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'They Worship Death Here': William Faulkner, *Sanctuary* and Hollywood

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WILLIAM FAULKNER HATED HOLLYWOOD. 'They worship death here', he said about the place once. 'They don't worship money, they worship death.' His first day working for what he called 'a hack's motion picture wages' had not been auspicious. Arriving at the MGM studios in May 1932, his head was cut and bleeding. Faulkner put this down, when he was asked about it, to being hit by a cab, several thousand miles away and several days earlier, in New Orleans. To Sam Marx of MGM, however, it was quite obvious that Faulkner had been drinking heavily, and that his wound was probably not entirely unrelated to his condition. Things then went from bad to worse. 'We're going to put you on a Wallace Beery picture', Marx told Faulkner. To which Faulkner replied, 'Who's he?' adding, 'I've got an idea for Mickey Mouse.'[1] Marx patiently explained that Mickey Mouse films were made at the Walt Disney studios, and then arranged for a screening of *The Champ*, in which Beery had starred as an amiable prizefighter. The new film to which Faulkner had been assigned for his first job in Hollywood had Beery as a wrestler; and it had the delightfully concise title, *Flesh*.

Faulkner allowed himself to be taken to the projection room by Marx's office boy. But, once arrived there, he evidently did not want to watch the film and just kept on talking. 'Do you own a dog?' he asked the office boy, who said that he did not. 'Every boy should own a dog',

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[1] Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* (one volume edition) (New York, 1984), pp. 304–5. See also, p. 456; Frederick R. Karl, *William Faulkner: American Writer* (London, 1989), p. 484.

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Faulkner advised him. 'You should be ashamed you don't own a dog. Everybody who don't own a dog should be ashamed.' With that, Faulkner then turned around to the projectionist, who had just begun running *The Champ,* and demanded, 'How do you stop this thing?'[2] There was no point in looking at it, Faulkner explained, because he could already guess—in fact, he positively knew—how it would turn out. With that, Faulkner asked for the exit, stumbled out, and disappeared, not returning to the studio for over a week and, when he did so, claiming that he had been wandering in Death Valley—although he did not bother to explain just how he had covered the 150 miles to get there.

'The truth is that I was scared', Faulkner later said of his bizarre behaviour. 'I was scared by the hullabaloo over my arrival, and . . . I got flustered.'[3] That may be so. It has to be added, though, that Faulkner never really wanted to go to Hollywood in the first place. And, right from the first, he never really liked working in a place where, he complained, there was 'nobody . . . with any roots' and the rhythm of the seasons simply disappeared. And although his experience of Hollywood was redeemed in part by friendships—notably with the director, Howard Hawks—and by a passionate affair with Hawks's script clerk, Meta Carpenter—a relationship that was to last, intermittently, for fifteen years—he was never really settled or secure there. In a way, things got worse for him as time went on: as the relationship with Meta Carpenter deteriorated, and he found himself working for a progressively smaller reward. 'I have realised lately', Faulkner confided to his publisher in 1947, 'how much trash and junk writing for movies corrupted into my writing.'[4] What made matters worse, he sensed by this time, was that, if he was prostituting himself by writing for the movies as he clearly felt he was, then he was doing so at bargain rates. 'I've got America's best writer for $300 a week',[5] boasted Jack Warner, head of Warner Brothers, at a Hollywood party in 1942; and even at the end of his stint with Warner Brothers, in 1946, Faulkner was earning no more than he had when he first went to work for MGM thirteen years earlier, $500 a week. Writers he regularly collaborated with were often getting more than three, four or five times this amount. Even F. Scott Fitzgerald, who always considered himself underpaid, was receiving $1,250 a week from MGM in 1938. Stuck in

[2] Blotner, *Faulkner*, pp. 304–5, 456. See also, Tom Dardis, *Some Time in the Sun* (New York, 1976), pp. 98–9.
[3] *New York Times*, 23 Dec. 1932.
[4] Joseph Blotner (ed.), *Selected Letters of William Faulkner* (New York, 1977), p. 248.
[5] Richard Gray, *The Life of William Faulkner: A Critical Biography* (Oxford, 1994), p. 289.

'that damned West Coast place', as he put it, where 'one day one leaf falls in a damn canyon up there, and they tell you it's winter',[6] Faulkner often felt both distracted and contaminated: stopped from writing the books he wanted to write and, quite possibly, damaging his talent, his capacity for writing those books some time in the future.

I am simplifying, of course, by dwelling almost exclusively on the bad side of Faulkner's experience. There was a good side. There had to be, really. Quite apart from love and friendship, to which I referred just now, Faulkner was canny enough and sensitive enough to realise the determining significance of Hollywood for his time and culture—and so the necessity of trying, at least, to come to *imaginative* terms with it. A novel like his *The Wild Palms*, for instance, published in 1939, is clearly shaped by Faulkner's understanding of the specific impact of Hollywood on the contemporary consciousness: 'Hollywood which is no longer in Hollywood', the narrator of *The Wild Palms* observes, 'but is stippled by a billion feet of burning colored gas across the face of the American earth'.[7] And it is equally and powerfully fired into life by Faulkner's sense of Hollywood as paradigm, an instance of that tendency towards commodification that all the characters in the novel share—and that, by implication, all those inhabiting our kind of culture share too. To an extent, *The Wild Palms* is a model analysis of what the critic Fredric Jameson has called 'the commodity age', and what Faulkner himself—clearly betraying his own biases and obsessions here—preferred to term 'the Kotex age': a culture, that is, in which people's mental and emotional lives, along with their material existences, are shaped by their failure to distinguish between the artificial and the authentic—by their inability, you might say, to recognise the textuality of the text. And to the extent that it is such an analysis—and, more generally, to the extent that Faulkner managed to recognise and dramatise his characters' failure to get outside the cultural texts they have read—he owed a debt to Hollywood and his experience of 'that damned West Coast place'. Quite simply, he learned about commodification by experiencing it in a peculiarly personal way.

While he was in Hollywood, too, Faulkner was proud enough, and capable enough sometimes to do a good job, particularly when he was working with someone he liked and admired, such as Howard Hawks. Of

[6] Dardis, *Some Time in the Sun*, p. 126. See also, p. 103.

[7] William Faulkner, *The Wild Palms* (New York, 1939), p. 148. See also, *Selected Letters*, p. 96; Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton, 1971), p. 96

course, Faulkner's characteristically Southern fondness for great tidal waves of rhetoric could lead him astray. One day, Lauren Bacall remembered, Faulkner walked onto the set of *The Big Sleep* (1946) with a new scene he had written. In it, there was a speech for Humphrey Bogart running for six pages without a break. 'I'm supposed to say all that?' Bogart asked, his jaw presumably dropping and losing his customary cool. But before Faulkner could reply, Hawks (the director of the film) came to the rescue. 'Bill, that's fine',[8] he said reassuringly, taking the several pages of script which were then quietly dropped. Quite often, though, Faulkner could direct his talent just where it was needed, curbing his taste for the big speech. He assisted Hawks, after all, on two seminal films of the 1940s: *The Big Sleep*, of course, and *To Have and Have Not* (1944). And, although the exact nature of his contribution is open to debate, it is clear that Faulkner *did* contribute, significantly. 'With a script that didn't work', one screenwriter who knew him at this time has observed, 'he would take a key scene and make it go. What Bill did was to make the whole picture better'. 'Faulkner . . . wrote his best on the scripts', another co-worker during this period has insisted; 'I know and don't care what anyone says to the contrary, even Faulkner himself. He was the kind of man who would do a bang-up job of work if he came to your house to fix the plumbing.'

That seems, in fact, to have been Faulkner's main skill while working in Hollywood. 'I'm a motion-picture doctor', Faulkner once admitted, when he was asked point blank what he had contributed to a film called *Slave Ship* (1937). 'When they run into a section they don't like, I rework and continue to rework it until they do like it. In *Slave Ship* I reworked sections. I don't write scripts. I don't know enough about it.'[9] Faulkner accumulated a total of four years' work in Hollywood, the time being split up into various segments, long and short, starting in 1932 and not ending until 1955. During that time, he worked for four different studios. And during all that time he functioned primarily as a technician: a writer, yes, but one who mainly contented himself with carrying out his various assignments as best he could. The evidence we now have about Faulkner in Hollywood is partial; our knowledge of what exactly he contributed to particular movies scrappy and incomplete. We have some original screenplays that Faulkner wrote for various studios most of which never got any further, like *The DeGaulle Story*, a hopelessly stiff tale of a Brittany fam-

[8] Blotner, *Faulkner*, p. 455. See also, p. 444; Dardis, *Some Time in the Sun*, p. 73.
[9] Dardis, *Some Time in the Sun*, p. 98.

ily divided against itself over the Vichy government and the Resistance movement. Intended to be a patriotic 'message' picture of the kind that most of the studios—and especially the one for which Faulkner was then working, Warner Brothers—were churning out at the time, this was completed in 1942 and then, quite rightly, shelved. There are also the treatments, shorter or full-length, that Faulkner produced to order, many of them adaptations of other writers' work. In 1936, for instance, Faulkner worked on a full-length treatment of a best-selling historical novel called *Drums Along the Mohawk*. His attitude towards that job can be gauged by the words he wrote on the very last page of the treatment, about two of the leading characters: 'Lana tells Mary whatever sappy stuff we need here about love conquers all things, etc.'[10] Unsurprisingly, the job was soon assigned to someone else. Then there are his contributions to a whole range of films from, for instance, *Today We Live*, released in 1933 to *Land of the Pharaohs* (1956), released over twenty years later. Both were directed by his friend Howard Hawks. Faulkner seems to have written most of the dialogue for the earlier film—and written it in what he and Hawks thought was a typically clipped British idiom ('Make a hit?' goes one exchange between two RAF pilots. 'Yes.' 'Glad. Been waiting.'). In the other, later film, it is difficult to see Faulkner's hand at all. It seems that Hawks just liked Faulkner's company and believed, correctly as it turned out, that the writer might like to join him on location in Egypt. Faulkner neatly summed up his own feelings about *Land of the Pharaohs* when he described it as hokum. It was 'the same movie Howard has been making for 35 years', he claimed.

> It's *Red River* all over again. The Pharaoh is the cattle baron, his jewels are the cattle, and the Nile is the Red River. But the thing about Howard is, he knows it's the same movie, and he knows how to make it.[11]

But even here there is the problem of just how much or how little Faulkner contributed. Did he contribute anything to *Land of the Pharaohs*, apart from his presence as a friend and drinking companion? We do not know. Did Hawks contribute anything to the staccato dialogue of *Today We Live* (it was certainly his decision to adopt that style for the film, which was why he wanted Faulkner)? Again, we do not know, for sure.

Faced with this problem of deciding just what, if anything, Faulkner contributed to a particular film, some commentators have resorted to

[10] Ibid., p. 102.

[11] Blotner, *Faulkner*, p. 599. See also, Dardis, *Some Time in the Sun*, p. 85; Karl, *Faulkner*, p. 905.

desperate measures. For instance, Tom Dardis in his book on writers in Hollywood, *Some Time in the Sun* (1976), assigns one bit of conversation in *To Have and Have Not* to Faulkner simply because, as he puts it, 'it *sounds* like Faulkner'.[12] My own opinion is that what we have, once we have sifted the evidence (such as it is), tends to confirm Faulkner's status as a script doctor, someone who was valued, when he was valued at all, for his skill at fixing a shaky script—and, especially, for his ability to see just what should go where. One of the most famous scenes in *To Have and Have Not*, for example, occurs when Marie, the woman played by Lauren Bacall, tells the film's main character, Harry Morgan, played by Bogart, that all he has to do whenever he wants her is just whistle. 'You know how to whistle, don't you . . .?' she asks him. 'You just put your lips together . . . and blow.' The lines were actually written by Hawks, as part of a screen test for Bacall. He liked them, but he could think of no way of using them in the film. It was Faulkner who hit on the idea of moving the couple into a hotel room and having them talk together there, with those words acting as the exit line. The only actual writing Faulkner then did for the scene was in supplying the characters with the preliminary dialogue that led up to the big finale: Bacall's exit and her delivery of Howard Hawks's words. When *To Have and to Have Not* was released in 1944, the critic James Agee saw the film as 'an unusually happy exhibition of teamwork'. 'I enjoyed watching something that obviously involved relaxed, improvising fun for those who worked on it,' Agee reported, 'instead of the customary tight-lipped and hammer-hearted professional anxiety'.[13] Of course, film making is always a collaborative process—which is one of the reasons why it is now so difficult to distinguish what Faulkner might have contributed to a particular work. But Hawks tended to push this further—like Brecht, say, or Ingmar Bergman—to make collaborative improvisation his trademark. In interviews, Hawks always said, 'We did this', or 'We did that', never using the 'I' of other directors, constantly stressing the team system he developed over forty years. On improvisation, Hawks once remarked:

> The moving picture work of my own which seemed best to me was done by the actors and the writers throwing the script away and inventing the scene in actual rehearsal just before the camera turned.[14]

[12] Dardis, *Some Time in the Sun*, p. 118. See also, p. 75.
[13] Ibid., p. 116.
[14] Ibid., p. 115

Faulkner seems to have appreciated this stress on making things work as you go along, and working together as a team. Which is perhaps why, if he ever came close to enjoying himself in Hollywood—and, in the process, helping to produce something worthwhile—it was when he was with Howard Hawks.

Still, despite his moments of professionalism, despite his part in creating key moments in key movies of the period, despite his use of film as a formative experience in his novels, despite his passionate attachment to Meta Carpenter and his bonding with men like Hawks who liked hunting, fishing and drinking, and male camaraderie almost as much as he himself did, despite all this, there can be little doubt that Faulkner hated Hollywood. A mournful litany of complaint runs through his letters home to Mississippi. 'Nobody here does anything', he laments in one letter. 'Even the houses are built out of mud and chicken wire. Nothin' ever happens an' after a while a couple of leaves fall off a tree and then it'll be another year.'[15] 'Nothing ever happens', he repeats in another letter, 'I don't like the climate, the people, the way they live.' Faulkner devised a personal mantra for his darkest moments in California, he explained to his friends. When he felt really depressed, when the feeling of being far from home and his proper work overpowered him, then he would remind himself why, in the final analysis, he was there. As long as it took, as long as he needed to say it in order to calm himself down, he would repeat under his breath five simple words: 'They're gonna pay me Saturday.' 'They're gonna pay me Saturday.' 'They're gonna pay me Saturday.'

* * *

'They're gonna pay me Saturday.' Faulkner had been invited to Hollywood to work as a script writer at MGM as a result of the commercial success and the notoriety of his novel, *Sanctuary*. Published in 1931, it had caused a storm of controversy, not least, in and around Faulkner's home town. 'Do you think of that material when you're drunk?' Faulkner's cousin Sally Murry asked him after she had read it; while Murry Falkner, the novelist's father, was reputed to have told a female student at the University of Mississippi, whom he saw carrying a

[15] Blotner, *Faulkner*, p. 467. See also, p. 382; Blotner (ed.), *Selected Letters*, pp. 84, 313; Dardis, *Some Time in the Sun*, p. 71. For the relationship with Meta Carpenter, see, Meta Carpenter and Orin Borsten, *A Loving Gentleman: The Love Story of William Faulkner and Meta Carpenter* (New York, 1976). For one account of the importance of this relationship for Faulkner in Hollywood, see Joel Williamson, *William Faulkner and Southern History* (New York, 1993), pp. 246–57.

copy of the novel, 'Throw it away. It isn't fit for a nice girl to read.' Friends, relatives and neighbours might claim to dislike the book; nevertheless, they read it. So did a lot of other people. And Faulkner then found that a book the first draft of which, at least, had been written to make money—or, as Faulkner himself put it, 'because I liked the sound of dough rising'—promised him more money than he had ever had before, if he headed West. 'Did you mention William Faulkner to me on your last trip here', Sam Marx of MGM cabled Faulkner's agent at the end of 1931. 'If so is he available and how much. Best regards.'[16] Within six months of that cable, the notorious author of *Sanctuary* was making himself even more notorious with his arrival at the studio, considerably the worse for drink, cut and bleeding. And within a few weeks of this arrival, Faulkner was trying to earn his salary—and do something that interested him, into the bargain—by working on a three-page synopsis that bore a curious resemblance to *Sanctuary*—the book that had been a ticket of entry, for him, into the film studios in the first place. Called 'Night Bird', it traced the career of the daughter of a professor in a small southern college. 'She is of a gay temperament', the synopsis explains. 'She begins to enjoy the youths [of the college town], experimenting with sex. She acquires a lot of technique with the youths, so that after a time, as she grows older, they begin to bore her.'

'One day', we learn from Faulkner's synopsis, this unnamed woman 'has an encounter with a stranger in the little town.' When the woman returns from this liaison, however, she is frightened, although she does not know as yet that (as the synopsis puts it) 'the man is insane'. In order to escape this dark, intriguing and yet terrifying stranger, she flees to another city, where she marries a former sweetheart, becomes pregnant, and for a while feels safe. But then (Faulkner tells us) the woman discovers that the strange, older man has followed her to her new home. Not only that, one day she senses that he is hiding in the house. The projected scene in which she senses this is the dramatic climax and hauntingly recalls several episodes in *Sanctuary*: most noticeably, the moment just before Temple Drake is raped. The woman in 'Night Bird' 'waits in the room', we are told:

> It seems to her that she can hear, feel, the man creeping from room to room, hunting for her, drawing nearer all the time. Then she knows that he is just outside the door. She turns the light off. She sees the door open, and a man's

[16] Blotner, *Faulkner*, p. 296. See also, p. 276; Gray, *Faulkner*, pp. 150–1.

> body in silhouette in it. The man enters. He approaches her. He touches her and she screams. Her husband runs up the hall and enters and turns on the light and kills the man.

The rest of the synopsis tends to run down from this emotionally charged scene. But, in the process, it follows the moral trajectory of *Sanctuary*. With a lipsmacking relish that suggests at least a degree of collusion, the narrator of 'Night Bird' describes how the woman as victim becomes the woman as object of blame. Having been rescued by her husband, the still unnamed heroine of this synopsis is then rejected by him. He is unable to cope with what he has learned about her past, apparently; in fact, he blames her entirely for it, and divorces her. Suffering a miscarriage, the woman returns to her home town, where she finds herself ostracised by what are rather priggishly called 'the better families' and so forced 'to consort with men . . . without social position'. 'She is now a night bird', we are told, a wanderer from one 'bachelor hotel' to another. And the last scene of this projected movie leaves her, more or less, alone and without hope. She is in a night club. She catches sight of her ex-husband across a crowded room. He has a new wife, who is clearly pregnant. And the final line of the synopsis is the one line of dialogue in the entire piece. Raising her glass, the heroine of 'Night Bird' offers a toast—at once gay and bitter—to the woman who has replaced her. 'To the mother of my child',[17] she says.

Nobody who has ever read *Sanctuary* can fail to notice, I think, how 'Night Bird' overlaps with that novel. In terms of both their narrative patterns and their overriding obsessions, the two stories are like shadowy mirror images of each other. The pleasant, average but ineffectual man whom the heroine of 'Night Bird' marries and then loses recalls Horace Benbow in *Sanctuary*. The dark 'stranger' to whom the woman is attracted but whom she fears offers another version of Popeye, the man who rapes Temple Drake. The woman herself, the 'night bird', feverish, apprehensive, excitable—torn between respectability and risk—is a reimagining of the Temple Drake figure. And, as I have already intimated, particular moments in the synopsis, particularly those that place the 'night bird' in the position of a trapped animal, repeat or replicate those episodes of entrapment that regularly punctuate the novel. But my purpose is not really to unravel the individual threads that connect *Sanctuary*

[17] The full text of 'Night Bird' is to be found in Bruce Kawin (ed.), *Faulkner's MGM Screenplays* (Knoxville, 1982), pp. 32–3.

to 'Night Bird'. What I simply want to do, for the moment, is to suggest just how intimately both the book and the synopsis—and the preoccupations they dramatise—were woven into the fabric of the times. By this I mean how clearly they illustrate what I would like to call the *noir* narrative: the kind of narrative, that is, which characterises much of the fiction of the 1930s and 1940s and many of the movies of the 1940s and early 1950s. And, for that matter, the kind that has enjoyed such a resurgence of popularity over the past thirty years or so, leading the actor (and director) Dennis Hopper to refer to it, in 1990, as 'every director's favourite genre'. The *noir* narrative has been described by one critic, Michael Walker. Talking about *film noir* in particular, Walker says:

> In film noir, sex, greed, and power tend to displace love as as the motivating feature of 'romantic relationships', marriages tend to be bleak and unfulfilling, and the family is viewed in a consistently negative light. The films probe the darker areas of the human psyche (obsession and neurosis are common preoccupations) and focus in particular on male sexual anxieties and on the pathology of male violence. Their view of the legal system is frequently highly critical, and figures of the establishment are shown as corrupt. Overall, they portray a society in which the American dream of success is inverted, alienation and fatalistic helplessness being the dominant modes, and failure the most frequent outcome.[18]

I will come back later to some of the features mentioned here, and perhaps add to them a little. All I want to suggest for now is just how much of this description seems appropriate for Faulkner's projected movie about the 'night bird'—and for the novel it feverishly recollects.

Faulkner went on to turn his synopsis into a story outline, now given the title 'College Widow', which was read, and then quickly rejected, by a reader for MGM in 1934. The reader did not mince her words in rejecting it. 'This is told very briefly', she wrote, 'but Faulkner would obviously develop another *Sanctuary.* It is an evil, slimy thing, absolutely unfit for screen production, in the face of current censorship . . . or at any future time.'[19]

Sanctuary had been Faulkner's ticket of entry into the money machine of Hollywood. But, ironically, any attempt to repeat the obsessions of that novel in the form of a movie—to translate the patterns of feeling

[18] Michael Walker, 'Film Noir: An Introduction', *The Movie Book of Film Noir* (London, 1992), p. 38. See also, James Naremore, 'American Film Noir: The History of an Idea', *Film Quarterly*, 49 (Winter 1995–6), 24.

[19] *Faulkner's MGM Screenplays*, p. 36.

that haunt the written text into cinematic terms—was evidently forbidden. The *noir* novel was possible in the early 1930s. *Sanctuary* showed that. So, for that matter, did books like *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) and *Double Indemnity* (1936) by James M. Cain. But *film noir* had to wait another ten years.

Faulkner experienced the impossibility of translating the obsessions of *Sanctuary* into cinematic form, at least in the early 1930s, in another curious way. The novel created such a popular scandal that, inevitably, the film rights to it were quickly bought; and a film version of it appeared in 1933. So frightened was the studio of public opinion, however, that the darker, more sensational aspects of Faulkner's novel were watered down to the point that *The Story of Temple Drake*—as it was now called—bore only the most passing, feeble resemblance to *Sanctuary*. As one critic has caustically remarked, the film (starring Miriam Hopkins) might more accurately have been entitled 'The Bobsey Twins Go To Hell'.[20] Written by Oliver Garrett and Stephen Roberts, *The Story of Temple Drake* introduces us to childhood sweethearts, the lawyer Stephen Benbow and Temple Drake. Unlike Horace Benbow, the semi-autobiographical character who carries much of the narrative for Faulkner in *Sanctuary*, Stephen Benbow is unmarried when we meet him. He proposes marriage to Temple, but Temple refuses him, because of what she calls her bad side. She finds Benbow, an old friend of her grandfather the judge, too dull. After refusing Benbow, Temple goes off remorsefully to get drunk with T. D. Gowan, who crashes his car at Lee Goodwin's place. There, Temple is raped by a gangster—whose name has been changed for the film from Popeye to Trigger. Unsurprisingly, given the sanctions and customs of the time, the rape is alluded to only in the most indirect of terms. There are corncobs in the scene, but they appear only as iconographic references to *Sanctuary*, reminding audiences of the most notorious element in the book, without repeating the reasons for that notoriety. Trigger, as it happens, is not impotent (as, of course, Popeye is in the book); and he is even given some queasily romantic lines about knowing that Temple really cares for him. Trigger then takes Temple to a sleazy boarding house (not, as in the novel, a brothel), where they share a room. In effect, whereas in *Sanctuary* Popeye becomes the voyeur spying on the sexual activities of Temple and the man whom he has hired specifically for that purpose, in *The Story of Temple Drake* the rapist almost seems to become the

[20] The critic is Bruce Kawin, in *Faulkner's MGM Screenplays*, p. 30.

romantic lead—living with the woman he loves, for a while, in a world apart.

Many of the changes that occur to the narrative line of *Sanctuary*, in *The Story of Temple Drake*, are intriguing examples of what happens when scriptwriters have to keep one eye on the original narrative and one eye on the censor—and, besides, have an emotional and financial attachment to the formulaic. Certain elements are left untouched. Tommy, who tries to protect Temple from Popeye, is murdered by Popeye, just as he is in the novel. Lee Goodwin is accused of the murder of Tommy, again just as he is in the novel. And Stephen Benbow volunteers to defend Lee Goodwin, out of a sense of principle and a general belief that justice must be upheld, just as Horace Benbow does. There is even a further parallel between book and movie in Temple's initial refusal to testify for the defence in the trial of Goodwin for the murder she knew Popeye committed—although the motivation is altered. In *Sanctuary*, Temple's motives for refusing to tell the truth in court are complex, mysterious and unnerving. They are also morally problematic, since they appear to implicate Temple in the evil of which she has been a victim. As such, they make the novel at once a dramatisation and a powerful symptom of male sexual anxiety. In *The Story of Temple Drake*, however, things are much simpler and, in terms of contemporary mores, slightly more acceptable. Temple is happy, she tells Benbow, and not wanting her happiness disturbed, does not care to get involved in the trial. This is something for which Trigger expresses due gratitude. 'You came through for me', he says to Temple, with a mixture of thanks and awe. 'You stuck up for me against one of your own kind'. This scene, which curiously overlays the original narrative with the motivations, the sexual and class prejudices of a formula movie and seems a little messy as a result, soon gives way to the straightforwardly formulaic. Temple shoots Trigger—as, in an emblematic scene, he stubs out his final cigarette. And, while to begin with when she returns home she is still reluctant to testify for the defence, she is won over by Benbow's eloquence. 'You're a woman,' he tells her, 'but you're still a Drake.' In the novel, before being carried off to Europe in the embrace of her father and (as the last words of *Sanctuary* put it) 'the season of rain and death',[21] Temple testifies that it was Goodwin who killed Tommy before raping her. She has become a *femme fatale* as well as a victim; who seems to be one of those weaving the web of evil as well as one of those caught in its embrace. In the film, by contrast, Temple tells the

[21] William Faulkner, *Sanctuary* (1931; Harmondsworth, 1953 edition), p. 253.

truth in court. Trigger 'attacked' her, as she puts it, after killing Tommy; she, in turn, has killed him. After this dramatic revelation, she swoons. Benbow then has to carry her from the court, his final lines summing up this miraculous reversal. 'Be proud of her, Judge', he intones, pausing at the door of the court with Temple in his arms. 'Be proud of her, Judge—I am.'

In effect, *The Story of Temple Drake* ends with a full-blown recovery of the formulaic. The messiness of some of the earlier scenes in the film, stemming from a desperate attempt to retain elements of the original narrative but to squeeze them into the straitjacket of contemporary genres and conventional expectations, is cleared up in the simplest possible way: by ditching the original narrative, more or less turning it on its head. At the beginning of the movie, there may have been a touch of the original Temple Drake in the character played by Miriam Hopkins, torn as she is between what she calls her good and bad sides. By the end, however, the movie character has become the clichéd heroine in distress, who has 'redeemed' herself according to the formula—through an act of heroic sacrifice, that combines those considerations of pride and honour that Benbow is so keen to mention with an appropriately cathartic touch of confession and even self-laceration. *The Story of Temple Drake* must have confirmed Faulkner's lowest impressions of the movie industry; and it provides a significant background, I think, for the attempts he did make to dramatise his own tortured feelings about sexual relationships in his screenplays. The tone of the movie is alternately tough and bland, suggestive and sentimental, dark and whitewashed; and, in place of the feelings of claustrophobia and closure that characterise the novel, there is melodrama involving a pretty strained attempt at moral uplift.

Formulaic, and perhaps even tame, as *The Story of Temple Drake* may seem now, however, it was regarded as pretty strong meat at the time. The actor George Raft, for instance, is said to have refused the role of Trigger for fear of what he termed 'professional suicide' (apparently, being connected with organised crime was palatable, but being connected with *Sanctuary* was not). Partly because of such controversial elements as remained in the movie, and partly because of the controversy surrounding the mere idea of any attempt to make a film version of a book like *Sanctuary*—despite all the obvious attempts the screenwriters had made to placate public opinion, a censorship problem did arise. To put it simply and briefly, *The Story of Temple Drake* caused a storm, and a storm that had a considerable

impact on public policy. To quote one film historian, William Everson, it was the film that along with Warner's *Convention City*,

> was literally responsible for bringing about the Production Code censorship crackdown in 1933. Through no fault of its own, the film was pilloried and condemned long before it was completed. Adolph Zukor was advised, in strategically placed advertisements, to burn the negative! All of this was, of course, due to the notoriety of the original novel . . . and a desire to keep such controversial material off the screen.[22]

In this context, it is easy to see why 'The College Widow', based on 'Night Bird', was not approved for production. Quite apart from the question of the heroine's moral character, there was the suspicion that, as that reader for MGM put it in 1934, 'Faulkner would obviously develop another *Sanctuary*'.

It is worth teasing out the ironies at work in the curious role that Faulkner played, however inadvertently, in the history of the *noir* narrative. '*Film noir*', as the historian of film Michael Walker has put it, 'is not simply a certain type of crime movie, but also a generic field'.[23] And the elements that characterise that generic field can be located in *written* texts of the early 1930s: in the writings of, for instance, Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain and Horace McCoy. They can also be located in *Sanctuary*. But those elements that characterise what is often called 'hardboiled' fiction (but which I would like to refer to here as 'the *noir* narrative') do not appear in *filmed* texts, to any significant degree, until the 1940s. One major reason why they do not is handily

[22] Cited in Bruce Kawin, 'Introduction' to *The College Widow*, *Faulkner's MGM Screenplays*, p. 31.

[23] Walker, 'Film Noir,' p. 31. The debate on this is, however, still open. *Film noir* is described as a genre by, among others, Robin Buss, *French Film Noir* (London, 1994); Charles Higham and Joel Greenburg, *Hollywood in the Forties* (New York, 1968); Foster Hirsch, *The Dark Side of the Screen* (New York, 1981); Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward (eds), *Film Noir: An Encyclopedia of the American Style* (Woodstock,. N.Y., rev. edn., 1992); and Jon Tuska, *Dark Cinema: American Film Noir in Cultural Perspective* (Westport, CT, 1984). Noir is a movement or period characterised by 'tone and mood' in Paul Schrader, 'Notes on *Film Noir*', in Barry Keith Grant (ed.), *Film Genre Reader* (Austin, TX, 1986), pp. 167–82; a set of 'patterns of nonconformity' within the classical Hollywood style in David Bordwell, Jane Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (New York, 1985); a series in Raymond Borde and Eugene Chaumeton, *Panorama du film noir americain, 1941–1953* (Paris, 1955); a motif and a tone in Raymond Durgnat, 'Paint it Black: The Family Tree of Film Noir', *Cinema*, 6–7 (1970), 49–56; a visual style in J. A. Place and L. S. Peterson, 'Some Visual Motifs of *Film Noir*', *Film Comment*, 10 (1974), 13–18; a canon in J. P. Telotte, *Voices in the Dark: The Narrative Patterns of Film Noir* (Urbana, IL, 1989); a phenomenon in Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (London, 1991); and a transgeneric phenomenon in R. B. Palmer, *Hollywood's Dark Cinema: The American Film Noir* (New York, 1994).

explained by Walker. 'The time lag between the publication of the *noir* novels of Hammett, Cain and Chandler', Walker writes,

> and their translation into films noirs was no doubt the result of a number of factors, but the most significant was the Production Code, which was rigorously enforced from June 1934. Before that date, it was possible for films to be relatively uncompromising in their depiction of the darker side of American life.[24]

So, however unknowingly and indirectly, Faulkner helped to create the conditions that made it impossible to produce anything like 'another *Sanctuary*' in the movies of the 1930s. *Sanctuary* had brought him to Hollywood: but *Sanctuary*—the novel, the filmed version, the storm they created and its consequences—then helped prevent him from replicating his vision, repeating his success in depicting the darker side of American life on the screen. Of course, I am not trying to suggest that Faulkner was the sole agent here, any more than he was the sole (or even the major) victim of the Production Code. Nor am I denying his innocence—or, if you prefer, ignorance—in this particular context; he was not, after all, responsible for the travesty of his book known as *The Story of Temple Drake*. But that innocence seems to me to add only a further touch of irony, an additional twist of the knife. Because of it, Faulkner himself seems like the classic protagonist of a *noir* narrative; to whom something happens without his or her volition. As the characters in *Sanctuary*, or those in a classic *film noir* like *Detour* (1945) or a more recent *film noir* like *Red Rock West* (1992), show only too clearly, a person need make only one false move, perhaps knowingly and perhaps not. And with that, the trap is sprung, the prison doors close.

The trap is sprung in *Sanctuary* for all three major characters: who, in this sense as so many others, end up not only oppressing but also reflecting each other. Having been 'betrayed', as he sees it, by Temple, Horace Benbow is locked back into stifling domesticity. The last time we see Benbow, in fact, he is back in a home that seems more than ever a prison; and the last recorded conversation between Benbow and his wife is a straightforward, wifely command—'"Lock the back door", she said.' Betrayed by Popeye—whom, after he rapes her, she refers to as 'Daddy'—Temple Drake ends by surrendering to the authority of her father, Judge Drake, who sweeps Temple from the courtroom—'her body arched', as the novel puts it, 'in shocking and rapt abasement'. The 'father' as violator is, in effect, replaced by the father as jailer. In turn,

[24] Walker, 'Film Noir,' p. 32.

Popeye is betrayed by the irony of circumstance. He is arrested and executed for a murder in Alabama he could not possibly have committed because he was elsewhere at the time; in Mississippi, as a matter of fact, where he was busy murdering Temple's lover. It is Popeye, actually, who finishes up in the most literal trap of all. 'Fix my hair, Jack', he says to the sheriff as he stands on the trapdoor waiting to be hanged. 'Sure', says the sheriff, springing the trap, 'I'll fix it for you.'[25]

There is a common disposition of character in the *noir* narrative, to be found in films like, for instance, *Detour* (mentioned earlier) or (in different, more convoluted ways) both *Out of the Past* (1947) and Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), which is to have the protagonist lured away from a 'good' (that is to say, conventional or 'domestic') woman and a 'good' life by a 'sensual woman' or 'femme fatale'. A similar disposition is to be found in the 1980s reworking of '*noir* narrative' conventions for the so-called 'yuppie nightmare' cycle of films, like *Fatal Attraction* (1987), *After Hours* (1985) and *Blue Velvet* (1986). In all such cases, the hero is ushered by the 'femme fatale' into a strange nightworld—what the film critic Robin Wood has called 'a chaos world'—notable for its sense of enclosure, fear and inevitable doom. Another common disposition, to be found in what Andrea Walsh terms '*noir* women's films',[26] like *Born to Kill* (1947), *The Reckless Moment* (1949) (remade as *The Deep End* (2001)) and even perhaps in Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), reverses the gender roles. In this case, a female protagonist enters the *noir* world as a result of being drawn towards a dark stranger who is at once intriguing and frightening. Usually, the stranger is a man. Sometimes, in more recent, self-conscious versions of this particular kind of *noir* narrative like *Black Widow* (1987), it can be another woman. What is peculiar about *Sanctuary*, in this respect, is how its narrative habit of reduplication—that is, of major characters mirroring each other—means that the roles are dual. The violator is also the victim; the oppressors also find themselves oppressed; the betrayer also experiences betrayal. In short, the mysterious, magnetic but disturbing stranger is male—and also female.

This is most noticeable, perhaps, with the character of Temple Drake. The first time the reader encounters Temple Drake in *Sanctuary*, she is running. We are invited to watch her disappear 'in a swirling high glitter', catching glimpses of 'her high delicate head and her bold painted mouth and soft chin, her eyes blankly right and left looking, cool, predatory, and

[25] Faulkner, *Sanctuary*, p. 252. See also, pp. 231, 241.
[26] Cited in Walker, 'Film Noir', p. 18. See also, p. 16.

discreet'.[27] That first sight of her not only registers the voyeuristic note that invariably creeps into descriptions of her; it also suggests the quality of elusiveness, even evasiveness, that surrounds her at almost every turn. To this extent, she is Faulkner's own personal variation on the 'femme fatale': a figure who helps to lure Horace Benbow down into the literal nightworld of the bars and brothels of Memphis—and, far more dangerously, into a discovery of chaos. But she is also, quite obviously, the victim. Caught between the dangers of two mysteriously authoritative paternal figures. Physically violated by one character, Popeye, who—like the stranger in women's *film noir*—is identified by a few shadowy details: smoke from a cigarette, the flicker of a match, the smell of brilliantine, a silhouette. And then taken out of the hands of the man she comes to call 'Daddy' into the hands of another father figure, who is the embodiment of legal as well as male power. Drawn, it seems almost helplessly, from one form of imprisonment to another.

In a brilliant analysis of *film noir* as 'male fantasy', the critic Deborah Thomas argues that *film noir* is 'fundamentally about men with women used as decoys in a strategy of denial'. 'The films', she suggests, 'are not predominantly about the misrecognition of women as subordinate (a misrecognition which guarantees male privilege) but, rather, about that of women as alien (thus masking a crisis in *male* identity projected onto women)'.[28] Thomas happens to be talking specifically about classic *films noirs* like *Double Indemnity* (1944) and *The Woman in the Window* (1944). But her argument could just as easily apply to, say, a later, postmodernist revisioning of *noir* narrative such as *Body Heat* (1981). The terms in which this misrecognition of women works in *Sanctuary* are far too complex to go into here. All I want to do is to point out just one thing: the way in which it affects the representation of the act of violence at the heart of the narrative. What I am talking about is the repeated suggestion that Temple herself is at least partly to blame for being raped. This is not just a matter of the emphasis on Temple's seductive looks and behaviour, or the hints that her constant running and jumpiness act as a provocation. It also has to do with what other characters observe about her—including another woman, Ruby Goodwin. 'Oh I know your sort', Ruby Goodwin tells Temple, '. . . You'll slip out at night with the kids, but just

[27] Ibid., p. 25.
[28] Deborah Thomas, 'How Hollywood Deals With the Deviant Male', *Movie Book of Film Noir*, p. 64.

let a man come along . . . You've never seen a real man.' 'It's not Lee I'm afraid of', Ruby adds, referring to her husband,

> Do you think he plays the dog after every hot little bitch that comes along? . . . I know your sort . . . All running, but not too fast. Not so fast you can't tell a real man when you see him. Do you think you've got the only one in the world?[29]

Extraordinarily enough, some critics have taken remarks like this at face value, effectively saying that, to use the standard cant, Temple 'asked for it'. It is surely superfluous to say that this is wrong, dangerous nonsense. What is more useful is to see how it happens, since it is, after all, a logical outcome of the assumptions, the moral economy of the narrative. Woman is seen as an agent of the evil of which she is, in fact, the victim; while man, who has in fact constructed the story and controls it, is seen as an essentially passive instrument, in terms of impotence and (often bewildered) innocence. Innocent men, experienced women: the formula is repeated in remarks like one of Horace Benbow's that punctuates the narrative. 'That's why nature is "she" and Progress is "he"', Horace reflects, 'nature made the grape arbor but Progress invented the mirror'. It is a powerful strategy of displacement, either suppressing or deflecting any accurate sense of male/female relations. And it tends, much of the time, to dictate the terms in which this story is told.

Closely related to this figuring of male/female relations is the experience of watching: 'nature made the grape arbour, but Progress invented the mirror'. I mentioned the note of voyeurism that creeps into descriptions of Temple Drake, and that voyeurism suggests another intriguing dimension to *Sanctuary*: the way it plays various subtle variations on the *noir* narrative. If there is such a thing as a novel for the eye, then *Sanctuary*, I think, is it. It is a book in which characters are seen and spied on, rather more than attended to and heard. It brings to mind, for me, a line given to Jeffrey Beaumont, the protagonist in the David Lynch film *Blue Velvet*: 'I'm seeing something', Beaumont admits, 'something that was always hidden'. Characters are constantly peering at each other,

[29] Faulkner, *Sanctuary*, pp. 47, 50. 'Temple invited the assault', says Lawrence Kubie, in 'William Faulkner's *Sanctuary*', Robert Penn Warren (eds.), *Faulkner: a Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1966), p. 141. Similar remarks are made by, for example, Calvin Brown, 'Sanctuary: From Confrontation to Peaceful Void', *Mosaic*, 7 (1973), 444; James R. Cypher, 'The Tangled Sexuality of Temple Drake', *American Imago*, 19 (1962), 246; Frederick T. Keefer, 'William Faulkner's Sanctuary: a Myth Examined', *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 15 (1969), 102; David Miller, 'Faulkner's Women', *Modern Fiction Studies* (1967), 11–12; 102; Olga Vickery, *The Novels of William Faulkner* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1966), p. 113. For one of the later revisionary views, see, Robert Dale Parker, *Faulkner and the Novelistic Imagination* (Urbana, IL, 1985), p. 63.

through keyholes, through windows, or around doors. And one peculiar result of this is suggested by a brief passage from a much longer description of Tommy, the character who tries to protect Temple Drake from Popeye and whom eventually Popeye kills, observing Temple through a window:

> Temple's head began to move. It turned slowly . . . on to an excruciating degree, though no other muscle moved, like one of those papier-mache Easter toys filled with candy, and became motionless in that reverted position. Then it turned back slowly . . . She unfastened her dress . . . In a single motion she was out of it, crouching a little, match-thin in her scant undergarments . . .[30]

I do not plan to discuss here the sexual politics of a passage like this. They are, it has to be said, very interesting: that is, symptomatic and disturbing since, in effect, the prose performs its own cool act of violation. What I would like simply to suggest is that—whatever else he may be doing—Faulkner seems to be playing a variation on the usual strategies of *noir* narrative: leading us to familiar obsessions, about human impotence and imprisonment, via a relatively unfamiliar route. Very often in *film noir*, the audience shares the feeling of being caught in a labyrinth with the protagonists, being there with them in their plight, through devices like the protagonist confiding in us, talking to us in voiceover. Even a fairly recent variation on, or pastiche of, *film noir*, the Coen brothers' *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001), uses this device. In *Sanctuary*, however, we *look* at the protagonists. Experience, according to the voyeuristic tableaux that punctuate the story, is not something fluid, changeable, on the move, something in which we are asked to participate. On the contrary, it is something 'out there', at which we gaze and with which we cannot even have the illusion of contact. What happens in *Sanctuary*, in short, is presented to us, as it is most of the time to the characters, as spectacle. As a result, we are made to feel as helpless as they do. Paradoxically, we share in the feelings of imprisonment and impotence, from which Popeye, Horace Benbow, Temple Drake and so many others in the novel suffer, precisely because we are not allowed to share in their experience, most of the time. All we can do, like them, is watch while the prison doors close.

Those prison doors are especially imprisoning for the characters because they seem to have reflective surfaces. In *Sanctuary*—to pick up a point I made earlier—voyeurism and narcissism frequently elide, because what the solitary seer sees is a reflection of the self, the imperatives of his or her own gaze. There is a constant pattern of doubling, replication of the perceiver in the perceived, which helps to confirm the suspicion that

[30] Faulkner, *Sanctuary*, p. 57.

what we, the readers, are being invited to observe is an enclosure built out of mirrors. Even the agent and victim of the rape at the centre of the novel are curiously doubled. Both are compared to children. Both are endowed with a strange, unfleshly quality. Popeye, for instance, is said to look like he was made out of 'stamped tin' and to have a 'waxy lifelessness of shape and size', while Temple Drake wears a 'a little putty face' like a mask. Both are also described in terms of their absence, or at least their marginal presence: the flicker of a match that announces that Popeye is there, or Temple caught in the diminishing ripples of her departure. Partly inhuman, partly pure surface, partly an absence, the gangster and the college girl are like perverse mirror images of each other, drawn into a game that seems to involve mutual humiliation. The humiliation inflicted on Temple is infinitely more violent and terrible, of course. But Temple, with her taunt addressed to Popeye, 'You're not even a man!'[31] seems to know at least one way to get some revenge. In this way too, *Sanctuary* maps out the territory of the *noir* narrative. In some narratives, the figure of the dark twin or secret sharer is deployed to suggest duality of character, most famously, Patricia Highsmith and then Alfred Hitchcock played variations on this theme in *Strangers on a Train* (1951). In others, like the film *Black Angel* (1946) (or, for that matter, the more recent *Angel Heart* (1987)), the apparently innocent victim-hero ends up by uncovering his own guilt; the detective discovers, eventually, that he himself is the fugitive he is seeking. And via a device that is just as effective, Faulkner makes the same fundamental point—which is perhaps *the* point in *noir* narrative, that is, quite simply, that no one, not even the evidently innocent, can expect to escape the spider's web of fear, suspicion and guilt.

* * *

In 1949, after watching the world premiere of *Intruder in the Dust,* based on his novel about race relations and produced by MGM, Faulkner wrote to Sam Marx, the man who had witnessed the writer's bizarre arrival in Hollywood. 'Dear Sam', Faulkner began,

> ever since our mild fiasco of 20 years ago, I have felt that accounts between me and MGM were not at balance & my conscience hurt me at times. But since seeing Clarence Brown's 'Intruder in the Dust' here last night, the qualms have abated some. I may still be on MGM's cuff, but at least I am not quite so far up the sleeve.
>
> Yours, Bill.[32]

[31] Faulkner, *Sanctuary*, p. 184. See also, pp. 5, 25, 49, 87, 113, 249, 253.
[32] *Selected Letters*, p. 293.

Faulkner's final sense of his time at MGM was, not that he had been exploited, but that he had not given them their money's worth to begin with. Now, he clearly felt—with the transfer of film rights to *Intruder in the Dust* and the appearance of the movie version of that novel—the accounts were, if not settled, then at least not totally uneven. Howard Hawks was to give Faulkner the chance to use some of his talents in the 1940s, when both men were working at Warner Brothers. But in the 1930s, the best that the writer could offer was not what Hollywood could evidently use. The movies were not ready then for 'another *Sanctuary*', they were not even ready for the original one. Unfortunately, when the movies were ready, Faulkner was not writing books like *Sanctuary* any more: he had moved on into another phase of his life and career. If he worked on *noir* narratives at all now, they were—however excellent—not his own. Whether Faulkner was at all to blame for what he eventually came to see as the failure of his time in Hollywood is certainly debatable: although, as I have tried to suggest, there was a curious irony at work here. The film version of *Sanctuary* helped to postpone any genuine replication of the vision of *Sanctuary* in the movies. What is clear, though, is that, had the movies been ready for the real story of Temple Drake in the early 1930s, then the story of Faulkner's Hollywood years—and, especially, his years at MGM—might have been very different. Nothing, probably, would have stopped him hating Hollywood. But he might, perhaps, have been more convinced, both during and after the event, that he was doing something of use. 'They worship death here', Faulkner said of the movie industry. But what he had in mind, of course, was what he saw as the deadening power of money to reduce everything to product, a commodity. Like the great creators of *film noir*, he too was interested in—in fact, fascinated by—death: as *Sanctuary* above all demonstrates. Unfortunately, though, for him—but, crucially, for the legacy he offers writers, directors and audiences now—it was 'death' of a very different kind.