CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The study of the works of both Walker Percy and Shelby Foote in the preceding chapters reveals the central concern of those two contemporary writers of the South. They are concerned, no doubt, with the question how the Southern characters respond to their past while living in the present. In the fictional worlds created by these two writers, the history of the South exercises its control over the lives of fictitious characters. In the novels of Walker Percy the central characters are preoccupied with the personal, or the family past which is inevitably and inextricably related to the past of the South. They are subjected to the burden of the past. They try to bear the past's burden, try to comply with the past, but fail in their enterprise. However, their preoccupation with the past continues unabated making them restless in the present. This is what happens to Binx Bolling of THE MOVIEGOER who is obsessed with the heroic tradition of his family past. Binx tries to follow that tradition, becomes a soldier that representing the standard of character appropriate to the son of a Southern gentleman under the circumstance. Even after having become soldier, Binx fails to keep himself with the family tradition because he does not meet hero's death in the war. However, the heroic spirit,
though consciously and subconsciously repressed, continues to live
deep in his psyche. His sense of failure to live up to the family tradition
and his obsession with the heroic ideals make him restless in the
present.

Like Binx, Will Barrett of *THE LAST GENTLEMAN* is the scion of
an old Southern family carrying the burden of following the model of
behaviour of an old style gentleman like his great-grandfather. But the
initial ability of the ancestor to act with assurance has declined into
uncertainty of his son and irony of his grandson, Will's father, who in a
moment of despair shot himself. Will's bonds with the gentlemanly past
impels him to ponder on the Civil War history but his father's ironic
death due to the gentlemanly past leaves him confused and anxious.
Not the gentlemanly past like Binx and Will but the past related to the
death of his beloved daughter and wife is a burden heavy enough to
bear for Dr. Tom More of *LOVE IN THE RUINS*. The past of loss of the
beloveds is constantly in his mind putting him in the role of
mythmaker. No matter how Dr. More may mythologize the past, the
past haunts him and keeps him from participating fully in the present.

As the scion of a Southern aristocratic family, Lancelot Lamar of
*LANCELOT* bears the burden of his family heritage constituted of a
series of great deeds. He is a hero with a repressed need for performing
something profound and courageous. While he rejects the past as banal,
he never really gives up the dreams of heroic ideals. In his new colony in Virginia, he decides to revive the lost code of honor and female virtue. As Lancelot does his best to break away from the Southern past, the more he is bound to it.

The reappearance of Will Barrett in *THE SECOND COMING* shows him increasingly obsessed with his past related to his father's attempt to kill his son and later on his killing of himself. Will's obsession with the past has to do with his attempt to know what actually happened in the past. The past of his father's suicide is so unbearable to Will as it impels him to flee to the North. However, there in the North, too, the past haunts him. Like Will Barrett the memory of his father haunts Dr. Tom More of *THE THANATOS SYNDROME*. But he is less preoccupied with his personal past and more with the Stedmann history. His obsession with the Stedmann history generates in him the sense of ending, of apocalypse. He imposes the myth of apocalypse on the modern situation. There is no break in his obsession with the Stedmann history even after he is on spree along with his new family.

The character's mere obsession with the past to Percy is an illness related to the mind. It is implied in the characters' suffering from the diseases concerned to the mind and called by various names in the novels. In *THE MOVIEGOER* Binx Bolling suffers from constant
insomnia and shaking terror. His illness is related to his failure in living up to the heroic tradition of his family past. His sense of failure gives way to his sense of alienation from the tradition affecting his natural gifts, sleep. Another character from the novel Kate, Binx's love, has psychiatric symptoms such as anxiety and suicidal tendencies. Kate's emotional disturbance is in a large part engendered by the pressures of her parents who want her to be a sweet and docile Southern belle of the past. So that Kate's illness is born out of her resistance to the forced conformity to the past rather than out of her obsession with the past. In either cases the characters suffer from the illness of mind. Will Barrett of *THE LAST GENTLEMAN* is given to fits of déjà vu and amnesia. He sleeps poorly, often forgets to eat, suffers from headaches and find's himself in disorienting fugue states in which everything looks strange. To cope with his illness, he is undergoing psychotherapy. Will's sickness has to do with the tremendous influence on him of his family heritage. Unable to comply with it, he develops the illness of amnesia which blocks from his memory the idea that he is the scion of race now gone and thus frees him from the responsibility of acting in accordance with his heritage.

The heavy drinking psychiatrist, Dr. Tom More of *LOVE IN THE RUINS* suffers from "morning terror", disorientation, and suicidal tendencies. He is declared crazy, hospitalized and kept under lock and
key for a good long time. More's sickness is inextricably related to the past that wells up in his consciousness. The loss of his only daughter and wife is a burden heavy enough to bear for More that leaves him to heavy drinking. At the same time he is prone to romantic mythologizing which is a sickness common in Southern men revealing their inability to confront the present in a positive manner. Lancelot Lamar of *Lancelot* is declared mad and put in the Centre for Aberrant Behavior, New Orleans where he is undergoing treatment for his mental illness. Lancelot is obsessed with the history as a series of great deeds and laments for the lost possibility of heroic action which he believes existed in his fore-fathers. His laments takes the form of a romantic obsession with the heroic action that leads him to murder his wife and so by society's standard, he is mad. He needs psychotherapy and his reconstructing the past can be seen as his going through an apparently one-sided psychotherapy. His monologues are instrumental in restoring some sort of sanity in him.

Will Barrett of *THE SECOND COMING* suffers from the total recall - the intrusion on his consciousness of the past memory that makes it impossible for him to live in the present. He also sustains blackouts and entertains suicidal tendencies. Considering all this, Will's sickness is the sickness of consciousness resulted from his intensive obsession with the past related to his father's suicide. The disease
contaminates Will's present life and abnegates the possibility of his having future. The other character Allison Huger, Will's love, too, suffers from mental disease, that is, amnesia. She, according to her doctor, is psychotic. She has been admitted in the Valleyhead Sanitarious where she is subjected to electroshock therapy which has left her with almost no memory. But Allison's amnesia is not so much the result of the electroshock as it is the burden of the past. If Allison can not remember anything, or has hard time remembering, it is not because for her there is nothing to remember, but because the past memories are too painful to tolerate. Living with amnesia, Allison uses notebook as a guide to the past. Dr. Tom More of THE THANATOS SYNDROME though apparently seems to be least mentally ill of all the Percy heroes, suffers from the disease of obsession with the history. He is obsessed with the Stedmann history which generates in him the sense of ending. He imposes the myth of apocalypse on the present situation. His predilection for myths is the part of illness, the part of defense to face the present.

Dr. Tom More's appearance in LOVE IN THE RUINS and his reappearance in THE THANATOS SYNDROME show him a man given to mythmaking that he never frees from. He is the embodiment of the Southern character having the habit of distortion and romantic mythologizing. Similarly, Father Smith's sickness, his fascination with
Germany, is the sickness of the Southern character since fascination with Germany has indeed long been a part of Southern mind.

Percy's proposition is that the characters' sickness of mind leads to a rather empty life. They escape the present and least think of the future since they are preoccupied with the past. Their problems are that they cannot simply forget the past and get relieved from it. For that matter the characters in Percy's novels take stock of the past implied in search into the past to make the present living condition. Once the characters understand the past, they are exorcized of it, or pattern their lives upon it. Binx Bolling of *THE MOVIEGOER* does the same; he searches into the past for clues to his father's predicament in relation to his family's heroic ideals. He tries to learn more about his father from his own mother. It is his "return" to the past in order to understand it. Binx learns that his father was suffering from personal gloom born of English romanticism that killed him. This knowledge about the past, about his father helps Binx to confront the reality. Now he proposes to marry with Kate and will go to medical school if his aunt wishes from him. In the same way Will Barrett of *THE LAST GENTLEMAN* tries to understand the past in order to get relieved from its influence. But his amnesia wipes out the past that he tries to confront. Will's final confrontation with the past occurs when he stands before his father's house where his childhood memories return to him. Will is able to learn
from those memories that his father was suffering from the romantic
cynicism revealed in his reading of Arnold's, "Dover Beach" and his
listening to the Brahms. He acquires the knowledge of the past and on
its basis judges that his father was wrong to choose to death.

In LOVE IN THE RUINS Dr. Tom More tries to come to terms
with the past related to the deaths of his daughter and wife. He
heightens that past into a particular myth of death and loss as it is
unbearable for him. But his "return" to the past, to the memory of
Samantha's unshakable faith pulls him out of his role of mythmaker and
revives his faith. Lancelot Lamar of LANCELOT also tries to understand
his personal history because, he thinks, it contains clues to the present.
His attempt to organize the scattered and fragmented pieces of the past
is his attempt to recover the clue. After recounting the past without any
regret, Lancelot decides to pattern his future on Southern code. He
rejects the present age and the Catholic faith while starting a new
society in that old womblike seat of Southern glory and defeat, the
Shenandoah Valley. Lancelot's new society will be based on the codes
of courtesy and chivalry by which, he believes, noble men of the past
acted. Will Barrett of THE SECOND COMING, too, is engaged in
assessing the meanings of memories of the past. He tries to understand
the past through memories that visit him. Ultimately, Will learns that
the vision and the mood of his father are shaped by the Southern stoic
in terms of which he has committed suicide and attempted to kill his son. Having gained the knowledge of the past, Will rejects his father's Stoical way to die and thus exorcized the memory of the past. At the end of the novel, we see both Will and Allison continue to converse with their pasts while making plans for the future. Dr. Tom More of *THE THANATOS SYNDROME* tries to confront the past in order to recover his old faith. The final confrontation occurs when the memory of his daughter's advice returns to him and he gains his old faith back. Although Dr. Tom More begins his new life with his new family, he never leaves his habit of mythmaking. His obsession with the Stedmann history continues.

In the same way, as Percy's fictitious characters, Foote's fictitious characters, too, are preoccupied with the past, but most often it is the past of the region. The past they are preoccupied with is not a burden to them but a heritage, a pattern to be lived by. Foote's characters are inclined to imagine and interpret their existence in terms of romance of the Old South. Hugh Bart of *TOURNAMENT* does the same; he is governed by an obsession with the past, specifically with the grand style of the region. The past style and manner become the main concern in his life. He always maintains the air of gentility and when he notices he has dropped it, he regains it immediately. His attending the games or tournaments - hunting, shooting, cards - is the part of the pattern of
life. The other character in the novel Cassendale Tarfeller tries to live by
the code of chivalry and challenges his adversary for a duel. To
Tarfeller, the duel is to be conducted in a manner described by the elder
Dumas or Walter Scott. Luther Eustis of FOLLOW ME DOWN is
obsessed with the region's religious past. Having spent his childhood in
the company of his grandfather, the Civil War Veteran who had lost his
arm at Shiloh, Eustis wants to have a male heir to continue the heroic
tradition of the family. As there is no male child that he gets from his
wife, Eustis turns to religion. He is dominated by a desire to follow the
letter of the Holy Word. He tries to live by the past protestant morality
while living in the present of loose morals represented by Beulah.

The major characters in LOVE IN A DRY SEASON are either
obsessively preoccupied with past or simply just neglect it. Major
Malcolm Barcroft is that character who is principally preoccupied with
the heroic past of his family. Born during Reconstruction and nurtured
on the lore of Confederate heroism, the major wants to prove himself as
a military man. Even after he retires with the rank of major, he plays the
role of military hero to the hilt. History is internalized in the mind of the
major. On the other side, Amy and Jeff Carruthers are those characters
who have lost their moorings in both history and tradition. Their
marital relations are devoid of the traditional values and love. The
Southern characters, who are the narrators too, of SHILOH are

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preoccupied with the region's past. Their frame of mind is shaped by
the region's past of romance and chivalry and at the same time they feel
presence of their personal as well as a European past. Metcalfe who
represents Southerners is obsessed with his personal past. He recollects
images of his mother whom he knows only from a painting. He feels the
grip of a European past on the minds of the Southern military men who
plan the battle order after Napoleon's Waterloo order. In *September
September*, too, the white set of characters act out the past while living
in the present. They are obsessed with the region's past in which the
blacks are exploited for white man's greed. To fulfill their personal
greed, the white characters kidnap a black boy of a wealthy black family
for a huge ransom. The black set of characters, particularly Eben and
Martha, on the other hand struggle to confront the unwritten code and
tradition in order to get relieved from that.

The character's stance toward history as heritage, as pattern in
Foote's novels turns out a malady, a flaw in their character causing
suffering and perhaps bringing about their fall. At the same time, the
character's lack of sense of the past and the tradition is also an illness.
Devoid of the sense of the past and the tradition, Foote's characters are
confused about the essence of their lives, hence are ill. Moreover, the'
characters in Foote's novels do not try to cure the malady or overcome
the flaw in their character, rather they prefer to live by it. It is evident in
the major characters in all the novels by Foote. In TOURNAMENT Hugh Bart suffers from the cultural illness embodied in his preoccupation with the grand style. In a sense, he attempts to imagine his existence in terms of romance of the Old South. The grand style proves to be the barriers that thickened around him making him unable to work. It becomes the source of his isolation from his family as he attends the tournaments away from home. Bart's illness turns out a flaw when he sells the land upon his seeing his son's inability to assume the responsibility of the heritage and brings about his fall. Even during the period of his misfortune, Bart's preoccupation with tournaments, specially poker, continues. He does not ponder so much on his fall as he does on the problem how to link different episodes of his past life into a whole. Bart's fellow Southerner, Cassendale Tarfeller also suffers from the malady of romance of the Old South. His attempt to live by the code of chivalry without understanding it, is an illness. He tries to follow the romantic convention not willingly but upon his wife's insistence consequently he is killed in the duel as he is not prepared for it.

Luther Eustis of FOLLOW ME DOWN is a sick man indeed. His intense preoccupation with the South's religious past generates in him a sense of guilt which is judged by his lawyer Nowell Parker as a fanaticism, a form of insanity. He kills Beulah because he feels guilty which is accounted for his craziness. Only an insane person can love a
girl intensely and kill her at the same time. Eustis does not regret the consequence of his worshiping the past rather he mutely faces that. Eustis's insanity, in a sense, represents the disease of the entire Southern culture. Beulah, the victim, too, suffers from the illness different from that of Eustis's. Her disease is loose morals opposed to the moral certainty of the traditional past. Major Malcolm Barcroft of LOVE IN A DRY SEASON is mentally sick by the real sense of the word. His romantic obsession with the heroic ideals of his family past reaches to the level of insanity. He is in turn frustrated, sadistic, ridiculous and cold-hearted. His behavior toward his daughters and society is not that of a sane man but of an insane person. Consequently, the daughters are afraid of him and the society is hostile toward him. Even his regular barber Sam Marino feels that something is wrong with the house of the major. The major's sickness becomes the cause of the failure of his relationship with his daughters and society. However, the major prefers to be a soldier fighting a Civil War battle in his mind. The major's reverence for the military tradition, on the other hand, lends him a courteous manner which is lacking in other characters like Harley Drew, Amy and Jeff Carruthers.

Amy and Jeff Carruthers of the same novel LOVE IN A DRY SEASON suffer from modern sickness of lack of values in husband-wife relationship. Having no sense of the history and tradition, the lives of
these characters have lost their essence. Jeff prefers to play the role of a voyeur rather than of a husband and Amy desires to be promiscuous rather than Southern belle of the past. The Southern men in *SHILOH* are, in Metcalfe's father's words, sick of an old malady, i.e. romantic idealism by Walter Scott and Dumas, and misplaced chivalry. Though Metcalfe's father is conscious of the malady of Southern men, he himself is an incurable romantic. He poses himself as a realist and straight thinker, but, as Metcalfe says, he was highly romantic man. Metcalfe's awareness of his father's malady does not help him, since he cannot save himself from that malady. Metcalfe's dedication to the romantic warrior Forrest is a sign of his suffering from that old malady. The other Southern character in the novel Luther Dade suffers from romantic idealism that brings him into the battle of Shiloh. For Foote, the Southerners' obsession with the romantic idealism leads them into the Civil War and defeat afterwards. There is no sign at all in the novel of the Southern men's having been cured of the old malady. Though Metcalfe comments on his father's incurable romanticism, he prefers to live by the way his father lived.

The white set of characters in *September September* suffer from the illness attributed to them in the South. Their attempt to retain in the present the old way of white people's living off of the labor of the black community is a symptom of their sickness of mind. The white
characters' attempt to live by the past brings about their fall, yet they do not mean to abandon this form of living anywhere in the novel. Only the black set of characters abandon the code that governs the racial relationship in the South.

To wind up the conclusion, I can say that the novels of both Walker Percy and Shelby Foote study the mind of Southern men in relation with the history that has shaped it. For that matter, these two writers explore the individual consciousness of the protagonists where history is always present. Percy tends to be more directly philosophical in his treatment of the Southern mind. He employs the existential terms, particularly from Kierkegaard's existential philosophy, for the better approach to the Southern character. This technique makes Percy's novels the novels of ideas. Foote, on the other hand, does not perceive the Southern mind from the philosophical point of view. His treatment of the Southern mind is simple but strategic. He studies the Southern characters in a particular historical context which affects them very much. Foote's novels turn out the novels of character study. Although these two contemporary writers of the South differ in their technique, their perceptions of the Southern mind is almost congenial.