel. Temple Drake, an 18-year-old Mississippi college girl, goes to a petting party with a drunken escort, Gowan Stevens, who wrecks his car on a lonely road. They walk to a nearby house, which is a bootleggers' hideout, inhabited by a number of vicious criminals of whom the chief is the killer Popeye, emasculated and of subnormal intellect as the result of a childhood accident. Temple's cowardly

escort escapes after a severe beating, but the girl, whose virginity makes her the object of several attacks, is finally raped by Popeye, who incidentally murders one of his men. He then places her in the Memphis brothel of Miss Reba, who is at first pleased to have the custom of this influential man, then horrified by his degenerate conduct.

Goodwin, one of the bootleggers, is arrested for the murder that Popeye committed and is defended by a member of the distinguished Benbow family of Jefferson, Horace Benbow, a lawyer who wishes to redeem his conventional career by serving justice in this unpopular case. He learns of Popeye's guilt and of the plight of Temple, whom he persuades to testify. The girl's mind is already unbalanced, and her testimony only increases the unreasoning vindictiveness of the jurors, who convict Goodwin. The latter is brutally lynched. Benbow manages to escape with his life; Temple is taken by her broken father to live in Paris; and Popeye, who has escaped to Alabama, is apprehended and hanged for another murder, which he did not commit."

James D. Hart
The Oxford Companion to American Literature, 5th edition
(Oxford 1941-83) 665-66

"*Sanctuary* is the most violent of all his novels; it is also the most popular and by no means the least important (in spite of Faulkner's comment that it was 'a cheap idea...deliberately conceived to make money'). The story of Popeye and Temple Drake has more meaning than appears on a first hasty reading—the only reading that most of the critics have been willing to grant it. Popeye himself is one of several characters in Faulkner's novels who represent the mechanical civilization that has invaded and partly conquered the South. He is always described in mechanical terms: his eyes 'looked like rubber knobs'; his face 'just went awry, like the face of a wax doll set too near a hot fire and forgotten'; his tight suit and stiff hat were 'all angles, like a modernistic lampshade'; and in general he had 'that vicious depthless quality of stamped tin.' Popeye was the son of a professional strikebreaker, from whom he had inherited syphilis, and the grandson of a pyromaniac. Like two other villains in Faulkner's novels, Joe Christmas and Januarius Jones, he had spent most of his childhood in an institution. He was the man 'who made money and had nothing he could do with it, spend it for, since he knew that alcohol would kill him like poison, who had no friends and had never known a woman'—in other words, he was the compendium of all the hateful qualities that Faulkner assigns to finance capitalism.

Sanctuary is not a connected allegory, as one critic explained it, but neither is it a mere accumulation of pointless horrors. It is an example of the Freudian method turned backward, being full of sexual nightmares that are in reality social symbols. It is somehow connected in the author's mind with what he regards as the rape and corruption of the South. In all his novels dealing with the present, Faulkner makes it clear that the descendants of the old ruling caste have the wish but not the courage or the strength to prevent this new disaster. They are defeated by Popeye (like Horace Benbow), or they run away from him (like Gowan Stevens, who had gone to school at Virginia and learned to drink like a gentleman, but not to fight for his principles), or they are robbed and replaced in their positions of influence by the Snopeses (like old Bayard Sartoris, the president of the bank), or they drug themselves with eloquence and alcohol (like Quentin Compson's father), or they retire into the illusion of being inviolable Southern ladies (like Mrs. Compson...or they dwell so much on the past that they are incapable of facing the present (like Reverend Hightower of *Light in August*), or they run from danger to danger (like young Bayard Sartoris) frantically seeking their own destruction. Faulkner's novels are full of well-meaning and even admirable persons, not only the grandsons of the cotton aristocracy, but also pine-hill farmers and storekeepers and sewing-machine agents and Negro cooks and sharecroppers; but they are almost all of them defeated by circumstances and they carry with them a sense of their own doom."

Malcolm Cowley
"Introduction to *The Portable Faulkner*"
(Viking 1946)

"One evening in the mid-1920s Faulkner and a woman companion were in a night club. A girl who at present may be identified as N. came across the room, sat down at their table, and in half an hour told them an interesting part of her autobiography. A few years later it became the core of *Sanctuary*. N. had associated for a time with a gangster who had many of the characteristics of the gangster in the novel, the

similarity later even going the odd extreme of nature's imitating art, because eight months after the book appeared the real gangster killed himself, though his method was less subtle than that used by his fictional counterpart. The real gangster was impotent and in his relations with women he was given to substitutions for his impotence. He did keep a girl for a time at a brothel in what might be called semi-privacy. And in the real perverted rape the implement was so fantastically unnatural that compared to it the notorious episode of the novel seems well along the way toward normalcy. (Students of the psychology of association can be expected to make something of the fact that N. was born and reared in a village named Cobbtown.) For some years Faulkner thought on N.'s autobiography and the related events which he knew of from other sources. And during that period, according to his associates, he tried to write the story in a number of ways....

The point is that Faulkner did not think up a series of fictional events to startle the public gratuitously. He had brooded over specific real events for some time, with disgust for what they represented and with what might be called shocked awe for the real counterpart of Temple Drake (as Faulkner told a friend, *Sanctuary* was partly written to show that women can survive almost anything). In dealing with the startling real events Faulkner by no means exaggerated them for cheap effect—quite to the contrary, he reduced their horror, besides doing the more important work of giving them form of a high order.”

Carvell Collins
“A Note on *Sanctuary*”
Harvard Advocate (November 1951)

“He was not really well known...until the appearance of *Sanctuary* in 1931. A story of sexual perversion constructed like a detective story and denying anything approaching poetic justice, it established Faulkner as one of the leaders of the ‘cult of violence,’ and, thanks to its reprinting in an inexpensive edition, it remains his most widely read novel. Although Faulkner avowedly designed it as a ‘shocker,’ it is not uncharacteristic in method or matter, for it embeds in a carefully worked-out pattern of objective indirectness some most stomach-turning crimes and abnormalities. After its appearance Faulkner commanded a ready market for his short stories and made his mark even in Hollywood, where his peculiar techniques were adapted to certain motion pictures. Some of his work was potboiling, but no other writer, with the possible exception of Erskine Caldwell, has provided such penetrating analyses of pathological specimens of degeneracy.”

Theodore Hornberger
The Literature of the United States 2, 3rd edition
(Scott, Foresman 1953-66) 1233

“*Sanctuary* is the most lurid of Faulkner's novels in content, although relatively conventional in technique. This unbeatable combination made it an enormous popular success; it was later made into a motion picture upon which Faulkner collaborated. The heroine is an intelligent but rebellious and neurotic young college girl, Temple Drake. She flees on an escapade with Gowan Stevens, the characterless young nephew of the lawyer Gavin Stevens, who later reappears in *Intruder in the Dust*. Through Gowan's drunkenness the car is wrecked, and he leads Temple to a lonely farmhouse where she falls into the hands of a gang of moonshiners. The leader of this band is the strange and perverted social misfit Popeye, himself impotent, who derives a vicarious satisfaction from Temple's violation at the hands of Alabama Red, another member of the gang. Gowan, beaten, disappears, and Temple subsequently undergoes various exotic and painful adventures including a confinement in a Memphis brothel, whose madam is at first proud to gain the patronage of the important Popeye but later shocked by his depravity. Alabama Red is killed by Popeye in the act of making an unscheduled visit to Temple, who eventually escapes.

Meanwhile Goodwin, another of the bootleggers, has been arrested for a murder actually committed by Popeye. He is defended by Horace Benbow, a lawyer who wishes to expiate his selfish and conventional life by fighting for this unpopular cause. Benbow attempts to use Temple's evidence to save his client, but she has been so unbalanced by her experience that she only prejudices the jury against Goodwin. Goodwin is lynched by a mob, Benbow barely escapes, and Temple goes off to Paris to forget her three months' nightmare. Popeye, the evil focus of the whole drama, escapes to Florida and is later hanged for a murder he did not commit.

Faulkner at one time declared that he wrote *Sanctuary* solely to create a sensation and make money. It did both these things; it is not, however, as bad a novel as Faulkner's statement, or a summary of its plot, would suggest. Temple's character is vividly established, and the plot achieves more suspense and general interest than it does in most of Faulkner's work. There is also an underlying symbolism—the rape of the South at the hands of an impotent North (Popeye)—but the theme is not of any importance in the basic structure of the book and means little to the ordinary reader. An important sequel to *Sanctuary* is found in *Requiem for a Nun*.”

Donald Heiney
Recent American Literature 4
(Barron's Educational Series 1958) 215-16

“*Sanctuary* and *Requiem for a Nun* are related by more than continuity of plot and character, for the latter is not so much a sequel as a restatement and commentary on some of the ideas which were overshadowed by the bizarre and exaggerated brutality of the events in the former. Actually both books are concerned with violence, though in *Requiem for a Nun* it takes the form of a completed act which is talked about while in *Sanctuary* it is part of the developing action, provoking an immediate and often unformulated response.... In both books an act of murder signals an exploration of crime and punishment in its social, moral, and legal aspects. Justice with its attendant problems of guilt and innocence, responsibility and punishment is probed from various points of view. The prose interchapters recount chronologically the history of Yoknapatawpha while exploring the process by which justice has become abstracted and conceptualized, housed in and symbolized by a courthouse, a jail, and a ‘gilded dome.’ At this point justice ceases to be a living reality in the heart of man and becomes a set of laws and precedents of the kind that defeat Benbow. Thus, *Sanctuary* and the two parts of *Requiem for a Nun* explore the same problem but by radically different approaches and techniques....

Temple's rape and Tommy's murder invoke certain social and legal rituals of justice which are more interested in completing the pattern of crime and punishment than in understanding its moral complexity.... In the process, Goodwin's self-elected executioners break the law, kill an innocent man, and debase their own moral natures, all in the name of justice and morality. Even as this pattern crystallizes, Horace Benbow is forced to re-evaluate it in the light of his own growing knowledge about the murder and his moral sense. As a product of his culture and tradition, he begins by assuming that society is the repository of human values and that it will act humanely and rationally even though individuals within it may fail to do so. He ends by uttering some of the bitterest condemnations of Jefferson's moral complacency, hypocrisy, and heartlessness to be found in any of Faulkner's novels.

Disillusioned by his society, he yet has faith in the power of truth and the unimpassioned due process of law, but he finds that the court too lends itself to the horrifying travesty of justice based on prejudice and emotional appeals. Even religion proves hollow as the church turns viciously on Ruby while God, whom Horace Benbow believed to be ‘a gentleman,’ remains genteelly indifferent to the subversion of His divine laws by human ones. What reduces Horace to a state of shock is the discovery not of evil but of the shoddy foundations of his vision of a moral and rational universe, supported and sustained by the institutions of the church, the state, and the law....

Jefferson's respect for law and social morality manifests itself in self-righteousness and unconscious hypocrisy while its preoccupation with social values leads to an indifference to personal values. Thus, Ruby is first branded a whore, an adulteress, and a murderess, and then harried from one shelter to another in the name of decency and respectability. Horace himself becomes the subject of gossip and condemnation simply because he refuses to accept the public judgment of her or to treat her inhumanely. In contrast to Jefferson's concern with social morality, Goodwin and Ruby do realize certain personal values in their love for each other, in their child, and in their care for Tommy and the old blind man. Similarly, Miss Reba shows a very real if maudlin love for the departed Mr. Binford and is able to sympathize with Ruby whom she does not know. On the other hand, both Goodwin's and Miss Reba's households exist in defiance of law and the rules of society. Each group thus lacks some quality essential to Horace's ideal of man in society enacting his own moral nature. Indifferent to personal and social values alike, and therefore as much an intruder at Goodwin's as he is at Miss Reba's, Popeye by his very presence is a source of latent

violence over which Goodwin manages to maintain a precarious control until two more intruders, Temple and Gowan, introduce a new and explosive element into his house.

By attempting to impose their code on a group and in a situation where that code is not only meaningless but dangerous, Temple and Gowan generate the violence which overwhelms them. Gowan's adolescent conviction that the honor of a Virginia gentleman is measured by his ability to drink every man under the table determines his behavior both with the town boys and later at Goodwin's. For him, the social and moral criterion is simply one's capacity for liquor. He actually seems to believe that by outdrinking Van he can establish his own standards of behavior and hence his control of a situation long since out of hand. Appropriately, he can only judge the events in which he and Temple have become involved and his own responsibility for them in terms of that same sorry code. He thinks not of what might have happened to Temple but of her returning among people who know him to reveal that he has committed the 'unforgivable sin'—not holding his liquor—which makes him forever an outcast in decent Virginia society. Gowan's abject despair over his folly and his hope that the extent of that folly will never be revealed indicate not so much his youth and stupidity, though that is also present, as his inability either to act or to think in any but the ways established by his group. His obsessive concern with social values has atrophied his every moral and human instinct. In him conformity has been carried to an extreme at once ludicrous and tragic.

While Gowan is completely dominated by the mores of the Virginia campus, Temple's attitude is ambivalent. Thus, although her degradation is greater, there is also within her a greater possibility of redemption.... Yet, like Gowan, she clings to her customs in the presence of an alien group. Temple can never quite rid herself of the unnatural flirtatiousness and the arch provocativeness which had served her well at Ole Miss because the young men also knew their role in the *pas de deux* of sexual teasing. The men at the Old Frenchman place, however, do not know the rules of her game and have no intention of permitting her to establish them. For them, the only relationship between a man and a woman is sexual; and crude and violent though it may be, it still possesses a vitality and forcefulness which at once repels and attracts Temple.

Caught between her longing for the safety of her own world and her desire to share in the 'adventure' of this new one into which she has stumbled, Temple reaches a state of semi-hysteria. She attempts to persuade herself that the two worlds are identical, or if not, that hers has the power of control.... But her wish not to be protected reveals itself in the constant advance and retreat, provocation and cringing withdrawal, that mark her behavior throughout her stay at Goodwin's. She forces herself on the attention of all the men including Popeye whose callous aloofness is not easily invaded and whose sexual desires are certainly not easily aroused. Temple's provocativeness, like Gowan's cavalier use of the bottle, are natural or at least accepted forms of social behavior in their world. At Goodwin's they become grotesque in their inappropriateness and highly dangerous once they are translated into the language of the Old Frenchman place. The flirtatiousness is construed as an open invitation and the drunkenness as indifference to what may happen.

Time and again Temple is given the opportunity to leave; time and again Ruby warns her to be quiet, to stop running, to stop impressing her fear and desire on the men. But she persists, half-fascinated by the idea of her own rape and half-dreading the actual experience. She can never quite make up her mind to flee either at Goodwin's, the filling station, or Miss Reba's. It is not her feat of encountering greater evils or dangers but her fascination with the idea of violence that holds her immobile. For only by becoming the victim of violence can she participate in Ruby's world without losing her position in her own. Since she does not will her rape, but only passively suffers it, she is freed of responsibility for it, thus enabling her to preserve her social innocence no matter what physical or moral degradation she experiences. In Ruby's spare room, her fear almost forgotten in her excitement and anticipation, Temple goes through a self-conscious ritual of preparing for her victimization and self-sacrifice. She combs her hair, renews her makeup, glances at her watch repeatedly, and lies down to wait, 'her hands crossed on her breast and her legs straight and close and decorous, like an effigy on an ancient tomb.'

In Temple's later account of the night she spent 'in comparative inviolation,' the alternation between fear and desire is obvious. Her wish to evade the coming rape is expressed by her fantasies: her vision of

herself as somehow physically sealed against contact, as dead, as a matronly schoolteacher, and finally as an old man with a long white beard. But this is balanced by her repeated cries of 'Touch me! You're a coward if you don't.' And at the very moment of her rape, Temple's scream is one of mingled protest and exultation: 'Something is happening to me!' At last even the naïve and inexperienced Horace realizes that the self-confessed 'victim' is 'recounting the experience with actual pride, a sort of naïve and impersonal vanity.'

At Miss Reba's Temple gives full scope to her inclinations while still playing the role of 'victim-prisoner.' The door which she carefully locks not only keeps Popeye out but herself within. Certainly when she desires to leave, neither the door nor the servant-wardress stands in her way. During her stay she becomes completely corrupted, not because she is kept in a whorehouse, not even because she has accepted a gangster for a bed-mate, but because her capacity for moral commitments and responsibilities has steadily declined since Frank's death until, in the underworld, it is wholly atrophied. She has absolutely no interest in Red, her lover, as a human being. At the moment of his greatest danger, her one thought is to obtain just one more second of sexual gratification; and later she dies not regret or mourn his death but only that 'it will never be again.' In short, Temple eagerly abandons all the social values of her group without accepting the personal values which, however minimal, lend significance to the lives of Ruby and Goodwin.

Temple's excursion into the underworld is paralleled by Ruby's forced sojourn in Jefferson. With her practical common sense or suspiciousness, Ruby not only accepts but jealously guards the isolation of her world, 'asking nothing of anyone except to be let alone; trying to make something out of her life.' Hence, she furiously resents Temple, the intruder who threatens her security. But she is also aware that she herself is the intruder in Jefferson and calmly accepts the intolerance and cruelty. She moves without protest from the Benbow house to the Hotel to the lean-to shed room in ironic repetition of Temple's flight from room to room at Goodwin's. But even in the shack Ruby is not safe from Narcissa who feels that her world has been threatened by her brother's interest in a woman who is not his kind.

Though Narcissa consistently reveals a complete indifference to the moral qualities of any act including her own, she is intensely concerned with the interpretation that maybe placed on these acts by people she knows. As she carefully explains to Horace, 'I don't care where else you go nor what you do. I don't care how many women you have nor who they are. But I cannot have my brother mixed up with a woman people are talking about.' It is with and through Narcissa that Jefferson rises to protect public morality, to speak in defense of an 'odorous and omnipotent sanctity' in the eyes of which Ruby and Goodwin are murderers, adulterers, and polluters of 'the free Democratic-Protestant atmosphere of Yoknapawph county.'

Narcissa is coolly indifferent to the methods she uses as long as they succeed in bringing her brother, who refuses to conform to Jefferson's preconceptions and prejudices, back into the fold. She points out that while he has been babbling about truth, justice, and responsibility, he has succeeded in offending social decorum past the point of forgiveness by taking another man's wife and then abandoning her, and finally, by sheltering a 'streetwalker,' 'a murderer's woman' in his apartment. She attempts to frighten him with public opinion, shame him by an appeal to the Benbow past and tradition, bribe him with an offer of a better criminal lawyer than he is for Goodwin's defense, and when all these fail, to disillusion him about Ruby's motives and her needs. Her final step is to deny even lip service to truth and justice: 'I don't see that it makes any difference who did it. The question is, are you going to stay mixed up with it?' Horace, of course, refuses to be swayed; but while he is savoring his indignation and exploring the possibilities of action, Narcissa acts expediently and effectively to thwart justice with law and to return a humbled Horace to Belle.

Society, concerned with its own preservation, is thus intolerant of the saint as of the sinner, of Horace as of Popeye. Strangely enough, there are certain startling similarities between these two morally antithetical figures. Both are primarily spectators rather than participants in life. Popeye's fear of nature, his terror when he senses the swooping owl, is matched by Horace's inability to remember the name of the bird whose call he hears and by his desire to escape from the rich fertility of the land. Moreover, Popeye's rapt and unnatural absorption in watching Temple and Red perform an act in which he can never share is

echoed by Horace's painful exclusion from the grape arbor where Little Belle casually experiments with sex. Both are conscious of their isolation and attempt to break out of it, the one through violence, the other through fantasy and hallucination which are themselves a form of violence. Popeye's brutal act fuses with Horace's thoughts and culminates in the nightmare vision of the rape of a composite Temple-Little Belle.

The separation from the world of nature also implies a separation from the nature of man, characterized by a capacity for good and evil. Both Horace and Popeye are therefore incomplete human beings—figures symbolic of good and evil, unintegrated into the human world. Significantly, Popeye is seen only through his actions, violent, reflexive, destructive; in contrast, Horace is all thought, sensitivity, and perception but without the ability to act effectively. The difference between them, and it is, of course, an overwhelming one, is that the latter is isolated by his dream of moral perfection, the former by his total indifference to all moral values. Consequently, they represent two possible aberrations from the social norm represented by Jefferson as well as the two possible alternatives between which society itself must choose. For only by sharing Horace's dream while recognizing it as a dream can society re-examine its conduct and make it once more a living expression of man's aspirations.

Unlike Horace, who discovers the force of human relationships even as he is rejected and threatened with lynching by society. Popeye continues to live in complete and utter isolation. The hereditary syphilis and insanity stress his inability to make any kind of meaningful contact, either physical or social, with other people. From his birth he is alone and his survival depends on accentuating that aloneness. The doctor warns that 'he will never be a man, properly speaking. With care, he will live some time longer.' Only by eschewing life can Popeye prolong his existence, and only by affirming the reality of death can he, by implication, affirm that existence. His killing the various animals is more than precocious sadism: it is his attempt to gain a fleeting and illusory sense of life through the very act of destroying it. Oddly enough, the same motive is present in his attachment to his half-crazed mother. Since he is rejected by all the groups with which he comes in contact, she is his only link with the human world, the source and therefore the living proof of his own existence.

Into this sterile, circumscribed world of Popeye's, Temple introduces lust, herself desiring that violation of which she suspects Goodwin to be capable and which she later admires so greatly in Red. But all that Popeye can offer is the mechanical violence of a corncob—a horrifying but futile protest against both his impotence and his isolation. His vicarious participation in sex terminated by Temple's revolt, his murder of Red proven an empty gesture, he chooses death out of sheer boredom and the realization that, quite literally, he has never lived. Once having chosen death, he finds it unimportant whether it comes as punishment for killing Tommy, Red, and indirectly Goodwin, or for slaying a policeman in a town he has never visited. It is, after all, the last joke that life will ever play on him and he makes no effort to counter this final gambit.

In contrast to Popeye, Horace wills his own isolation. His desire to escape from Kinston is caused initially by his disillusionment in those relationships which give meaning to a man's life. Experience mocks the poetic ideal as marriage settles into the routine of fetching shrimp from the station and locking doors, and love becomes identified with the grape arbor frequented by a multitude of young men. Narcissa, the 'still unravished bride of quietness,' proves to be a stupid, self-centered, and shallow woman. And even the fragile beauty of the fairy Titania is tarnished by too much handling so that he sees in Little Belle's portrait 'a face suddenly older in sin than he would ever be, a face more blurred than sweet...eyes more secret than soft.' The world of beauty, symbolized by the glassblowers' cave in *Sartoris*, has been completely destroyed.

But though the beauty he worshiped is denied by experience, Horace yet has faith in goodness. As he travels from Kinston to the Old Frenchman place, Jefferson, the campus of Ole Miss, and finally Miss Reba's whorehouse, that ideal too is put to the test of reality. For wherever he goes, he carries with him his vision of a world peopled by gentlemen and benevolently ordered by a God who may be 'foolish at times, but at least He's a gentleman.' As an ideal, his dream is a noble one; as a description of reality, it is hopelessly inadequate. The crudity of actual life and the intermingling of good and evil in the very texture of experience leave him bewildered and helpless. The very ideals which make him an unerring judge of his society render him incapable of fighting that society.

All of Horace's actions are thus marked by a curious bifocal vision. As he becomes actively involved in helping Goodwin and Ruby, he sees various events and relationships with increasing clarity. But this is dependent on his intuitive comprehension of certain complex situations and their moral quality. Consciously, he cannot help but see through the eyes of a forty-three old gentleman lawyer, scholar, and poet. He consistently forces the material of his perceptions into a pattern of abstractions which reduce irrationality and complexity to a simple order. He is, in short, hampered by the same kind of innocence and naïve faith in reason that plagues Sutpen. Reason and his legal training mediate between Horace's responses and his actions with the result that he finds himself conducting a mock battle with a phantom opponent: armed with Truth, Honor, and Justice, he assails Evil. The battle of abstractions continues while beneath it the intensely human drama of experience is played out to its bitter conclusion.

The source of Horace's frustration is his discovery that his concepts of justice and honor have no coercive power or even influence over either experience or people. When driven to it, Narcissa is prepared to admit that the possibility of a miscarriage of justice is far less important than her position in Jefferson. Senator Snopes and Eustace Graham are concerned only with advancing themselves in the name of justice; both are willing to attribute justice to the side which pays most. Horace cannot even convince Ruby and Goodwin, who have the most to lose, of the importance of truth. Goodwin decides simply to take his chances with the law while Ruby prepares to pay Horace for undertaking Goodwin's defense in the only way she can. The final and complete subversion of Horace's ethical system comes when he sees the Jefferson mob, acting in the name of the very justice he has defended, kill Goodwin.

It is increasingly borne in upon Horace that he will have to stand and act alone. Though for a while he is strengthened by a stubborn courage, he is, nevertheless, doomed to fail. Because he himself is unsure of his ability to take control of a situation, he still relies for support on words and phrases. He offers Goodwin the protection of 'law, justice, civilization' against the concrete menace of Popeye's gun, and talks to Ruby about 'a thing called obstructing justice' as a counterweight to her concern for her husband's safety. While he talks to Temple about the importance of truth and justice, Miss Reba cuts through his abstract verbiage with 'They're going to hang him for something he never done.... And she wont have nuttin, nobody. And you with diamonds, and her with that poor little kid.'

The sharp contrast between his generalizations and Miss Reba's concrete statement of the human issues is underscored by Miss Jenny, who points out that his moral indignation and championing of the right is purely verbal and that he is spending his time making speeches instead of doing something. Horace's answer is to go off on another tirade in which he threatens to legislate evil out of existence: 'I'm going to have a law passed making it obligatory upon everyone to shoot any man less than fifty years old that makes, buys, sells or thinks whisky.' Presumably his statement is intended ironically, but even so it reveals his habit of thought: One additional law will finally either regenerate or frighten men into living in accordance with virtue, decency, and the moral law.

Even though Horace finds that justice no longer lives in the hearts of men, he still retains his faith in the power of truth—if only all the facts are made available, then innocence and guilt, the victim and the murderer will be unmasked. Truth must prove itself independent of and stronger than individual prejudices and distortions. With Ruby's unwilling help he learns of Temple's presence at the Old Frenchman place; with Snopes's information he tracks her down. With dawning horror he realizes, however, that victim though she may be, Temple is also the cause of her victimization. The responsibility for the rape and hence for Tommy's murder is as much Temple's who provoked it as it is Goodwin's who did not act to prevent it or Popeye who actually committed it. Gowan Stevens is also involved in the guilt, and even Ruby, who anticipated it and yet walked away, is not without blame.

Horrified as he is by his discovery that good and evil do not live in separate compartments, Horace yet risks a final throw of the dice. He presents his facts to the judge and jury and waits confidently for the only possible verdict. In the courthouse, if [in] no other place, justice and truth must be living realities. Yet they are not—he is defeated, and not by deliberate, conscious evil but by self-interest and respectability. Horace's collapse is complete and inevitably so, for through most of his conversations with Ruby and Goodwin one refrain had been dominant, that of 'Good God. What kind of people have you lived with?' To find that the evil he abhors is in his own backyard, in Narcissa, in his wife and her daughter, in Temple

and her respected father-judge, is too much. The enormity of fighting it becomes the impossibility of even challenging it, and Horace who anticipated total victory submits to total defeat. He returns meekly to Belle and the routine of his life with her. Murmuring 'Night is hard on old people.... Something should be done about it. A law,' he appears to shrink, to lose stature as he stands alone, gazing at the fragments of the Grecian Urn in whose aesthetic and abstract image he had built his life.

The pathos of this scene arises from the fact that Horace's sanctuary, his imaginative world of moral and aesthetic perfection, has been violated and destroyed by his one excursion into the world of concrete experience. For it is only in the verbal universe, whether philosophic, legal, or poetic, that evil can be isolated as the antithesis of good. In experience evil is a necessary condition of existence which cannot be destroyed without destroying life itself. That Horace contemplates such a destruction, though only in fantasy, suggests that he is not yet ready to live in terms of his painfully acquired knowledge of the real world. Because of his search, the separation of justice and law, truth and belief, dream and reality is recognized; but the task of reuniting them, which is the necessary prerequisite to the salvation of man and his society, is beyond his powers."

Olga Vickery
"Crime and Punishment: *Sanctuary*"
The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation
(Louisiana State 1959) Chapter 3

"The objections to Faulkner had to this time been fairly confined to qualifications of earnest or puzzled admiration. With the publication of *Sanctuary*, they became more overt and bold. Each page of the book 'is a calculated assault on one's sense of the normal,' said Fadiman; and, though he considered it an improvement over *As I Lay Dying*, he thought it overcharged with the faults of 'excessive eagerness.' Faulkner evokes only fear, said John Chamberlain (*New York Times*, February 15, 1931), whereas Dostoevsky evokes both fear and exaltation.' The great share of the novel's reviews complained of that lack of 'exaltation,' of the grimness of the horror, the 'sadistic cruelty,' and the lack of 'warmth.' Literary talent is wasted on a 'morbid theme'; the characters are of no interest save to the neurologist or criminologist. When the novel was praised, it was often because the reviewer (like Herschel Brickell, *North American Review*, April, 1932) thought Faulkner courageous in telling 'the truth' about the South, and in refusing to 'kneel in the romantic temple.'

In the *Saturday Review of Literature* for October 20, 1934, Lawrence S. Kubie subjected the novel and its author to psychoanalysis. This view and the letters written in answer to it provide an interesting commentary on Faulkner's fate among the reviewers. *Sanctuary*, said Doctor Kubie, was that type of literature which 'represents the working out in phantasy of the problems of impotence in men, meaning by impotence a frailty in all spheres of instinctual striving.' Horace Benbow's struggle in Lee Goodwin's behalf is actually a struggle against his own 'impotence and powerlessness [*sic*].' The only persons of the novel 'who take life in the body with the simple, earthy realism' are Lee and Ruby Goodwin. At least one of the correspondents thought Kubie had not gone far enough; J. R. Oliver felt that 'Along these lines of overcompensation lie all the attempted rapes, all the cruelty and bullying that are so vividly described in Mr. Faulkner's book.'

Frederick J. Hoffman, Introduction
William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism
eds. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery
(Harcourt/Harbinger 1963) 17-18

"After the poor reception and sales of *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner determined to write a book that would sell. The result, quickly composed but much revised in galley proofs, was *Sanctuary*, a novel centered on rape committed with a corn cob by an impotent gangster on a rather worthless girl. The novel did sell, and brought its author fame and notoriety mixed; but what it chiefly proved was that by this time Faulkner was unable to produce a merely sensational story, for it has its moral center in Horace Benbow, a man who tries (however ineffectually) to 'catch up with injustice'."

William M. Gibson & George Arms, eds.
Twelve American Writers

“In its own lesser way *Sanctuary* depends on this power to shock. Apart from some first-rate comic diversion, it drives brutally toward two climaxes, the corn-cob violation of Temple and her later account of it to Benbow. And no matter what complain is proposed about their use in the novel, these moments of shock are necessary to its organizing scheme, the notion that *Sanctuary* merely offers cheap thrills, a notion for which Faulkner himself is in part responsible, deserves short shrift.

Most of Faulkner’s work, good or bad, exhibits his moral intent, an extreme aversion from the horrors he is compelled to notice.... Shock in *Sanctuary* derives not from a lack but from an excess of moral feeling—a feeling often uncontrolled and without an adequate object of attack. Written with unmodulated fervor, the novel resembles a polemic run wild, its thematic line moves with a stringent clarity but is neither contained nor reinforced by a quite credible human context. Its dominant emotions stain the prose a shade too lurid for anything which even the violent and melodramatic plot might require. Indeed, Faulkner is so possessed by his hatred for the world of Popeye that it is precisely his moral sensibility, outraged and baffled, which prompts his wish to shock...the feelings which drove Faulkner to write do not find a satisfactory equivalent in the work itself....

From the very beginning Benbow’s futility is so unqualified that his side of the novel suffers a quick prolapse, and one wonder whether in all of Yoknapatawpha there might not be a sturdier agent of justice than this sadly henpecked lawyer. The helplessness of Ruby Goodwin is apparent almost as quickly; and only they, Benbow and Ruby, so much as care to oppose Popeye. Without a greater resistance than these two can muster, the novel is reduced to a staccato of incidents which lack the quality of drama even when they are exciting. The final effect resembles the aggravation of a wound a good deal more than the release or cleansing of an emotion.

All surface turbulence, brilliant surface at times, *Sanctuary* seldom strikes a fully-articulated or complex meaning. The suspicion that its violent motions conceal a void may result from Faulkner’s fastidious distance from his material, an unwillingness to breathe the foul air of Temple and Popeye. It is somewhat perplexing that a writer who excels in works of radical subjectivity should now confine himself to an approach that can only be called behaviorist; apart from his eagerness to try new techniques, the change seems a consequence of his hatred for the world of his own novel. *Sanctuary* concentrates on sheer events, seldom examining the sources of conduct; and in several crucial sections, particularly the rape scene, displays an opacity which comes from a crowding of action, a blurred jam of scurrying and commotion. It is this behaviorist bias which prompts critics to read *Sanctuary* as an allegory, for a bare sequence of events lends itself to schematic interpretation far more easily than does a complex imitation of experience [Howe does not understand an allegory of symbols as distinct from an allegory of signs]....

Naturalism pushed to its extreme limit becomes something other than itself, a kind of expressionist nightmare. The scene in which the virile punk Red is buried, offers a good illustration.... In creating such expressionist nightmares Faulkner evokes a sense of fatality beyond meaning or purpose, a sense of fatality quite without the grandeur which sometimes accompanies it in the work of Hardy and Conrad. The doom summoned in this book is petty and absurd.... A book resembling a ward of incurables can hardly be expected to provide a copious display of human character; what it does yield is several brilliant gargoyles and caricatures. To the extent that the main figures of *Sanctuary* need merely satisfy the requirements of a bizarre action, they are superbly done....

It may be argued in behalf of Temple that she anticipates a kind of woman who has become very important in American life and literature: the trembling, sexless, ferocious bitch. This claim is true, and Faulkner deserves credit for his observation. But in celebrating Temple as a cultural phenomenon it is too easy to neglect her limitations as a character in a novel... She falls too easily from the possibility of archetype into the misery of pathology. Taken as an individual, she is pitiable but not, finally, interesting enough.... Remarkable things certainly happen to Temple, yet she herself usually remains indistinct and remote, perhaps because Faulkner’s contempt for her values is so extreme he cannot stop to illuminate her motives. To be sure, Temple is accurately done in a clinical sense.... For Temple the rape is like a

nightmare, a half-desired nightmare; and Faulkner observes, with admirable precision, how this nightmare disorders her sense of time, intolerably prolonged periods alternating with urgent compressions....

By contrast, Popeye is a triumph of vividness. Nor is this vividness affected by the terms in which he is conceived: as a depraved gangster, as the projection of a fear of impotence, or as an inclusive symbol of evil. In his stiff hat and tight suit, his rubbery eyes, his fear of all animals and readiness to kill any man, Popeye is indisputably present. And what is the point of caviling about him when no one can forget him?... [One might say the same about Temple and the whole novel] Several chapters—the visit of the Snopes boys to Memphis, Miss Reba’s memorable tea party, Red’s funeral—are not essential to the theme of the novel. Yet these chapters are the finest in the book. Wild burlesques, they exploit such stock elements of folk humor as the absurd adventures of small-town boys during their first visit to the big city and the fondness of brothel madame for respectable talk during slack hours....

Sanctuary is a remarkable book, not to be forgotten. It is a modern book, assaulting the reader rather than delighting him, stirring his discontent and disgust rather than softening him in the ways of the world. It is surely not the cheap shocker it once was supposed to be, nor does it quite warrant the philosophical expansion it has suffered at the hands of Frenchmen and exegetes. *Sanctuary* lives in memory after a first reading, but neither deepens nor grows after a second.... It is caught up with our sense of a major cultural event: the collapse of order, the loss of morale, whatever it may be that leads us to think of society as mechanical and inhumane.... For us *Sanctuary* is like a hard and painful blow: the ache lingers in memory, the shock cannot be dismissed. Yet we might also remember that for all its uses, a blow is not the profoundest way of transforming human consciousness.”

Irving Howe
William Faulkner: A Critical Study
(Random House/Vintage 1962) 192-99

“The first of Faulkner’s novels to have any kind of commercial success, *Sanctuary* has been unfortunately branded with Faulkner’s own comment that it was a cheap idea, conceived solely to make money. Initially, it may have been so; the first draft was written in three weeks in the early summer of 1929 and sent off to the publisher, who feared to print anything so scandalous and shelved the manuscript for over a year. In November, 1930, a year and a half later, Faulkner received the galley proofs of the first version, and realized that he could not shame the work he had already done by allowing *Sanctuary* to be published in its present form. Accordingly, he revised and rewrote extensively, and the *Sanctuary* that appeared in 1931 was a considerably different book from the ‘cheap’ and ‘horrific’ tale he had written two years earlier. Certainly not one of his best books, *Sanctuary* is nevertheless an honest piece of writing, and contains themes that are an important part of the total body of Faulkner’s work....

CHARACTERS

Horace Benbow, *lawyer, age 43*
Belle Mitchell Benbow, *his wife*
Little Belle, *his stepdaughter, age about 18*
Narcissa Benbow Sartoris, *his widowed sister, age 36*

Temple Drake, *college girl, age 17*
Lee Goodwin, *bootlegger*
Ruby Goodwin, *his common-law wife*
Popeye, *impotent Memphis gangster*
Miss Reba, *madam of Memphis brothel*
Red, *young hoodlum*
Gowan Stevens, *Temple Drake’s escort, age about 21*
Tommy, *feeble-minded man*

PLOT

As the novel opens, Horace Benbow, having left his wife after ten years of marriage, is on his way from Kinston to his old home in Jefferson. He stops at the spring near the Old Frenchman Place and is accosted by Popeye, a gangster temporarily staying with the bootlegger Lee Goodwin. Four days after this incident Temple Drake is brought to the Old Frenchman Place by her drunken escort Gowan Stevens, who wrecks his car and, unable to face Temple, later abandons her there. Although she is frightened by the men on the place, her behavior toward them is provocative, and she refuses to heed Ruby Goodwin's urgent warnings to leave the place before dark.

Finally, protected by Ruby, she spends the night in the barn. The following morning she hides from Goodwin in the corncrib while the feeble-minded Tommy keeps watch outside, having promised he will let none of the men in. Meanwhile Popeye enters the crib from a trap door in the loft overhead. He opens the door and shoots Tommy, and then, since he is impotent, rapes the frightened but unresisting Temple with a corncob. He then takes her, still completely unresisting, with him to Memphis, where he establishes her in Miss Reba's brothel and provides her with a lover in order to enjoy her as it were, by proxy. He later murders Red, the lover, for trying to see Temple alone.

Meanwhile, Lee Goodwin is arrested for the murder of Tommy, and Horace Benbow undertakes to defend him and look after Ruby and her infant son. The local townsfolk, however, persecute Ruby because of her relationship with the supposed murderer, and finally make it impossible for her to get a room anywhere in Jefferson. Goodwin refuses to admit even Popeye's presence at his place at the time of the murder, fearing that Popeye will kill him if he does. Horace manages to locate Temple at the Memphis brothel and tries to persuade her to testify at Goodwin's trial. She refuses, but later appears as a surprise witness for the prosecution and falsely testifies that it was Goodwin who killed Tommy and raped her. Goodwin is convicted and shortly afterwards taken from jail and burned to death by a mob. Horace, defeated in his attempt to see justice done, returns to Kinston and his wife. Temple is taken off to Europe by her father, and Popeye is arrested and executed on a charge of murdering a man in Alabama—a crime he could not possibly have committed, since it occurred on the night that he was in Memphis killing Red, Temple's lover....

ANALYSIS

Sanctuary suffers from three major weaknesses. Its characters tend to be two-dimensional... Popeye is a figure of pure evil; Temple is wanton, weak, and utterly without conscience or any sense of responsibility; Gowan Stevens is a drunken cavalier; Horace Benbow is the good but inept man who is unable to match the forces of evil in the world; Tommy is the innocent undeservedly destroyed by evil; and so forth. There is little actual conflict, even between the allegorical good and evil, because Horace is too weak and ambiguous a character to have any effect on evil. The conflict dies on the vine, its outcome certain almost before it has begun. Because of this failure of conflict, the book fails to have any significant resolution. The characters who die achieve no understanding before their deaths, those who go on living remain apparently unchanged by their experiences.

Faulkner seems to be suggesting that in the modern world the presence of evil no longer implies the existence of good. The evil in *Sanctuary* is a result of amorality, not immorality; there is no sin in a positive or religious sense, which implies the possibility of salvation, but only in a negative sense, as the complete absence of a capacity for or awareness of virtue.... *Sanctuary* seems to be only a record of the complete failure in the modern world of even the smallest hope of redemption or meaning. If *Sanctuary* is, as many critics have noted, Faulkner's equivalent of T. S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land,' it is a wasteland in which the thunder does not presage rain, and in which the protagonist finds not even fragments to shore against his ruins.

There are three moral environments in *Sanctuary*. The Old Frenchman Place might be seen allegorically as nature beyond the law, uncultivated and growing into a rank jungle. Here (before Popeye's arrival, at least) the illegal but basically good and 'natural' relationship of Lee and Ruby can exist in peace; here a child has been born and lives, although feebly; here is the naif, Tommy, and a helpless old man, blind and deaf, cared for by Goodwin; and here Goodwin distills into alcohol the earth's corn—certainly a symbol of

fertility and increase, even though distorted and used for 'unnatural' purposes. The Memphis underworld, Popeye's natural habitat, is the antithesis of this, being civilization beyond the law. Like Popeye, it is anti-natural, sterile, mechanical, exploiting for its own profit the natural lusts of men, not so much hostile to life as utterly indifferent to it.

The third allegorical environment is the town of Jefferson, which tries, within the framework of social law and order, to have the best of both worlds, the natural and the mechanical. However, if the Old Frenchman Place and Miss Reba's are amoral, Jefferson is pseudo-moral. It verbally upholds the standards of respectability, the sacredness of womanhood, and the idea of justice; but in so doing it mistakes conventional action for moral action, and is either unable or unwilling to look beneath the surface of apparent reality and recognize the existence of good and evil in every person.... Horace, a respectable man from respectable Jefferson, is held in bondage, somewhat against his will, to respectability. Temple, from a similar environment, courts an appearance of respectability both before and after her complete immersion in depravity. Narcissa, respectability personified, admittedly cares nothing for truth, but only for the appearance of virtue and righteous action....

Temple...clings to the tokens of her respectability ('My father's a judge') while flaunting herself before the men at Goodwin's place. After her voluntary sojourn in the depths of vice she returns unchanged to Jefferson to play the part of the victim, of Southern Womanhood violated and constrained against her will. Though she obviously desires to flirt with evil, she has no wish to experience it, or anything else, in the full sense of responding to it and being changed by it. When attacked by Popeye, she cries in horror, 'Something is happening to me!' She cannot ignore what has been done to her person, but she feels herself the victim, the passive object, in a situation in which she has unwittingly found herself. By regarding even this violent collision with experience as a purely physical event, Temple is able to avoid any feeling of responsibility for her own part in the affair; she disavows her own provocative acts to such a degree that, for all practical purposes, she might as well not have committed them. Thus she absolves herself of any possibility of guilt for what has happened....

The title 'sanctuary' is ironic. Temple, whose very name underlines the irony, is herself a violated, even desecrated vessel to whom desecration has no meaning. Her sanctuary is, fittingly perhaps, a Memphis brothel. Lee and Ruby Goodwin had apparently found a kind of sanctuary in the abandoned Old Frenchman Place—a sanctuary for illegal bootlegging on the one hand, but on the other a place in which Ruby sought to maintain some kind of positive relationship with a man to whom she had chosen to be faithful. When this haven was destroyed with Tommy's murder, there was no sanctuary for Goodwin in legal justice, nor for Ruby in morally upright Jefferson; again, ironically, it was the ladies of the church who forced Ruby and her child to take refuge in the cabin of a supposed witch outside of town. After Goodwin's immolation, Horace was driven by failure back to the depressing sanctuary of an empty life with the wife he had left just before his unsuccessful attempt to uphold justice.

As there is no true sanctuary, no consecrated place, in the novel, there is no true justice. Goodwin is convicted of a murder of which he was innocent, and burned by a mob before he could be legally executed. Tommy, the most innocent of all the characters, is coldly and needlessly murdered. Temple, who deserved a far worse fate than Ruby for her part in the drama, is taken to Europe by her father. Even Popeye is executed for a murder of which he is innocent. However, if there is only ironic justice, there is no true innocence, either. Tommy, the only exception, is innocent insofar as he is incapable of distinguishing between good and evil. All the rest are guilty in one way or another.... Narcissa, the moral leader of those righteous women who define as sin any deviation from the conventional rules of decent conduct, persistently refuses to concern herself with the truth or justice of the Goodwin affair. 'I don't see that it makes any difference who did it,' she retorts to Horace.

Horace, despite all his good intentions, lacks the courage of his convictions and bows to Narcissa's refusal to let Ruby take refuge in the Benbow family home. There can be no justice in Jefferson as long as women such as Narcissa rule their men—and the town—and as long as men like Horace fail by their own example to challenge conventional morality when it conflicts with their human values.... Horace is the only character who shows even the smallest degree of insight into his—and the human—condition, but that insight is insufficient to save him. By leaving his wife and the meaningless life he had lived with her for

ten years, he was attempting to assert the possibility of a meaningful existence. Yet he is still bound by his dependent relationship to his sister. Though he recognizes the indifference to truth behind Narcissa's front of pious respectability, he still cannot evade her, and respectability's, hold on him.

His fantasies on looking at Little Belle's picture clearly indicate his sexual response toward her, but he cannot reconcile the voluptuary aspects of womanhood with his and Jefferson's conception of Pure Womanhood, chaste and undefiled. His willingness to come to terms with his quasi-incestuous passion for his stepdaughter is a parallel to his failure to carry out his beliefs in action—to defy Narcissa and the other wagging righteous tongues by continuing to shelter Ruby in his own house. Horace may have reached the point at which he can recognize the failure of conventional morality, but he is not yet capable of ending his own emotional subservience to respectability, and therefore incapable of taking Jefferson to task for its similar failure.

The novel ends on a deeply ironic note; law has triumphed but not justice. The inhabitants of the natural, lawless world of the Old Frenchman Place are either dead or dispersed, and Popeye, the leader of the Memphis underworld, has been executed for a crime he did not commit. The evil which Popeye represents has gone, but so have the Goodwins' potentialities for good... Like the people who inhabit it, Jefferson continues to be respectable and law-abiding, a sanctuary of empty conventionality.”

Dorothy Tuck
Crowell's Handbook of Faulkner
(Crowell 1964) 40-45

“The symbolic character of the gruesome events becomes even more apparent in *Sanctuary* (1931), a tale of horror, allegedly written by Faulkner to make money. Whatever this statement may imply, there is no doubt that *Sanctuary* is by no means fundamentally different from the main aspects of Faulkner's work. Again it is a story of rape, murder, prostitution, sexual pathology, and lynching, but this time the structure of the whole is more obviously coherent, the thread of the narrative more easily placeable. What, however, makes the novel far more than a mere shocker is not so much the attempt of one of the characters to stick to a moral principle by undertaking the (unsuccessful) defense of a just but hopeless case, but the fact that the degenerate killer escapes punishment until he is sentenced for a crime he has not committed at all.

The absence of any human compensation or justice in the accumulation of perverse cruelties is, of course, not without significance. It is evil in its purest form, evil absolute, by which Faulkner is fascinated, and yet it is evil produced and carried forward by human beings. If in the early '30's there was still something unbelievable about *Sanctuary*, the '40's have confirmed Faulkner's assumption that there is no limit to Man's criminal capacity.”

Heinrich Straumann
University of Zurich
American Literature in the Twentieth Century
(Harper Torchbooks 1965) 88

Michael Hollister (2015)