Another Psychologist, a Physiologist and William Faulkner

MICK GIDLEY

IN THE wake of Laurence Kubie's pioneering interpretation, 'William Faulkner's *Sanctuary*' (*Saturday Review of Literature*, 20 October 1934), several of Faulkner's critics have drawn attention to what they see as Freudian patterns of theme and structure in his major works. They include Irving Malin, in *William Faulkner: an Interpretation* (1957), and Richard P. Adams, in *Faulkner: Myth and Motion* (1968). One of them, Carvel Collins, relying like the others on *internal* evidence, has gone further and speculated on Faulkner's *conscious* use of Freud.[1] In an early essay Faulkner does mention Freud in a notably casual manner, a manner which is perhaps meant to imply a *knowledge* of Freud in much the same way as a young intellectual today might nod in the direction of McLuhan or Marcuse.[2] Yet thirty years later Faulkner's invocation of Freud's name is usually affixed to a *denial* of any such acquaintanceship; at Virginia he said flatly, 'Freud I'm not familiar with'. (*Faulkner in the University*, 1965, p. 268)

Between Faulkner's extreme positions of acknowledgement and denial there is a tenable position on middle ground. And Faulkner himself locates it. In his interview with Jean Stein he said, 'Everybody talked about Freud when I lived in New Orleans, but I never read him'.[3] Freud's teachings were in the air that Faulkner breathed during his formative years. He could have

[1] Carvel Collins, 'The Interior Monologues of *The Sound and the Fury*', *English Institute Essays 1952*, New York, 1954, pp. 29–55. He posits Ernest Jones and the 1925 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as possible sources of Faulkner's knowledge of Freud. For Faulkner's interesting comments on Collins's Freudian interpretation see Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, eds, *Faulkner in the University*, New York, 1965, p. 147.

[2] Carvel Collins, ed, *William Faulkner: Early Prose and Poetry*, Boston: Atlantic — Little, Brown and Company, 1962, p. 95.

[3] Reprinted in James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, eds, *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner 1926–1962*, New York, 1968, p. 251.

been, or become, aware of them not only through conversation but also by means of other figures who were prominent on the literary scene — such as his one-time friend Sherwood Anderson, to name the most obvious. Also it is likely that Faulkner read brief descriptions of Freud's theories in at least three of the books which his friend and mentor, Phil Stone, ordered in 1922 with Faulkner 'in mind':[1] James Harvey Robinson's *The Mind in the Making* (1926), pp. 50, 53–4, Havelock Ellis's *Little Essays of Love and Virtue* (1922), *passim;* and Louis Berman's *The Glands Regulating Personality* (1921), pp. 20–1, 156, 172, 187–9 and 195. A single example from Robinson will suffice to show what is meant: *The Mind in the Making* contains a vivid enough discussion of Freud's work on 'the "free association of ideas" ' (pp. 53–4) to suggest that if Faulkner read it, it might have helped him to work out the transitions which occur during the streams of consciousness of Benjy and Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929); it was usually by such indirect means, as Frederick J. Hoffman has insisted in *Freudianism and the Literary Mind* (New York, 1959), *passim* and especially pp. viii and ix, that Freud's work passes — and passes — into creative literature.

The other two authors mentioned, Havelock Ellis and Louis Berman, are interesting not simply because they discuss Freud, but also because their work is pertinent in its own right to the making of the Faulkner canon. In *Crome Yellow* (1921), p. 154, another of the books Stone ordered, Aldous Huxley refers to Havelock Ellis by name. Faulkner does the same in his 'novel of ideas', *Mosquitoes* (1927). But there is no reason to believe that Faulkner merely followed Huxley, that he lacked first-hand experience, because in *Little Essays of Love and Virtue* he could have read Ellis's 'fundamental principles, together with their practical application to the life of our time'.

Ellis's first 'little' essay, called 'Children and Parents', treats, in a general way, emotional relationships within the family. He dwells particularly on the possibility of parental attitudes crippling the life of the child in that the views of two generations are frequently at variance, especially over politics and religion, and

[1] The Appendix to Joseph L. Blotner's *William Faulkner's Library — A Catalogue* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1964) consists of an alphabetical by author list of such books.

may thus lead to wounding tensions. This opinion, now common but original in its time, applies to several of the individuals in Faulkner's major works. We cannot but be aware of how to a certain extent Quentin Compson's thinking has been deformed by his father's cynical philosophy, or of how, in *As I Lay Dying* (1930), Addie Bundren's relationships with each of her children largely determine their different natures. And we see with exceeding sharpness how Joe Christmas feuds with his foster-father McEachern, the Calvinist Christian in *Light in August* (1932); indeed, that relationship could be summarized by one of Ellis's quotations from James Hinton: 'Our . . . Christian homes are the real dark places of the earth.'

In discussing familial involvements Ellis mentions the work of Freud several times, including Freud's theories on 'regression' or 'the paralysing and maiming influence of infantile' experiences. This is one of several instances in which Ellis's feelings parallel — or, even, as in the case of his views on 'autoeroticism' anticipate Freud's findings. So, to use Faulkner's own phrase[1] in *Mosquitoes* (p. 210), perhaps both 'Dr Ellis and your Germans' can be considered applicable when we think once more of Joe and Quentin; Ellis could be directly describing them when he comments thus:

> there are . . . people in whom immature childish sexuality persists into an adult stage of development it is no longer altogether in accord with, so that conflict, with various possible strains of nervous symptoms, may result. (p. 53)

This abstract analysis aptly covers their concrete situations — Joe warped by his experiences at the orphanage, Quentin persisting with his adolescent incestuous longings.

The essay 'The Love Rights of Women' details the historical circumstances which led to the obsessional opinion — typified by Acton — that erotic desire/experience in women was 'a vile aspersion' (p. 110). Ellis propounds the need for women's erotic rights to be considered. It may impress some readers that often in Faulkner's writings there is — even if we fight shy of Leslie Fiedler's assertions, in *Love and Death in the American Novel*, New York, 1960, pp. 309–15, 443–9 — something horrific about these 'rights'. Several of Faulkner's women are pictured as

[1] See Frederick J. Hoffman's *Freudianism and the Literary Mind*, p. 33.

over-demanding sexually: Temple Drake, Joanna Burden, even Caddie. Or, conversely, like Ike McCaslin's wife in *Go Down, Moses* (1942), they are willing to use, to prostitute, their sexual power. This is true a little in the case of Eula Varner — or perhaps with her it is simply that her sexuality frightens the comparatively ineffectual Gavin Stevens. . . . What must be striking is that in the long gallery of Faulkner females — from Cecily in *Soldier's Pay* (1926), through Dewey Dell of *As I Lay Dying* and Drusilla of *The Unvanquished* (1938) and Charlotte Rittenmayer of *The Wild Palms* (1939), to Linda Snopes Kohl of *The Mansion* (1959) — there seems hardly one who could be placed within a group we could call 'normal' (unless it be Judith of *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936)).

While Havelock Ellis resists the rigid determinism displayed by Louis Berman, in one or two respects he places great emphasis on 'heredity' as against 'environment' in the creation of human beings ('The Individual and the Race'). His rudimentary narration of glandular mechanisms in the determination of sexuality is a case in point (pp. 116–18). Another is his advocacy of 'negative' eugenics in order to 'breed out' undesirable qualities like epilepsy and feeble-mindedness (pp. 118–20). Remembering the stress many critics have put on the importance of the South as a crucial factor in Faulkner's fiction, Ellis can be an aid to remind us that in the evolution of Faulkner's families 'heredity' rather than 'environment' seems to play the more prominent part. The Sartorises, the Sutpens, the Compsons, even the McCaslins, are decaying breeds and Faulkner sometimes offers physical, as well as moral, signs of their degeneration: the idiot, Benjy, or Jim Bond howling round the ruins of Sutpen's Hundred. Amongst the Snopeses heredity is pre-eminent. Neither Faulkner nor his readers could ascribe to them any such qualities as the term 'Snopesism' implies (most of them moral) if we did not believe that, on the whole, each Snopes is imbued with a despicable nature merely by his family relationships; Warren Beck can rightly speak, in *Man in Motion: Faulkner's Triology*, Madison, 1961, p. 73, of a 'sense of clan as predestination'. This facet of Snopesism receives corroboration from the fact that Faulkner makes two of his characters suggest that honest Eck Snopes is not really a Snopes: Stevens explains him, in *The Town*, 1965, p. 31,[1] as one

[1] London edition; American publication was in 1957.

conceived before his mother 'married whatever Snopes was [his] titular father', and Montgomery Ward Snopes speaks of him, in *The Mansion*, 1965,[1] p. 88, as the product of 'some extracurricular night work'.

But in life and fiction heredity is only one of several determinants in the forging of human behaviour — and Faulkner's attitude to determinism itself seems ambiguous. His 'Address upon Receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature' contains the insistence that the artist must write of 'the old verities and truths of the heart . . . love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice'. 'Until he does so,' Faulkner continues, 'he labors under a curse. He writes not of love but of lust, of defeats in which nobody loses anything of value, of victories without hope. . . . He writes not of the heart but of the glands'.[2] The distinction Faulkner tries to elaborate here (if we disregard his tautologies) is the general one of free will as against determinism. The 'heart' represents the seat of choice; it is an umbrella word which denotes the source of voluntary emotions and actions — love, honour, etc. The 'glands' on the other hand represent the seat of *compulsions*. 'Lust' for example is, presumably, an involuntary emotion, a mere response or, better, reaction, to the stimulation of the sexual glands: in Dreiser's phrase, 'the chemic compulsions of sexuality'. Victories and losses due to the operation of compulsions are necessarily devoid of meaning. Faulkner's selection of the glands as his metaphor for man's determined behaviour and feelings is both interesting and suggestive, for Louis Berman's *The Glands Regulating Personality* proclaims the doctrine that a person's emotions, his physique, his actions and what we call his personality are all rigidly determined by his particular glandular structure. Clearly, this book deserves attention.

Berman, an American physiologist, was extremely influential for a time. In fact many of his ideas, which often complement those of behaviourist psychologists like J. B. Watson, found their way, as Geoffrey Bullough points out in *Mirror of Minds: Changing Psychological Beliefs in English Poetry*, 1962, p. 189, into the novels

[1] London edition; American publication was in 1959.
[2] James B. Meriwether, ed, William Faulkner's *Essays, Speeches and Public Letters*, New York: Random House, 1965, p. 120.

of Aldous Huxley (even in his late Utopian novel *Island*, 1962, Huxley was still troubled by those 'endocrine types' susceptible to demagoguery). Berman's book contains many descriptions of what he calls 'endocrine types', descriptions, that is, of people whose whole development is due to the dominance or imbalance of one or another of the glands. In so far as they are accurate depictions of certain people in particular medical states all Berman does is to provide a 'scientific' explanation for their existence; in other words, if Faulkner sometimes creates characters who are similar to Berman's descriptions it does not mean, of course, that he necessarily took them from Berman — for both he and Berman worked from life. However, Berman's analyses do tempt the reader to believe that Faulkner may have been influenced by their details, or by recurrent factors in them.

Whether or not Faulkner was, as V. K. Ratliff would say, 'actively' influenced, just as Berman himself finds Carol Kennicott of *Main Street* a 'thymus-centred type' (which, he says on pp. 157–8, accounts for much of the material in the novel; he offers the same kind of analysis for O'Neill's play *Diff'rent* on pp. 161–2), it is possible to categorize some of Faulkner's characters in much the same way. Benjy, the castrated idiot in *The Sound and the Fury* — even down to his physical appearance — is a case in point. Let me quote some of the salient features from Berman's picture of the cretin, the sufferer from thyroid deficiency:

> A yellowish, white or waxy pallor . . . watery eyes . . . the wobbly drooling tongue . . . the hair thin . . . eyebrows and eyelashes are scant . . . growth is irregular and disproportionate . . . protruding abdomen. . . . Hands and feet are broad, pudgy and floppy, the fingers stiff. . . .
>
> The mental state varies [from] the repulsively vegetable [who] manifest no interest in anything. . . . Hunger and thirst they manifest by grunts and inarticulate sounds, or by screaming. . . . They . . . sit like sphinxes. . . . [And there are] those who recognize parents and familiar faces, and exhibit some affection for them. . . . They attain . . . the age of two or three years and there stop altogether, as if a permanent brake were applied. . . . (pp. 53–4)

and from his delineation of the effects of castration:

> . . . hair on the face does not appear, hair elsewhere on the body remains generally scanty . . . there is more or less muscle-weakness, obesity, and mental sluggishness. (p. 83)

The links with Benjy are obvious; and the link receives further corroboration from Faulkner's handling — in 'Monk' — of an idiot very like Benjy; he says of Monk, 'he was a moron, perhaps even a cretin' (*Knight's Gambit,* New York, 1949, p. 31), which implies that he was aware of the medical terminology. At any rate, the connection with Berman is definitely stronger than with Wordsworth's 'The Idiot Boy', as suggested by Michael A. Frederickson in 'A Note on "The Idiot Boy" as a Probable Source for *The Sound and the Fury*', *Minnesota Review,* VI, 1966, pp. 368–70; the only 'evidence' Frederickson produces is that Benjy's birthday falls on the same date as Wordsworth's — but here he forgets all about the significance of the date for Easter 1928. Winthrop Tilley has already shown that Benjy is not clinically diagnosable as an 'idiot' ('The Idiot Boy in Mississippi: Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*', *American Journal of Mental Deficiency,* LIX, January 1955, pp. 374–7).

It could be said that Berman supplies 'scientific' support for the mythical phenomena exhibited by the development, as a child, of that goddess of *The Hamlet* (1940), Eula Varner. The following is from his chapter on the adrenal glands:

> [the oversecretion of the gland into the bloodstream produces] a curious hastening of the ripening of the body and mind summed up in the word puberty, a precocious puberty with the most startling effects. A little girl of 2, 3 or 4 years of age perhaps will exhibit the growth and appearance of a girl of 14. She begins to menstruate, her breasts swell, she shoots up in height, [etc.] (p. 71)

Faulkner's portrait of the young Eula testifies to his remarkable skill in the creation of character: while traversing much of the same territory he is able to skirt arousing undivided repulsion in the manner of Berman here; he manages to render only the pleasingly grotesque. Also relevant to Eula is Berman's belief — as against that of the psycho-analysts — that nymphomania has its roots in glandular rather than psychic factors (p. 200), for, in *The Town* (1957), Stevens subscribes to the same notion — *à propos,* naturally, the adult Eula. 'She was seduced', he says on p. 236, 'simply by herself; by a nymphomania not of the uterus . . . but by a nymphomania of a gland whose only ease was in creating a situation containing a recipient for gratitude, then supplying the gratitude'.

In Berman's view of the 'subthryoid type' we have the general qualities which Faulkner particularizes with such verve and credibility in his rendering of Anse Bundren. The 'subthyroid type' needs 'excess of sleep, sleeps heavily, needs sleep during the day . . . feels tired [in the morning] . . . lazy. . . . [He has bad teeth and] perspires little, even after exertion . . .' (p. 215).

Finally, although there are no direct patterns which exclusively fit them amongst Berman's types, such highly individualized creations as Popeye and Flem Snopes do possess some of the properties that recur in many of the types; that is, several of their characteristics — namely, popping eyes, chinlessness, hairlessness and, even, 'delinquency' itself — are frequently inventoried as results of glandular insufficiency or hyperactivity.

In sum, while Faulkner most likely did not *take* any of his characters from Berman, he could have used whatever knowledge he gained from Berman's physiology to give his people characteristics of 'scientific' credibility and to present them with additional consistency. Moreover — as possibly with Eula and Anse — if he did rely on Berman for 'facts', he transmuted them into enduring and vivid fiction. Thus, just as the critics mentioned at the opening of this essay have discerned Freudian affinities in Faulkner's work, we can point to like affinities with Berman — and with Havelock Ellis. They too can be considered as contributing to the atmosphere which Faulkner breathed during his formative years. The use here of the word 'affinities' rather than the more bald 'influences' to describe Faulkner's relationship with these other thinkers seems advisable because it allows him greater intellectual independence as a creative writer — indeed, as we observed earlier, Faulkner was certainly independent enough to repudiate 'the glands' in his Nobel Prize Speech.

If there is a grave intellectual contradiction between Faulkner's rejection of determinism in the Nobel Prize Speech and his fictional deployment of deterministic elements from Ellis and Berman, it is ultimately only of secondary importance. It is not a contradiction which stands alone. At Virginia, Faulkner said 'I think that man's free will functions against a Greek background of fate' (*Faulkner in the University,* p. 38). This presumably means that those of his people, such as Dilsey, Cash, Benbow, and Hightower, who persist in following — even into failure — the

injunctions of their 'hearts' thereby do transcend the limitations, inherited or environmental, glandular or psychic or whatever, which *should* utterly determine the nature of their existence. These are complex notions, resistant to easy formulation. In the last analysis we are concerned solely with Faulkner's artistic achievements, but it is partly because his fiction raises such intellectual problems — which after all have engaged the minds of the most significant philosophers past and present — that it possesses additional universal profundity; like some of his most memorable characters, Faulkner's fiction thus transcends those factors — such as his probable sources — which might tend to restrict it too severely to a particular place, a certain era.

Spring Evening

Lilac thickens the blue and settled air
The garden is lit by a purple star
Green and green and green explode everywhere.

Dressed in blue, green and purple you appear
To tell this season all it is you are.

KEVIN CROSSLEY-HOLLAND

Bearings

Navigate the concepts while you may,
  Understand the undistinguished phrases,
  Collimate the convoluted mazes
Man constructs to show, the shortest way,
Bad is good, black white, and night is day.

DAVID I. MASSON