Literature of Mutants: Mechanical Elements in *Sanctuary*

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1. Mechanical Elements as the Characteristics of Mutants

In *Sanctuary*, Popeye is compared to animals such as horses and cats. For example, when Popeye approaches Temple in Miss Reba's brothel, he makes a "high whinnying sound like a horse" (167). In *Flags in the Dust*, women are symbolized by flowers. In Faulkner's works, human beings are often treated as lying on the same level as other animals and plants. In this, Faulkner has much in common with Darwin's evolutionism, which stresses the continuity between human beings and other living things.

In *Sanctuary*, Faulkner even describes living things as being equal to inorganic substances or machines. In the opening scene where Horace Benbow meets Popeye at a spring, Popeye is depicted as someone having "doll-like hands" (5) and "the face of a wax doll" (5); his eyes "looked like rubber hands" (6). Behind Horace a bird sings monotonously "as though it were worked by a clock" (5). [1] In *Sanctuary*, Faulkner presents a mechanistic view in addition to evolutionary ideas of Darwin.

Michael Wainwright analyzes Faulkner's works in terms of the theory of evolution and discusses the relationship between men and women according to Darwin's model of courtship strategy in animals. Furthermore, Wainwright emphasizes mechanical or inorganic things—impersonal elements—in *Sanctuary*, such as Popeye's automobile and gun, the corn-cob used by Popeye to rape Temple, and the mechanical piano in Miss Reba's brothel. Wainwright calls the strategy in the relationship between Popeye and Temple "the mutant courtship *strategy of impersonal gratification*" (60; italics in the original text).

Wainwright insists that Popeye's "biological inferiority" (60) leads him to taking the mutant courtship strategy. Popeye is physically weak: he is a small man; he cannot drink alcoholic beverages because his stomach is weak; he is impotent; when he was a child, he could not walk nor talk until about four years old (*Sanctuary* 319-23). His physical weakness excludes him from "the standard biological and patriarchal constructions of courtship" (Wainwright 60). Instead he seeks substitutes for his physical strength in mechanical things such as cars and guns. It is Popeye's biological inferiority which makes him, as it were, a mechanical mutant.

2. An “Artistic” Popular Novel as a Mutant

Just as Popeye is a “mutant” character, *Sanctuary* may be regarded as a mutant novel in the whole works of Faulkner. *Sanctuary* not only deals with rape and murder but also includes a lot of elements concerning popular culture of the time such as female students and cars. *Sanctuary* may be called a popular novel which is intended to attract many readers, or, to “make money,” as the author confesses in his introduction to the Modern Library edition of *Sanctuary* (337). But we must remember that Faulkner revised the novel “trying to make out of it something which would not shame *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* too much” (339). *Sancturay* is a new kind of an artistic popular novel, a “mutant” which lies between the potboiler and the serious work.

When we think of an artistic work with elements concerning popular culture, we must refer to hard-boiled detective stories. Hard-boiled detective story writers such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler intend to write artistic stories while they depict violence and popular culture. Hammett has philosophical tendencies (he read Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* when he was young), and Chandler's works are often praised as poetic.

Some critics point out that Faulkner was influenced by hard-boiled detective stories when he revised the original version of *Sanctuary*.

For example, Jay Watson says that “Faulkner revised the *Sanctuary* galleys away from what had been a Jamesian immersion in 〔Horace〕 Benbow's consciousness, and toward a tougher, leaner, hard-boiled prose, after the style of Hemingway and Hammett” (54).

André Bleikasten also compares *Santuary* to hard-boiled detective stories:

> Unlike *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*, the published version of *Sanctuary* seldom delves into the inner recesses of individual minds and makes no sustained attempt to conjure up the illusion of a “stream of consciousness.”. . . As in Dashiell Hammett's novels, albeit less systematically, we find in *Sanctuary* a fierce and scrupulous concentration on externals. (237)

When Bleikasten points out the similarity between the revised version of *Sanctuary* and hard-boiled detective stories, he pays attention to the “external” description of bodies as opposed to the internal description of individual minds (237). As we have seen, Popeye’s body is depicted with mechanical images. Bleikasten also says that Popeye is a hybrid which lies “halfway between the organic and the inanimate” (243).

But here a question arises: Why does Faulkner, who is good at researching into the

inner minds of characters, concentrate on the mechanical, hard-boiled descriptions of externals in the revised version of *Sanctuary*? In Watson's argument quoted above, the style of the revised version is considered "a tougher, leaner, hard-boiled prose." Why does Faulkner adopt what Watson calls "leaner" style in revising *Sanctuary*? To answer these questions, we shall go on to consider mechanical elements of hard-boiled detective stories.

3. Mechanical Elements of Hard-boiled Detective Stories

Sinda Gregory calls Hammett's works the best examples of the "antidetective" novel which stresses irony, paradox and contradictions:

> First of all, at the same time that his〔Hammett's〕books are almost universally acclaimed as the best of American detective fiction, they are also among the best examples of the antidetective novel. As Hammett maintained the outword form and pattern of the hard-boiled story, he also infused it with irony, paradox, parody, and humor so that, like the Maltese falcon, all is not as it seems. Thus, the black-and-white appeal of the detective story—a detective who pursues, a villain who eludes, a mystery created by evil and dissipated by good—is present in Hammett's fiction with disquieting contradictions that keep the reader slightly off balance. (12)

Leslie Fiedler also pays attention to the irony in Hammett's stories when he compares *Sanctuary* to one of them: "Its final ironic plot twist, in which Popeye, who has escaped hanging for murders he has actually committed is executed for one which he has not, is so closely anticipated in one of Hammett's Continental Op stories, that it is difficult to believe Faulkner had not read and remembered it" (86; sic).

According to Gregory, the classical detective story has the following three characteristics: "strict sense of rules and sporting behavior, emphasis on the supremacy of reason, and belief in the existing social order" (18). On the other hand, hard-boiled fiction lacks rules and "there is no single answer in the hard-boiled story and no single criminal" (Gregory 20). In other words, we can say that Hammett's "antidetective novels"—*mutants* among detective stories—are written with the background of chaotic reality, which are full of ironies, paradoxes and contradictions in conflict with classical reason and order.

In "The Simple Art of Murder," Raymond Chandler admires realism in Hammett's works. He says that what Hammett writes is "made up out of real things" (988) and that "the realist in murder writes of a world in which gangsters can rule nations and almost rule cities" (991). In such a world, we cannot trust the police nor juries and judges

because “law and order are things we talk about but refrain from practicing” (991).

Facing chaotic reality, the characters of the hard-boiled fiction lose their human feelings and become mechanical beings.

Hammett’s *Red Harvest* (1929) depicts a world of chaotic violence in a town called “Poisonville,” in which multiple forces such as the police and gangsters conflict with each other. The Continental Op, the narrator, is not given a name in the novel. The reader knows neither personal information about him nor what he thinks or feels in his mind. The Continental Op is a mechanical being like a camera whose function is recording the violent world. He has lost internal human feelings so that he can adapt to chaotic reality. The man without a name reminds us of the anonymous “reporter” in Faulkner’s *Pyron*.[2]

In the opening scene of Hammett’s *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), the face of Samuel Spade, the private detective of the novel, is described by repeatedly comparing features of his face to “V”:

> Samuel Spade's jaw was long and bony, his chin a jutting V under the more flexible V of his mouth. His nostrils curved back to make another, smaller, v. His yellow-grey eyes were horizontal. The V *motif* was picked up again by thickish brows rising outward from twin creases above a hooked nose, and his pale brown hair grew down—from high flat temples—in a point on his forehead. He looked rather pleasantly like a blond satan. (3)

In *The Maltese Falcon*, unlike in *Red Harvest*, Hammett uses the third-person point of view, and the name of the private detective is known to the reader. But the inner thoughts and feelings in Samuel Spade’s mind are not directly shown. Instead Hammett depicts Spade’s body externally with the use of the mechanical symbol of “V” or animal images of a wolf or a bear: “Spade grinned wolfishly, showing the edges of teeth far back in his jaw” (10); “The smooth thickness of his arms, legs, and body, the sag of his big rounded shoulders, made his body like a bear’s” (12). In short, Spade’s inner human feelings are suppressed and he is depicted as a mechanical being or an animal. Spade needs to be an impersonal man in order to adapt to the chaotic world of *The Maltese Falcon*, where the characters conflict with each other to get the falcon, the symbol of their desires. Mechanical ways of descriptions correspond to Spade’s impersonal attitudes.

Raymond Chandler, another representative of the hard-boiled detective story writers, is admired as a great stylist. Truman Capote likes his works and even calls him a “poet” (96). Chandler’s poetic style is characterized by mechanical metaphors. William Marling says that Chandler’s metaphors presuppose “laymen’s physics” (209). For

example, Philip Marlowe's brain is compared to a clock, and Lash Canino, a killer, to a dynamo. With its mechanical metaphors, Chandler's style greatly influenced post-war Japanese science fiction writers such as Sakyo Komatu and Kazumasa Hirai.[3]

Mechanical characters and metaphors in hard-boiled detective stories appeared with the background of mechanistic views which were becoming dominant in American society in the early 20th century.

In 1913, the mass production of Model T Fords on assembly lines started. Henry Ford was influenced by Frederick Winslow Taylor, an American engineer who proposed the ideas of scientific management. For Taylor, efficiency was everything. He wanted to treat workers as parts of machines and confined human work to the mechanical operations of tightening screws on assembly lines. Ford embodied Taylor's ideas in the mass production of Model T Fords. In automation, workers were treated as parts of mechanical processes and regarded as something similar to machines.

In 1948, Nobert Wiener, a mathematician at MIT, published *Cybernetics: or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, in which he propounded a mechanistic view of humans and animals based on the modern theory of information.

Some thinkers criticize such mechanistic views, saying that mechanism leads to alienation of human beings. György Lukács points out that, when we become parts of mechanical processes, we are alienated from the living world. On the other hand, the mechanistic views of human beings provide new insights into the understanding of our existence and give rise to new kinds of art. For example, Henri Bergson says in *Le rire* that mechanical movements of comedians make the audience laugh. "Our attitude, behavior and body movements cause laughter in proportion to the resemblance of our body to simple machines" (22-23). *Modern Times* (1936), Charlie Chaplin's comedy film, also presents a new kind of humor by depicting how human beings are treated as parts of machines in the modern automation process.

Now, what are the artistic effects of the mechanization of human beings in Faulkner's *Sanctuary*? In the next chapter, we will consider these effects as the "technology of perception."

4. *Sanctuary* and the Technology of Perception

Faulkner is interested in the artistic effects caused by the manipulation of perception. The first section of *The Sound and the Fury* describes the world perceived by Benjy, an idiot. In this section, various events are divided into separate perceptual images without temporal order. It is such an unusual world of perception that makes up the first section of *The Sound and the Fury*.

In *Sanctuary*, the reader finds another kind of unusual perception. While the world in the Benjy section is perceived by the idiot, the perceptual world in *Sanctuary* is dominated by Popeye, a hybrid of man and machine.

Let us consider the opening scene of *Sanctuary*, in which Horace Benbow, a lawyer, meets Popeye at a spring. Horace represents law, words and psychology; the original version of *Sanctuary* focuses on Horace's internal mind. On the other hand, Popeye is a silent outlaw who is depicted externally in a hard-boiled way as "a man of under size, his hands in his coat pockets, a cigarette slanted from his chin. His suit was black, with a tight, high-waisted coat" (4).

On meeting Popeye, Horace is drawn into the world of unusual perception. In the opening scene at the spring, Horace sees "the broken and myriad reflection" of his own drinking and "the shattered reflection" of Popeye's straw hat (3). The broken or shattered reflections mean distorted visual perception. In such a world of distorted perception, Popeye is described with mechanical metaphors: His face has a queer, bloodless color "as though seen by electric light, against the sunny silence" (4) and he has "that vicious depthless quality of stamped tin" (4). Horace's first encounter with Popeye, who represents chaotic evil in contrast with law and order, is depicted through hard-boiled external description and distorted visual perception. One of the most important differences between the revised and original versions of *Sanctuary* is that, in the revised version, the opening scene begins with the meeting of Horace and Popeye.[4]

Distorted perception also enhances fear and surprise in the scenes at Old Frenchman Place. In these scenes, instead of the direct descriptions of objects, their "shadows" are emphasized. Temple is haunted and trapped by Popeye's gaze and finally raped by him with a corncob. After being raped, Temple falls into a semi-conscious state of mind and her face looks "like a sleep-walker's" (142). She becomes a mechanical being and the parts of her body are compared to inorganic substances: "her mouth round and open like a small empty cave" (144); "She looked about with dazed, glassy eyes" (145). In a sense, she is violated by distorted perception and becomes a different kind of being.

Miss Reba's brothel is "full of sounds" (163) of the mechanical piano and love affairs. These sounds make up the space of auditory perception. When Virgil Snopes and Fonzo stay at the brothel, they hear these sounds at night and try to guess what is going on inside the house: " 'She's got a big family, I reckon,' Virgil said, his voice already dull with sleep. 'Family, hell,' Fonzo said. 'It's a party. Wish I was to it' "(204). They just listen to the sounds but they do not see the inside of the other rooms. Their misunderstanding is caused by distorted perception—in this case, perception without the aid of vision. In this scene at the brothel, Faulkner deliberately uses distorted

perception in order to stress the difference between imagination and reality.

Such a distorted world of perception involves the artificial manipulation of perception. Let us refer to Henri Bergson's view on movies in order to consider the technological aspect of perception. In chapter 4 of *L'évolution créatrice* (1907), Bergson says that, in a movie, a series of motionless photographs are used to reconstruct motion. For example, with the aid of numerous photographs, each of which represents a motionless posture of an instant, a movie can reconstitute the motion of an army marching before us (304-5). Each photograph is made up of lifeless materials and records only a motionless picture of an instant, but we can project our own life onto these lifeless pictures and give them vivid motion. Bergson insists that, in our daily perception, a system similar to movies works within us and reconstructs motion out of motionless fragments of an instant. "The system of our usual cognition is essentially cinematographic," Bergson says (*L'évolution créatrice* 305).

In *Sanctuary*, where living things are placed at the same level as things without life, the above-mentioned system of reconstructing motion does not work. In *Sanctuary*, we find no vivid motions, but the scenes are dominated by motionless states. For example, Faulkner often uses the word "motionless" to depict Temple, who behaves like a sleep-walker: "Then he〔Popeye〕 gripped her by the back of the neck and she sat motionless, her mouth round and open like a small empty cave" (144). Similarly, sounds in *Sanctuary* are monotonous without melodious motion. At the opening scene of the novel at the spring, a bird sings "three bars in monotonous repetition" (4) and sings again "as though it were worked by a clock" (5). Instead of lively melodies, there are mechanical, monotonous sounds.

In *Sanctuary*, artificial manipulation of perception has violent characteristics. Horace and Temple meet Popeye—their sudden, violent encounters with the mechanical mutant lead them to the unusual space of perception. Violence in *Sanctuary* not only means murder and rape but also the violent change of perception.

Most of us also experience violent transformation of perception in our daily life. It is when we get drunk that we fall into unusual space of perception. In *Sanctuary*, Gowan Stevens' drinking habit leads to Temple's encounter with Popeye. Gowan goes to Frenchman's Bend with Temple to get illegal alcohol and this is the beginning of a series of criminal incidents. In Old Frenchman Place, Gowan always drinks alcohol and gets drunk. Transformed perception in *Sanctuary* is similar to that perceived by drunken people. Faulkner himself suffered from heavy drinking and must have often experienced transformation of perception.

Faulkner's heavy drinking reminds us of Raymond Chandler, who is also an

alcoholic. According to Tom Hiney's biography about Chandler, the hard-boiled detective story writer began to drink too much alcohol due to his shell shock in World War Ⅰ. "In June 1918, Chandler was knocked unconscious when German shells bombarded his battalion's trench position" (Hiney 43). Then he was transferred back to Waddington in England. "It was during his four months' training in Waddington—'a hell of a place to spend a Sunday'—that the shell-shocked Chandler discovered his taste for alcohol" (Hiney 43).

In Chandler's novels, Philip Marlowe, the detective and narrator, experiences transformation of perception such as illusion through the effects of alcohol or drugs. In addition, Marlowe's perception is often interrupted when he is knocked out by gangsters. As Faulkner and Chandler suffered from heavy drinking, both of them must have known the possibility of falling into different kinds of perception.

Ways of perception described in *Sanctuary* are different from those of ordinary perception, but all of us have the possibility of experiencing such unusual perception. In *Sanctuary*, the unusual perception is represented by the word "shadow." The "shadow" means something hidden in our daily life: the unconscious state of mind like sleepwalking; evil such as rape, murder, and lynchings.

In *Sanctuary*, Faulkner describes shadowy parts of our existence not by delving into the inner recesses of the characters but by throwing the characters into the unusual world of perception produced by their encounters with Popeye, a mechanical mutant. How we perceive the world shows what the world means to us, and transformation of perception changes the meanings of the world. In *Sanctuary*, the mutant Popeye calls into question identities (identities which are represented by the proposition of "A man is a man") and violently transforms the meanings of the world.[5]

Notes

1. The phrase "[The bird sings] as though it were worked by a clock" (5) is not included in the original version of *Sanctuary*. It is added to the text in the revised version, which emphasizes a mechanistic view of living things.
2. In *Pylon*, "mechanical violence[of machines]" (27) and the waste land of the modern world are depicted, and the pilots are regarded as things below humanity. "Because they aint human like us; they couldn't turn those pylons like they do if they had human blood and senses . . ." (42). In addition, the Reporter who observes the pilots is not given a name in the novel. He is treated as if he were a ghost with "his ghostlike quality of being beyond all mere restrictions of flesh and time" (174). Modern technology regards humans as something belonging to the same level as

machines or ghosts.

3. Komatu says that he likes Chandler and that the hard-boiled style is essential to science fiction (Komatu 232). Hirai wrote *Cyborg Blues*, a collection of hard-boiled science fiction stories, whose narrator is a black cyborg police officer. The second story of *Cyborg Blues* is a parody of Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*: a beautiful blond woman in *The Long Goodbye* is rewritten as an android in *Cyborg Blues*.
4. In the original version of *Sanctuary*, the encounter of Horace with Popeye is depicted in the middle of chapter two (20).
5. Gender identity is also brought into question. When Temple recalls the rape scene, she tells Horace that she tried to make herself look like a boy in order to escape from fear: "I was looking at my legs and I'd try to make like I was a boy" (227).

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