

On Narcissa Benbow Sartoris in the Original Text of *Sanctuary* and the Revised Edition

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Abstract: The text of William Faulkner's *Sanctuary* that most readers can buy and read is the one edited by Noel Polk, which looks like a different work from the original text. This paper aims to investigate the revision, focusing on the role of Narcissa Benbow Sartoris, one of the remarkable characters in the two versions of *Sanctuary* and Faulkner's way to represent her. In investigating her, the situation in which Faulkner wrote this work is also considered. In comparing the revised parts and looking into Faulkner's private life, the concept of "a family" and "roles in a family" is re-examinined. This process shows Narcissa as a supporter of a patriarchal and classical concept of a family and the division of roles in a family. The process of the revision makes it clear that Faulkner also accepts the patriarchal idea and changes Narcissa into a person who deserves some sympathy. Narcissa's playing of a role of "a sister", "a wife" and "a mother" in a large family reminds us of Faulkner's most important female characters like Caddy Compson and Addie Bundren. However they do not feel responsible for making their families decent and acceptable in their societies, which contrasts with Narcissa. Narcissa's words and character repeatedly lay her open to criticism, but her family avoids ruining itself partially because of her insight and devotion. The purpose of this paper is to suggest the possibility of re-evaluating her character in the text of *Sanctuary* through considering the revision.

Key Word: William Faulkner, *Sanctuary*, revision, gender, family

I. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to defend "notorious" Narcissa Benbow Sartoris, who is involved in all the events of *Sanctuary*, William Faulkner's "most horrible tale." She rejects Gowan's proposal, saying "one child is enough." As a result, Gowan takes Temple on a date and leaves her at the place, where Popeye's rape of her happens. What is more, she bargains with the opponent of Horace, her brother who works as Lee's lawyer, and makes him lose the case. Apart from this, she makes Ruby, wife of Lee, Horace's defendant, and her son leave the hotel they are staying at and tells Horace to take her to Memphis, where she used to be a prostitute, saying "It shouldn't be so hard." As shown in these examples, Narcissa repeats things worthy of severe criticism. Nevertheless, if we examine the differences in the original edition from the revised edition, we can find the description of her scenes was deliberately changed. The change is expected to reflect Faulkner's intention. In this paper, I would like to clarify the change of Narcissa's characterization as a woman who obeys the patriarchy blindly but has a sense of difference from the society.

II. Precedent studies and an approach in this study

Narcissa appears in some works of Faulkner and the way to describe her changes according to the respective works. In *Sanctuary*, her aspect as "a villain" is emphasized. As a consequence, in the criticism of other works by Faulkner as well as that of *Sanctuary*, Narcissa is often severely blamed. Her lack of humanlike feelings is often pointed out. However, it is presumed that her society, a Southern community, necessitates women like her. I would like to clarify this point by referring to the theory of gender roles in family systems.

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In *What Is Family?*, a book by Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, gender roles in a family based on patriarchy are discussed. Their work shows that the system where women control domestic and private space and men go out and earn money to support their families has established itself in our modern societies. As a result, women's control of households is taken as granted, so whether they neglect their duties is repeatedly called into question. A woman who plays an active part in a society is criticized all the more severely if she fails to manage her household affairs. No matter how modernized our societies become, this classical idea concerning 'the woman's role' in families is deeply rooted in our common sense. A large number of people think that women's prior duty is to do household affairs even when they contribute to our societies in other ways.

This study aims to compare two versions of *Sanctuary's* text and show that by meeting people's expectations about gender roles, Narcissa is protected and cherished by her society. The comparison between the two versions would clarify that Narcissa in the revised version is more conscious of a woman's role and maintains her secure position by not deviating from the gender role.

III. Gender roles in a family – The way to portray Narcissa and Horace in the two versions of *Sanctuary*

A sociologist, Talcott Parsons divides roles in a family. His book, *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process*, schematically expresses the division of roles in a family based on gender. A sociologist, Jon Bernardes at Wolverhampton University, has studied Parson's work and shows his concept of "family" in his work, *Family Studies*. The concept of "family" is so esoteric to define, but it is uncritically believed to be self-evident and have no room for discussion. Jon Bernardes points out many people's idea that "a family" is a nuclear one and means having a heterosexual spouse, producing offspring, a division of roles in a family based on the distinction of sex and so forth. The idea takes firm hold in stereotyped images related to a family.

Despite enormous real world variation and diversity, a common and popular image of 'the nuclear family' portrays a young, similarly aged, White, married heterosexual couple with a small number of healthy children living in an adequate home. There is a clear division of responsibilities in which the male is primarily the full-time breadwinner and the female primarily the caregiver and perhaps a part-time or occasional income earner. (2-3)

Also, Jon Bernades indicates that even the traditional theories of sociology idealize the division of household duties based on the distinction of sex and justify giving men paid work and women unpaid work.

Similarly, the division of labour within the ideal model of 'the family' is widely used to justify male preoccupations with paid work and female preoccupations with attracting men, marrying, bearing and rearing children. (4)

In this way biology is emphasized to justify and strengthen the division of roles in a family based on the distinction of sex. Moreover, the premise of this idea is that a family is "a nuclear family,"

The power and 'obviousness' of the popular stereotype of 'the family' is rooted in popular understandings of biology. Clearly, the sexes are very different in their roles in biological reproduction. Women conceive and suckle infants, these are indeed biological facts. It is very easy indeed to point to other species that engage in similar divisions of labour. From this it is a simple matter to create an image of a 'biological family' of lifelong monogamy between male and female, where the female is responsible for the rearing of the children. (6)

These ideas seem to determine the division of roles and are accompanied with stereotyped duties for women. However, looking from a different angle, women who obey the ideas should be accepted and protected in return as if it were "a reward." In other words, the only way for women to be accepted is to support the gender roles based on

patriarchy.

Narcissa clings to the gender roles in a family and her attitudes give us the impression of being excessive. Nevertheless, Horace deviates from the gender role as “a husband” and “a father” and becomes the target of criticism. Their contrast shows that the fulfillment of their roles is taken as their responsibilities. Looking into Horace’s plot, we can see that a man also suffers from the pressure of accomplishing his role even if patriarchy treats men more favorably than women. To maintain the order of their society, both women and men take great pains to accomplish their roles. The following citation introduces Narcissa’s view of a family.

Original Text Chapter I (5) Revised Edition Chapter 16 (117)

“When you took another man’s wife and child away from him I thought it was dreadful. but I said At least he will not have the face to ever come back here again. And when you just walked out of the house like a nigger and left her I thought that was dreadful too, but I would not let myself believe you meant to stay. And then when you insisted without any reason at all on leaving here and opening the house, scrubbing it yourself and all the town looking on and living there like a tramp, refusing to stay here where everybody would expect you to stay and think it funny when you wouldn’t; and now to deliberately mix yourself up with a woman you said yourself was a street-walker, a murderer’s woman.” (Original 5: Vintage 117: Modern Library 138-139)

About the pages of this scene, it is significant to compare the original and revised versions. In the original version, at the beginning of Chapter 1, this scene is set. This shows that in Faulkner’s early ideas, the characterization of Narcissa in contrast to Horace and her view of family has greater importance attached.

It is often said that the revision of *Sanctuary* is an attempt to change the story making Horace its central character. His main plots feature Temple and Popeye as well. Here, it is worthy of consideration that as an original idea, Faulkner makes Narcissa emphasize the importance of patriarchal roles in a family at the beginning of the story. The following citation gives Narcissa’s other idea concerning gender roles.

Original Text Chapter XVII (197-198) Revised Edition Chapter 20(184)

“I dont care where you live. The question is, where I live. I live here, in this town. I’ll have to stay here. But you’re a man. It doesn’t matter to you. You can go away.”

[...]

“Dont you see, this is my home, where I must spend the rest of my life. Where I was born. I dont care where else you go nor what you do. I dont 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. I dont expect you to have consideration for me; I ask you to have consideration for our father and mother. Take her to Memphis. They say you refused to let the man have bond to get out of jail; take her on to Memphis. You can think of a lie to tell him about that, too.” (Original 197-198, Vintage 184: Modern Library 220-221)

Narcissa would not disobey her society’s expectations and fully supports the idea that a woman’s place is her home and to keep her place she must be accepted in her society. Actually she persuades him not to do anything unordinary and be considerate even by mentioning their dead parents. After that she found Horace would not change his mind and went to his opponent in the court herself to make Horace lose the suit. Nonetheless, she tried to persuade him by mentioning the possible consequences he might encounter.

Faulkner gives Narcissa this personality in the original version, and her words and acts are not altered in the revised one. It means they form the core part of her characterization. In contrast with her, Horace in the original version turns into a person who talks about his “incompetence” in the first person in the revised version. He fails to use his utmost authority as the head of a family and escapes from his home. To accomplish a male role in a patriarchal family is beyond his reach and being asked to play “a male role” exhausts him.

The next citation from the revised version is the scene where Horace mutters about his small hope of being alone for a while to others in Old Frenchman Place. This scene in the original version ends in his short muttering to

himself.

Original Text Chapter II

That night he was lying in a bed of sawdust at a sawmill sixteen miles away, still telling himself all he wanted was a hill to lie on for a while. Just a hill, he told himself, toying with that lie, turning and turning it on his tongue until it wore away, like a lozenge, until there wasn't even anything left to swallow. (19-20)

Revised Edition Chapter 2

...I just wanted a hill to lie on, you see. Then I would be all right. When you marry your own wife, you start off from scratch...maybe scratching. When you marry someone else's wife, you start off maybe ten years behind, from somebody else's scratch and scratching. I just wanted a hill to lie down for a while.' (Vintage 16: Modern Library 17)

In the next citation, Horace is described as a father who fails to discipline Little Belle. Differing from the original version, in the revised one, Horace himself talks about Little Belle. In the revised one, Little Belle does not show any respect to what he says, and Horace tries to hold her down, failing to make her obey him.

Original Text Chapter II

Then she cried "No! No!" flinging herself upon him in a myriad secret softness beneath firm young flesh and thin small bones. "I didn't mean that! Horace! Horace!" And he could smell that delicate odor of dead flowers engendered by tears and scent, and in two mirrors he saw her secret, streaked small face watching the back of his head with pure dissimulation, forgetting that there were two mirrors. (15)

Revised Edition Chapter 2

Then she was saying 'No! No!' and me holding her and she clinging to me. 'I didn't mean that! Horace! Horace!' ...and then I saw her face in the mirror. There was a mirror behind her and another behind me, and she was watching herself in the one behind me, forgetting about the other one in which I could see her face, see her watching the back of my head with pure dissimulation. (Vintage 15: Modern Library 15-16)

In the revised version Horace's words make it more evident that he is unable to accomplish a male role as a husband and Little Belle's father. Horace's figure as a failure in a family contrasts with Narcissa as a female figure who cleverly succeeds in playing her role in her family. Making Horace talk about his incompetence in the first person in the revised version has the effect of making Narcissa stand out sharply.

The revised version emphasizes the plots of Temple and Popeye and necessarily the ones of Narcissa and Horace are toned down in the whole text. Despite this shift, the core idea is not reduced and the characters are conscious of it; both a man and a woman are asked to stick to their respective roles or at least superficially do so to keep the form of a family.

IV. The time of writing the two versions of *Sanctuary*

Here it is meaningful to look into Faulkner's own family situation at the time he writes *Sanctuary*. His family situation at the time is unusual and it greatly affects his writing. It is well known that Faulkner states that *Sanctuary* is "a cheap idea" and written to earn money in "Preface" of the Modern Library version (1932). Actually Faulkner needs some money to prepare for his marriage with Estelle. Nonetheless he revises *Sanctuary* even though he has to bear the expenses himself, which is clear evidence that he thinks highly of its artistic value. In January 1929, he starts to write, in June 1929, he gets married to Estelle and in November 1930, he receives the first galley of the original version. In 1930 he finishes revising it, and in February 1931 *Sanctuary* is published (in

January 1931 his eldest daughter passes away). The time of publishing *Sanctuary* coincides with his marriage. At the time Faulkner has to face the necessities of performing male roles as a husband and a father.

Considering these points, we go back to the texts of *Sanctuary*. The revised version (1931) is a commercial success while some critics praise the artistic quality. He accomplishes his work that does not stain his name as a writer while fulfilling his domestic responsibilities. While Faulkner portrays Narcissa as “a villain”, he does not bring down ruin on her. Her being in a safe position reflects Faulkner’s sense of values. To conclude, Narcissa’s attitude in supporting patriarchy is appreciated. She shares the unprecedented boldness with other female characters of Faulkner’s works but remains a blind supporter of patriarchy.

In 1929, Faulkner starts to write *Sanctuary* and *The Sound and the Fury* is published and in the next year, 1932, *As I Lay Dying* is published. As for *As I Lay Dying*, the time Faulkner starts to write it overlaps with the time of his writing *Sanctuary*. Regarding *The Sound and the Fury*, the relationship between an “incompetent” brother, Quentin and his strong-minded sister, Caddy bears resemblance to the one between Horace and Narcissa. While Caddy fails to settle herself within the framework of a Southern lady, she virtually acts as “a mother” in their family. Also, Addie Burden in *As I Lay Dying* is the dead mother of the Bundrens but her dominant presence rules her family as if she were alive. Her authoritative figure reminds us of Narcissa’s will power to fulfill her ideas. Narcissa’s characterization as a mother and a widow is analogous to Addie’s. Narcissa has her own words and will but differing from Caddy and Addie, she is not excluded from Southern society. The difference is that she maintains a female position based on patriarchy.

V The transformation of Narcissa – focusing on the latter part of the text

Faulkner seeks success as a writer to earn money, but the parts he revises greatly are the ones describing the relationship between Horace and Narcissa. Before the revision, Narcissa impresses readers as a flat character whose personality is excessively distorted. However, in the revised one, her human-like parts increase and she becomes more than just an evil woman. While she is consistently a strong-willed woman who resorts to all measures to fulfill her ideas from the original version to the revised one, in the revised one Faulkner makes amends to one scene and makes Miss Jenny say to Narcissa, “You don’t wonder. You just do things and then stop until the next time to do something comes around.” (Vintage 185-186; Modern Library 222-223). Narcissa turns into a person who makes plans on her own initiative more positively. And once she decides to take actions, she does not conceal them and seems to enjoy acting boldly. After accomplishing her hope, she sympathizes with the one who is left hopeless. Superficially she acts from her selfish interest to keep her place, but she takes pains to maintain the peace of their family without being thanked by the family.

The following citation is the scene where she leaks information causing Horace’s loss in the court to his opponent, District Attorney Eustace and the one where she makes sure Horace’s suit is completed and he can return to his wife.

Original Text Chapter XXII Revised Edition Chapter 26

That night she wrote Belle that Horace would be home on the twenty-fourth. She telephoned Horace and asked for Belle’s address.

“Why?” Horace said.

“I’m going to write her a letter,” she said, her voice tranquil, without threat.

Dammit, Horace thought, holding the dead wire in his hand, How can I be expected to combat people who will not even employ subterfuge. (Original 258-259, Vintage 265; Modern Library 318-319)

The description of this scene is the same both in the original one and in the revised one. Horace fails to talk back to Narcissa, who shows no hesitation in making him go back to his wife. The description of this part remains unchanged in the revised one. However, in the revised one, Narcissa asks Miss Jenny about Eustace before meeting him, which is different from the original one. In the revised one, Narcissa is more confident about her plans and their fulfillment and she appears to enjoy acting on her own.

The next citation is from the final scene where Horace appears and his letter to Narcissa.

Original Text Chapter XXV

“Dear Narcissa –

“I ran. Once I had not the courage to admit it; now I have not the courage to deny it. I found more reality than I could stomach, I suppose. [...] Thus (your own words) like a nigger I left her; like a nigger I returned (via the kitchen); entered the house and stood in the door while she had her magazine down and watched me from her pink nest... [...] I want you to find that woman yourself; tell her that I must give up the case because I do not think I am good enough, and that I am putting it in the hands of the best criminal lawyer I can find, for an appeal, and that she is not to worry. Do this, my dear. [...]”

“Horace.” (281-283)

In this original version, Horace puts all the responsibilities for Ruby on Narcissa after his case is lost. The following citation is Narcissa’s reply to Horace’s letter.

Original Text Chapter XXVI

“Dear Horace –

“I received your letter. Your message to that woman I cut off and mailed to her at the jail. I imagine she got it. They took the man away the day after you left. They were getting ready to lynch him, Isom said. So Jefferson is spared that at least. Why they should want to I cant see, since they are going to hang him anyway. So you can save hiring another lawyer.

[...]

“Love,

“Narcissa.” (284)

She does away with the responsibilities for Ruby just by sending a letter and talking about Lee’s lynching with composure, which emphasizes her cruel personality. She totally lacks humane feelings but does not turn down Horace’s request.

Here I would like to compare this scene with the one from the next citation. In the revised one, after she succeeds in making Horace lose his case, she is pleased to prevent him from being Lee’s lawyer. However, at the same time, she is left with an unpleasant aftertaste. This scene leaves some possibilities to interpret she herself feels it painful to obey patriarchy. In the original one, the above-cited letter is Narcissa’s last scene. In the revised one, she waits for Horace, who just loses his case and consoles him.

Then he began to cry, sitting in the car beside his sister. She drove steadily, not fast. (Vintage 292: Modern Library 350)

He stayed to supper. He ate a lot. “I’ll go and see about your room,” his sister said, quite gently. (Vintage 292: Modern Library 350)

Her words in the citations disclose Narcissa also lives under limited conditions and does things she feels urged to do.

Sanctuary is a multi-phased novel and allows us to interpret it from various angles. Possibly, through the process of revision, Narcissa changes from an inhuman monster to a woman who voluntarily acts as a monster for her family in spite of her real feelings.

VI. Conclusion

From the abovementioned changes made in the revised version, it is hard to declare that Narcissa is a mere villain deserving unflinching criticism. Certainly Horace will get more excluded from his society if he remains involved in Lee and Ruby’s case. In his family, only Narcissa can avoid the danger of leaving Horace isolated in his society. We

should be reminded that Narcissa first tells Horace not to get involved in their case before she actually does something like making Ruby go out of the hotel. And she does not conceal what she does and her intentions to do something from Miss Jenny as well as Horace. They let her do as she likes partly because they have to think of her absolute respect for their patriarchal society as reasonable.

From these aspects, we can conclude that Narcissa is “a villain” her society necessitates and the order of their society involving a family system is maintained because these “villains” make “efforts” to make it stable. The revised version allows us to glance at Narcissa’s figure as a woman in a family who is protected by her socially accepted idea without being free from ill feelings against the society.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 88th Annual General Meeting of the English Literary Society of Japan, at Kyoto University, May 28, 2016.

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