

From Inertia to Dynamism: A Study of Psychological Reverberations in Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*

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ABSTRACT

Human life is a priceless opportunity for growth, a spiritual journey of Redemption. Despite the Eden's material flavor, the present-day man is estranged in constant despair and deep-seated ambivalence of quandary. People often don't really look for truth but are dogmatic about what they believe is true. The different forms of mental illness, such as Binx Bolling's urbane melancholy in Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*, are essentially placed into the existential phenomenon of human situations. Percy, as a physician of the soul, posits medicine to this disquietude of modern man. Reflecting upon the disoriented and unsatisfied past, the protagonist, Binx Bolling tries to reconstruct the present reality making it more meaningful. Though not apparently, inspired by Catholicism, Percy in *The Moviegoer* propels advocacy against the patrimonial melancholy inherited and current spiritual scrambles. Every individual must discern who he is and what he is here for, transcending the wayfaring and shattering passivity and everydayness. Such authentic self-awareness gives vent for true humanism. When the authentic self is trudging from inertia to dynamism, there is a new beginning. This article tries to explore the transition of Binx Bolling from the past-ridden estrangement and passivity to authentic and meaningful existence.

Keywords: Opportunity, Life, Dynamism, Transformation, Existential Situation, Everydayness, Passivity, Melancholy, Inertia, Metamorphosis, Transition and Estrangement

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature aims at a profitable contrivance to merit the fellow individual to forge a significant and purposeful living on earth. An individual's crop up on this earth cannot be fashioned flawless and unalloyed. Stumbled, falling and rising again is a learning process. The deep-seated ambivalence and trauma of an individual arising out of unprecedented tragedies necessitate a serious succor. Every Individual is potentially capable of arriving the Truth they thirst for. The viability of human existence is contingent on holistic and metamorphic transformation -physical, emotional and psychological- of an individual self. Literature features to this convalescence of the earthly existence. Oeuvre of Walker Percy assists a reader to ameliorate the past-ridden disorientation suggesting a new opportunity to renew life.

The present gimmicky technological advancements never protrude any guarantee for internal happiness. The human nature, however, aspires to seek after such transitory possessions and gets lost into them missing the paramount aspect of the earthly life. These worldly ingredients that appear to be burnishing in the beginning certainly end up meaningless and culminate into the disease of everydayness, malice and patrimonial melancholy. Addressing this existential anguish is one of prominent themes of Nineteenth century American literature. The emerging capitalism and the negative reminiscences of the civil war in 1950s made the life in the south more absurd and distorted. Having lost the southern heroic identity, men and women were in search of meaningful existence. The

past-ridden existential question was the main feature of the search. To quench this thirst for finding the individual identity, authors like Walker Percy came out with deep and philosophical novels summoning the readers for an individual conversion. *The Moviegoer* is one of the best examples explaining the internal transformation that every individual must encounter.

Walker Percy, the National Book award winner in 1962, traverses the disease of everydayness manipulating his intense regret over man's loss of sense of sin and malice and tries to unify the fragmented man with authentic self. For him, an oeuvre is not merely a sophisticated form of entertainment but a serious transaction between the reader and the writer. This outstanding writer of the twentieth century exposes the serious phenomenon of earthly existence with his excellent sensibility corresponding to all the complications of life that the readers can discern and with the impeccable faith that he has in humanity and the rectification possible for the alienated man. His preoccupation is not on the theological treatise but to give assurance that God can write in crooked lines. Percy's faith is based on an underlying assurance of God's presence even when all the signs proclaim otherwise. For him, the purpose of the earthly existence is to discover the God's genuine presence in fellow human being. His distinctly southern sensibility rooted in Christian existential philosophy and profound Catholic doctrines exegete the theological themes like God's gracefulness, fragility of human nature and the relevant eschatological significance etc.,

Percy's principal personae in all his novels are substantially successful postmodern men who in spite of their social intelligence, thirst for renewal in the debris of postmodern world of golf courses, shopping malls, X-rated movie theaters. These apparently affluent men in worldly affairs -drinking, roaming out of professional duties, dating with women etc., -fall into abstraction at one point while trying to purpose their lives and miserably fail in this process of philosophical speculation and fall into melancholic everydayness and alienation. The rest is all about his struggle with himself and his existential anguish trudging on towards Redemption assisted by the grace of God.

After drawn-out convalescence, in his 40s, the intensive comprehension of the modern existential agony and the personal thirst to alleviate the modern malice of alienation and perplexity, set Percy on fire to write about a man whose attraction to movies and the idealized protagonists on the screen of the then American reality, provided refuge against the aforementioned malicious realities and the existential anguish of the narrator temporarily. As the fictitious representation of gaiety is fugacious, the narrator falls prey to everydayness. Thus, the novel interprets the existential theology of Kierkegaard and develops a kind of possibility of leap into faith overcoming the despair just as the narrator remarks, "to make little contribution and leave the world just a little better off." (MG 88) (William Alexander Percy, *Lantern on the Levee*, 75)

Usually Percy's heroes are never defined by their social order but are willing to be identified with set of values and their choices. This new view of the human individual by Percy is in Sartre's eye the authentic self, searching for a true life that bears meaning. As the plot progress, they are endowed with enormous amount of freedom and freewill to move toward the future. They are men of hope as in Sarthe's existential philosophy moving from non-fixed lacuna to a vibrant and dynamic future. Their main stream of action is to resolve the "Little Way" of the ordinary and passive life to the top of their professions, or even to prove God's existence by personal ordeal. In spite of their psychological imbalance, they lead a decent life in suburbs of Gentilly or Paradise Estates spending their time playing golf and barbeque in the backyard and watch television. At one point, they recognize the meaninglessness in disguised merrymaking and try to overcome the condition. Will Barrett, protagonist of *the Second Coming* indicate: "the lives of other people seemed even more farcical than his own...? How did they manage to deceive themselves and even to appear to live normally, work as usual, play golf, tell jokes, and argue politics? Was he crazy or was it rather the case that other people went to any length to disguise from themselves that fact that their live farcical?" (Percy, *Second Coming*, 3)

The disguised authentic self as portrayed in Sartre and Camus and Kierkegaard's aesthetic stage, realize that the affluence of life cannot assist him escape wild anxiety, depression, abstraction, and alienation and even considering or attempting suicide. Self-destructive natured fathers predominantly affect the protagonists terminating deep ambivalence and trepidation. Ralph Ellison observes that Percy is obsessed with theme of suicide and present his protagonist searching for their identity in segments. (Ralph Ellison, 177) As physician, Percy proceeds diagnosing the psychic illness which begets afflictions and treats the trauma leading protagonist into religious faith despairing the suicidal fathers. Kierkegaard's leap-into faith restores the protagonists from the inferno of sexual obsession, societal collapse, and meditation on suicide into the quiet life of faith. As Kate says to Binx, "The only happy men are wounded me." (MG 145) Percy himself has revamped his wounded self. In his Introduction to *'Lanterns on the Levee'* Percy remarks that "through William Alexander he gained vocation and in a real sense a 'second self.'" (Walker Percy, ix) He reflects, "Surely it is the highest tribute to the best people we know to use them the best way we can, to become, not their disciples, but ourselves." (P. ix)

The inclination for suicide could be due to fact of persistent hearing and knowing of the same. But then, certainly it was the erudite house of music and art and regular visits of famous literati to Uncle Will, that helped Percy to fight against the rotten memories of the childhood. In contrast to Freud, who believed that literature cannot alter the essential structure and emotions of an individual and the society, Percy explored that science cannot guarantee an ultimate ground for human values and personal quandary. However, an individual can grow and change infinitely from the depressive and traumatic boyhood and avoid following his ancestor's destructive example. Percy assures that art and literature is more helpful in this process and conforms that the individual conflicts can be overcome much easily when art and literature is approached for.

2. KIERKEGAARD'S AESTHETIC MAN

The Moviegoer, Percy's philosophical, unassertive, highly allusive fiction is the best coalescence of the postmodern American life situation with the European existential perspective and phenomenological approach pioneered by Sartre and Camus. Certainly, this new method can be simply explained as "the idea of describing accurately how a man feels in given situation...a man who finds himself in a world, a very concrete place and time." As Percy himself writes in one of his essays, "*The Coming Crisis in Psychiatry*," "We all know perfectly well that the man who lives out his life as consumer, a sexual partner, an other-directed executive; who avoids boredom and anxiety by consuming tons of newsprint, miles of movie film, years of TV time; that such a man has somehow betrayed his destiny as a human being." (Percy, *The Coming Crisis in Psychiatry*, 258)

The plot is simply about an ordinary bourgeois man, Binx Bolling, young New Orleansian who frequents movie theater to break free monotony of everydayness, surmises movies to be more real than his own life cherishing not the remarkable episodes of the life but consequential scenes from movies mirroring its heroes and heroines and has inconsequential affairs with his secretaries to fight the humdrum of life and make money. (Joy Jacob, 35) Percy presents him as a formalist who is unaware of the dryness in life and enjoys his absolute freedom as already foreshadowed in the epigraph.

At one point, he realizes that his diurnal life is nugatory leading him to everydayness, life of despair and dejection. Despair, a favorite term of the existentialists, paradoxically arises not only out of man's awareness of his absolute freedom, but from his concurrent denial that he possesses it. "The worst of despair is to imagine that one is at home when one is really homeless." (MB 429) The "authentic" man faces the burden of his freedom while the "inauthentic" man hides from it; yet both suffer from despair. Though initially, Binx hides away from it by visiting theaters and romancing secretaries, he accepts his existential desolation and pangs of alienation (Joy Jacob, 35) leading the plot into philosophical exploration from start to end. He laments on several instances, "everydayness is the

enemy” (MG 99, 100, 145) as the story progress, we can discover the indispensable existential anguish Binx undergoes.

Mark Johnson remarks that “Binx verbalizes like an essayist rather than a character.” Percy postulates many existential concepts such as rotation, repetition, despair, everydayness, and existential anguish, alienation etc., through many disjointed and scrappy vignettes. The long and self-explanatory dialogues necessarily throw light on the laconic natured Binx’s head way from a life of digression to a substantial acceptance of his despondency. Lewis Lawson speculates that only when we put together the seemingly fragmentary episodes; yield a clear picture of Binx’s “complicated consciousness.” For a temporary escape from his despondency, Binx engages in rotation and repetition. MG 117, 68. Lawson observes that in order to break free the agony of his perturbation and isolation,

“He turns to the future or the past for the meaning that will transform the present. If he turns to the future, he values the rotation, the orientation toward the radically different future that enables the sufferer to avoid the dreary present. If he turns to the past, he attempts to discover the point at which his life got off the track, in the hope that he could go back to resume his life at that point. This pondering of the past is called repetition.” (Lawson, 30)

Percy broaches Binx as reticent and fearing the unpleasant past and he himself states in “*Symbol as Hermeneutic Existentialism*,” “I, who symbolize the world in order to know it, am destined to remain forever unknown to myself.” (Message in the Bottle, 283) The interior self is enigmatic in its aesthetic desire which is negatively nothingness. In distinction to the objective world Sartre calls it a “hole.” Unlike the objects on earth man’s self can be what its choices are. Sartre’s famous phrase, “Existence precedes his Essence” substantiates to the fact. Man’s prerogatives arise out of his consciousness, so does his anxiety, which leads him to define himself in terms of material objects in the vain effort to fill up the “hole” of the self.

The opening scene evidently exposes how Binx is imposed to fill up the ‘hole’ with unpleasant memories of the past. Aunt Emily calls him out behind the hospital and tells him, “Scotty is dead. Now it is all up to you. It is going to be difficult for you but I know you are going to act like a soldier.” (MG, 11) The conflict between the ethical and stoic attitude of Aunt Emily and existential one of the Binx begins when Binx mentally thinks, “I could easily act like a soldier. Was that all I had to do?” (MG, 11) Already from thenceforth, there is an evocation of concatenated and wretched memories of his household that climaxes into cavernous discernment of his distressed paterfamilias.

Percy derives the epigraph from the three stages of life -the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious-presented in Kierkegaard’s “*The Sickness unto Death*,” and additional key points from Dostoevsky’s underground man. Luschei describes that Percy likens the three stages to the three sections of his living house: the aesthetic man -lost in sensual diversion inhabits the vault; the ethical man, the ground floor; and the religious man, garret. (Luschei, *Sovereign Wayfarer*, 76) This symbol is employed all through the plot.

Unlike the others in Gentilly, who visits theaters to diverge actuality, Binx admits, the movies are “onto something,” but they always “screw it up.” (MG18) The movies are not mere snuggly anesthetic but screw up the interior self, hidden to fire light or sun light. What the movies are onto, despite their many compromises is what Binx calls “the search” horizontal. Though Binx is identical to Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, and Sartre’s self-parodic waiter, the way they describe of their possessions like ID cards, scholarship, diplomas, and membership cards etc., he hides his wretched memories in sensual inertia against authentic potentiality. It is evident as he casually mentions his deed of inheritance: ten acres of his father’s defunct duck club, which is his only patrimonial identity, at the end of the list, which indicates that the relationship with his father must be resolved if he is to understand his predicament.

Binx perceives his rummage as he wakes up in the morning by the dream of Korean War where he vowed laying on the ground, “there awoke in me an immense curiosity. I was onto something. I vowed that if I ever got out of this fix, I would pursue the search. Naturally, as soon as I recovered and got home, I forgot all about it.” (MG 16) Binx’s awareness that he has inherited the poignant insomniac ‘waking dreams’ of his father, at once, he prods through the pile of his keys, pencils, and the like “in search of a clue just as the detective on the television pokes through the dead man’s possessions.” (MG 17) Binx, from thenceforth, engross in detective like inquiry of his father’s possessions. Though the rationale for Binx’s quest is obscure for the reader, Binx acknowledges that:

“What is the nature of the search? You ask... the search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life. This morning, for example, I felt as if I had come to myself on a strange island. And what does such a castaway do?” (MG18)

Binx, perplexed by the ignorance of the object of his search, hesitates to expose it. His anxiety will increase until he remedies this defect in his knowledge. The first evidence of the Binx’s trouble with his father starts with photograph from the mantle. The enigmatic portrayal divulges him to consider his father as recluse, for the other two brothers have their arms around each other excluding his farther who was a showy dresser; a romantic who carried around a book of poems celebrating the tragic deaths of the young heroes; and, above all, an ironist. Binx is truly conceived more of his father. Aunt Emily later would say Binx, “You remind me so much of your father,” though Binx replies “I can’t seem to remember him.” (MG 50)

Aunt Emily is a strong influential stoic who resembles Percy’s uncle Will, Percy’s foster father and represents the heroic tradition of south. (John Blair, 77-89) She and her husband Jules Cutrer took care of the orphan boy Binx, who feels so much indebted to her. He says on seeing her, “in a split of second I have forgotten everything... even my search.” MG, 27) At the request of Emily, Binx promises that he would help Kate, her stepdaughter to recover from pills and alcohol. In the very first meet with Kate, Binx is able to understand that she too, like him finds it difficult to adjust to the code of Bollings. She says, “Aunt Emily thinks you are one of her kind... But you don’t fool me... you are like me, but, worse. Much worse.” (MG 40) The first part ends, as Binx’s search being compared with that of Kate.

Binx’s merry life in America -dating with his secretaries, profitable business, and night movies and clubs- in the beginning of the second part digresses him from his search. But when he meets Kate, the question of authentic existence and the agony of identity with his father recall to mind. When Kate unfolds futility of merry life, the next morning, (Friday) Binx “awakes with the violent start” as if retrieved from deep sleep and goes for a solitary walk in the streets of Gentilly and calls to mind how his father suffered insomniac and wished quietus as Hamlet.

Binx, unlike his father, is of irregular life-style and is reluctant to be either son or father. For, he refuses to be godfather of his friend’s son feeling ignoble. Thanking his friend, he says, “I am not a practical Catholic, I doubt I could.” (MG 73) He is hesitant to sell the duck club which is his only patrimony despite of good sum of money, fearing to break the lineage. When he comes to know how the club was built, he is struck with the disparity between the historic deeds of the past and the present paltriness.

Binx rejects Jules suggestion to travel to Chicago to get a job, but prospects to start a service station at Gentilly. Kate too realizes that “a person does not have to be this or be that or be anything, not even oneself. One is free.” (MG 94) She abruptly gets off her treatment and enjoys the insight of existential moment of unbounded freedom. Her awareness of freedom obstructed by the therapy and his rejection of Chicago trip have thrown them out of the safety of everydayness. Now they are free but responsible for their future. Binx, comforting Kate propose to marry her and realizing the threat of the Little Way with memories of his father crowding him. Binx transfer from Kierkegaard’s aesthetic stage to the next and his desire to help Kate is much more heartfelt at the end of the second part.

3. KIERKEGAARD'S KNIGHT OF FAITH

The third part of the novel brings forth the important persona of the novel, Lonnie, Binx's half-brother, seriously ill and confined to a wheel chair. Binx says that his brother "has the gift of believing that he can offer his sufferings in reparation for man's indifference to the pierced heart of Jesus Christ. (MG 112) Binx seems to be resolved only with three people in the novel: Lonnie, Kate (at least late in the first and second sections of the novel) and his father at the end of the third part.

His uneasiness in the fishing camp and his mother's abstracted hug make him say, "I feel sometimes, a son's love for her, or something like this, and try to give her a special greeting, but at times like these she avoids my eye." (MG 112) Binx feels, "Neither my mother's family nor my father's family understands my search." (MG 118) He is fatherless, but he feels deprived of his mother as well. She explained how his father succumbed to sleeplessness and walk alone miles together by the river bank. Though his mother did not apprehend, Binx knows that his father's solitary walks were to get-rid of self-anxiety which perhaps resemble Binx's horizontal search that is existential in nature and opposes the vertical search which is scientific, impersonal, platonically abstract.

The father's search, religious in nature is senseless to the mother just as Binx's search means nothing to either side of the family. The father miserably failed his search resulting severe depression and died in war. Binx now has to admit to himself that his father's death was really a suicide: "He had found a way to do both: to please them and please himself... and perhaps even to carry off the grandest coup of all: to die." (MG 127) Binx too has been to war but has survived, and so has been left to inherit his father's failed quest for meaning. Finally, Binx's search has found its grim object - the body of a suicide-and Binx's admission to himself of this previously suppressed knowledge sends him into a spiral of despair. Binx's return to his mother's fishing camp and subsequent acceptance of the fact that his father willed his death strongly, suggest the fragmentation of the modern world and the breakdown of traditional value systems through the search for stable identity of an alienated young protagonist of aristocratic heritage.

The knowledge of truth ridded in the past is the aim of investigation. Binx's obsession to know the past throws him into rotation and repetition. Since any particular form of rotation quickly wears itself out, Percy has had Binx and Kate try several different modes of transportation earlier in the book-all of which take them further and further from home. Binx first walks, then takes a bus around the town, then drives his car to the coast before taking the train to Chicago. Kate, when her first fiancé died in an auto accident, had escaped the horror of the scene by simply slipping away on a bus. While both hopes the trip will help, Binx and Kate are at their lowest points. Percy will fill their journey with death imagery, suggesting that Kate's attempted suicide reflects Binx's desire to follow his father's example: Binx is after all, as Kate insists, "Like me but worse."

Binx's growing awareness of death imageries that of his brother Scott and half-brother Duval, of his wounding in Korea, of Lonnie's illness and Kate's suicide attempt, and above all, of his father's death has a serious impact on him. These are preparation for the train ride Chicago, which is so filled with it as to make certain that this is Binx's symbolic descent into hell. This psychologically authentic journey stands in contrast to the state of death-in-life Binx has lived in Gentilly. Thus, the novel's persistent theme of the interpenetration of life and death reinforces the journey of man on this passive earth.

All of Percy's heroes come to the realization that their only hope for salvation must come out of an encounter with death in its pure form. As Kate puts it in a paradox summing up Percy's fiction, "Suicide is the only thing that keeps me alive." (MG 155) Infernal journey in the train culminates Binx intoxicated with alcohol and anguish assuring his complete responsibility for Kate after marriage out of love than lust, acknowledging "we did very badly and almost did not do at all. Flesh, poor flesh failed us." (MG 159)

Chicago is unbearable to Binx not only because of his southerners but because it reminds his father too much. He is reminded of a most important visit to Chicago with his father:

“feeling my father’s eye on me... he staking his everything this time on a perfect comradeship-and I, seeing in his eyes the terrible request, requiring from me his very life; I, through a child’s cool perversity or some atavistic recoil from an intimacy too intimate, turned him down, turned away, refused him what I know I could not give.” (MG 162)

Binx believed that he himself was blameworthy for his despair until he realized his failure when his father asked for “his very life.” This realization of his responsibility towards other is turning point in the fiction. Binx has reached his lowest point and begins to climb out of the hell in which he has sunk himself. After attending a few functions at the broker’s convention, Binx and Kate make a quick visit to see Harold Graebner, Binx’s friend during the war who had saved his life. The visit depicts the awkwardness of the trying to live up to a great friendship of ten years ago. A function of the visit is to underscore Binx’s failure with his father at the museum long ago, for Harold tells Binx that his son was baptized the day before and that Binx was “godfather-by-proxy” (MG 169). Binx is afraid to take any responsibility and has failed as both son and father, but in the rest of the novel he will move toward accepting his responsibilities.

The final conflict between the stoic and the existentialist is exposed when Binx encounters his Aunt who has desperately looking for Kate. When Binx and Kate see the sweepers cleaning the rain soaked remnants of the Mardi Grass parade which indicates the transience of Kierkegaard’s aesthetic pleasures. Binx’s decision to stand for Kate by now portrays his readiness to leap into a higher way of life, just as surely as Ash Wednesday follows Fat Tuesday.

Aunt Emily, who lives in the Ethical stage of Kierkegaard, outraged by his failure to inform her Kate’s presence with him and believes that he is “not capable of caring for anyone.” (GM 175) But the journey to Chicago has marked the beginning of the end of Binx’s self-absorption and his extension for others. Kate soon tells Aunt Emily that she and Binx will marry, and Binx’s irresponsibility is excused and he is taken back into the Cutrer family.

The final bout with his despair is still in danger when he again tempted to try and reestablish his little way, despite the self-knowledge his memories of his father have given him. Dispirited after Aunt Emily’s lecture, he recalls that it is Ash Wednesday, his thirtieth birthday, and that he promised her he would have decided on his future plans by this date. Denying what he has learned, he concludes that he has “inherited no more from my father than a good nose for merde,” that “it is certain now that my Aunt is right,” and that “there is nothing to do but fall prey to desire” (MG 180-181). As the chapter ends, they sit in her car discussing marriage, and watch a black man come out of a church with the mark of Ash Wednesday on his forehead. Binx wonders if the man is receiving the ashes as a matter of course or in true faith, but decides “it is impossible to say” (186).

In the epilogue, Binx has avoided falling back to his Little Way and has become at least potentially religious man who openly considers life of evasions and begun the only genuinely worthy pursuit of man, in Percy’s Christian terms, the search for God through giving one’s life to others. The change is an inner one and that Binx’s transformation is confirmed by the tone which in the epilogue is never flippant or ironical. Binx does not yet profess belief, however, for, as he explains, “I have not the authority, as the great Danish theologian declares, to speak of such matters in any way other the edifying.” (MG 187) But Percy has remarked in an interview, “In the end Binx jumps from the aesthetic clear across the ethical to the religious. He has no ethical sphere at all.” (Jhon Carr, Interview 330) The epilogue finds Binx married to Kate, planning to attend medical school, and dealing successfully with the deaths of Uncle Jules and his beloved half-brother Lonnie, who finally succumbed to a virus infection. The last scene finds Binx assuring Lonnie’s brothers and sisters that they will see Lonnie, who also finally succumbed to a virus infection that they will see in heaven one day, and taking full responsibility for the still-fragile Kate. Lawson takes it as an encouraging sign that

in the epilogue Binx “mentions no movies he has seen, nor does he affect the behavior of any movie star. Binx Bolling has come out of the movies, to chance acting himself.” (Lewis Lawson, 40) At the novel’s end Binx-the lost, disturbed son-has metamorphosed into the protective father, but his battles will have to be refought by the protagonists who follow him. The protagonists of Percy engage in a pilgrimage from “the dislocated post-modern world back into the ancestral past and onto a transcendental timelessness.” (Luschei, 169)

4. CONCLUSION

There have been soul shattering incidents in Percy’s life like suicides of his parents, decease of tuberculosis, and his conversion to catholic faith etc., It is the story of a spiritual wayfarer trudging on along his lonely path toward salvation. Percy envisions a complete annihilation of the present order and the emergence of a new one from its ashes Binx startled to see the end of his own world in social breakdown and personal upheaval begins his journey (wayfaring) to achieve the impetus from discovering love amidst ruins. His coming to self-consciousness through way-faring and inter-subjectivity, marks the definite stage in their lives. Redemption, in Percy’s terms, marks the end of certain turbulent period in the protagonists’ lives and paves way for an authentic revival of cultural values based on a creative personal development. It promises a new vision of themselves and of the world.

The originally genuine voice in the galaxy of modern Southern literary talent, Walker Percy wrote about, sophisticated moderns living in urban America and no longer hung up over the Supreme Court decision, the fall of Richmond, dynastic decline, or the inhospitality of the culturally retarded community to the sensitive artist. The South he wrote about was the South that most of us inhabited. The malaise he saw it as suffering from was not a matter of the passing of the heroic virtues of an age of Gold and the advent of an Iron Time; it was that of a too-smug, too-selfish material prosperity and a loss of spiritual direction.

Walker Percy was a Roman Catholic. His novels were by design religious fiction, unlike most of the Southern religious fiction, not written from a position of theological privilege located far above the struggle, judging the poor deluded sinners and cosigning them to the fire. The author never confuses his typewriter with the flaming sword welded by the Avenging Angel, because this particular author includes himself among the sinful. His Catholicism is not a charter for smugness or arrogance. Nor is it an authorization of the self-important gesture, the self-congratulatory stance of the public martyr.

In his last thirty-five years in this small southern community, Percy has produced one of the most impressive bodies of American postmodern fiction. It is his novels, however, that are his most powerful statements of this view. They are a unique blend of art and idea, true-to-life stories about people we can believe in and care about-fellow pilgrims, neither beasts nor angels, in search of life’s meaning. We can laugh and cry with them and in the process better understand out won struggle toward Being.

Walker’s whole approach to experience was that of the explorer, the wayfarer, he didn’t presume to know all the answers. To engage honestly and with humility in his search, the satirical mode was too one-sided, too limiting; he had to be imaginatively, the creatures, of his fiction, and it was the moral, Ethical, and theological implications inherent in their situations that most concerned him, not their social and historical context. Certainly, in southern writing, that was brought off with anything like an incomparable brilliance and distinction.

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