CHAPTER II

WALKER PERCY: HISTORY AND INDIVIDUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The Moviegoer* (1961) Walker Percy's first published novel, presents the past-ridden mind of the Southern protagonist searching for meaning in a world of change. While the Southern fabric is dissolving, he struggles to come to terms with his own past. For the Southern character history is purely personal experience; it is their own past, a matter of consciousness and the hero of the novel is no exception to this. The novel is about a young man John Bickerson Bolling, sometimes called Jack, sometimes Binx. Being the hero and the narrator of the novel, he allows us to have glimpses of his mind. We can infer a great deal about his character and his mentality from the way he tells the story. By treating us to some reminiscences of his childhood and of the very recent past, Binx reveals his orientation to the past. Though the novel covers only a weeklong duration of Binx's life, the events in his past life are shown in flashback. As the story progresses, we realize that Binx is not of that type of man who finds satisfaction in an ordinary mode of living. The heroic spirit of the Old South continues to live deep in his psyche. In one of his retrospections he tells, "Once I thought of


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going into law or medicine or even pure science. I even dreamed of
doing something great” (p.9). The thought of “going into law or
medicine” or dream of “doing something great” is conforming to the
family history of which Aunt Emily is a spokesman. The past of hero
and heroism stays in Binx’s mind throughout the novel. He has received
the heroic past as a family legacy through the person of Aunt Emily.
She tells him:

More than anything I wanted to pass on to you
the heritage of the men of our family, a certain
quality of spirit, a gaiety, a sense of duty,
nobility worn lightly, a sweetness, a gentleness
with women – the only things the South ever
had and the only things that really matter in
this life (p.224).

Aunt Emily represents the Southern past and provides a living
link to the series of heroes and heroism in the Bolling’s family in
history. Chivalry as a vital family virtue has been demonstrated in the
death of a warrior in each generation. It exercised first by Captain Alex
Bolling in the Civil War, then his namesake in the First World War. By
then it became the tradition of the Bollings family that Dr. Will’s son
John lived a life of disquiet fearing that he would not have such an
opportunity. When the Second World War broke out, he volunteered
for the Canadian armed service before the American entry into the war.
Though Eimly’s sex had made her unable to work out the family virtue
of engaging in combat, she has found an alternative to that by joining
Red Cross as a volunteer in the Spanish Civil War. Thus irrespective of being a woman, Emily has participated in the family ritual. To Binx she is the still living member of a series of larger-than-life-figures that stretches back into history. Expectedly Binx succumbs to her “serious talks” (p.3). Aunt Emily offers him a myth by which he can have access to become honorable and he has acted on the myth. He recalls his memory of the death of his brother, Scott when Binx was eight. His Aunt had taken him for a walk on the street outside the hospital, and then told him his brother had died. She added, “Now it’s all up to you. It’s going to be difficult for you but I know you’re going to act like a soldier” (p.4). To Emily “soldier” represents the standard of character appropriate to the son of a Southern gentleman under circumstances.

Binx has given positive response to her expectation and now he remembers having thought that “I could easily act like a soldier” (p.4). He has grown up following his aunt’s advice and became an army officer during the Korean War in 1951. Attempting to meet his Aunt’s expectation, Binx had written such sentiments from war-front to her:

Japan is lovely this time of year. How strange to think of going into combat! Not so much fear – since my chances are very good–as wonder, wonder that everything should be so full of expectancy... (p.86).

Binx’s experience as a soldier in the Korean War is crucial in his life. No doubt he has attempted to conform to the gallantry of the Bollings
family, "But Jack, when wounded," Lawson comments, "makes the mistake of experiencing fear – and surviving." Lying wounded on the ground, Binx felt his shoulder "was pressed hard against the ground as if somebody sat on me" (p. 11). This experience of Binx implies that the family's demand for prowess had become a sort of burden to bear on shoulder. He thinks he has got himself in "this fix" (p. 11). He learns from this experience that he is an individual and not an idealized hero in a gallant historical series. By surviving, Binx has distracted himself from the series of the warriors in the family history who met death in the wars. The novel depicts Binx's subsequent attempts to come to terms with the fact of his experience in the battlefield. His such attempts are called search which will deliver him from his past. The thought of search occurs to him on the battlefield where he resolved to pursue the search.

Binx returns home with a resolve to pursue search but soon he "forgot all about it" (p. 11). He prefers a peaceful life in Gentilly, a middle class suburb of New Orleans. He sketches in the broad outlines of his present existence. He is the ideal consumer zestfully performing the prescribed duty:

I am a model tenant and a model citizen and take pleasure in doing all that is expected of me. My wallet is full of identify cards, library cards, credit cards (p. 6).
He works as a stock and bond broker at his uncle’s brokerage firm. He has no close friends and likes to spend his evenings in the company of pretty women. He regularly seduces his secretaries, though not as a practice but as a hobby. He calls it his “Little Way”, the life of fornication. But Binx is afflicted with, that is variously referred as, malaise and everydayness. It is the direct result of his present routine making his life meaningless. Unable to cope with the malaise of the actual world, he goes to the movies. He goes to the movies so frequently that he is designated “the moviegoer”\(^1\). Binx’s obsession with the movies proves the fact, again, that he prefers the life of glamour. His present life does not correspond with the one he has in his mind. He lives that life, Webb writers, “by vicarious participation in the glamour and grandeur of a movie plot”\(^2\). But at the end of the film, he experiences disappointment. His living in Gentilly is his alienation from culture and history.

The means to escape the disease of “everydayness” is search. “The search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life”\(^3\) Binx says. His going to the movies also has to do with the search, he notes, “The movies are on to the search, but they screw it up”\(^4\). From the Wednesday when he becomes freshly aware of the search, Binx tells that he is acutely aware of Jews. He identifies himself with the Jews when he says, “We share the same
exile" (p. 89), but adds that he is more Jewish, i.e. more alienated. Nevertheless, Binx insists that "Jews are my first real clue" (p. 89), because they, like Robinson Crusoe, are able to function and create meaningful lives in spite of being away from society that contains them. The search Binx undertakes leads in two directions at once: towards shared consciousness with Kate, and into the past in pursuit of his father. Binx's obsession with the past, with his father, impels him to undertake the search. Since search is an experience of seeing things anew, he will understand his past from a fresh perspective. While working on his search, he attempts two dimensions of it: vertical and horizontal. His preoccupation with the problem of time - time past - is underscored during the days of his vertical search. He has read "fundamental" books, or "key books on key subjects" (p. 69) such as War and Peace by Tolstoy and A Study of History by Toynbee, terming the latter as "the solution of the problems of time" (p. 69). After reading the book - The Chemistry of Life, Binx feels that the main goal of his search has been achieved. However, the only difficulty is that though "the universe has been disposed of" he himself "was left over" (p. 70). He is still alienated or displaced "as an Anyone living Anywhere" (p. 69), so he takes up the horizontal search which is existential in its nature. Percy uses Soren Kierkegaard's existential view of man in order to emphasize his character's stance toward history. Kierkegaard sees human existence as
a progression of stages he characterized as aesthetic, ethical and religious. Percy is primarily interested in the ethical stage and only that aspect of it he terms as "rotation" and "repetition". Search through "rotation" is a quest of the new as new, "the experiencing of the new beyond the expectation of the experiencing of the new" (p. 144), reposing all hopes in future. Search through "repetition" is a backward movement into the past in order to integrate it with the present. Binx is frequently involved in "repetition" or in "recolletion" because he is obsessed with the past. He travels in reverse, into the past to discover new clues from his father to recover himself from the meaningless present. "Any doings of my father, even his signature, is in the nature of a clue in my search" (p. 71), Binx says. Major part of the novel is devoted to Binx's efforts to find clues about his past that will help him to understand it. He enjoys playing detective, ferreting out hints about his father. His detective work continues during his working day. He receives a call from Mr. Sartalamaccia who wants to buy his father's ten-acre duck club. Binx ponders on how much his father had paid for it, not only to get a fair deal but also to find a clue in his search. The duck-club is the only inheritance Binx receives from his father and its selling is not a less serious matter. It symbolizes the continuity between the past and the present, between the father and son. Binx's move to sell his inheritance suggests, William quotes Percy, "the break with the
past." But the break with his past is not possible until he confronts it.

Binx learns from Mr. Sartalamaccia against his own knowledge that the camp was built by Judge Anse rather than Binx's father, and Sartalamaccia himself built it for the Judge. He simply walked into Sartalamaccia's store one day with a check for a thousand dollar's and said, "I want you to build me a lodge" (p.92). Mr. Sartalamaccia takes pleasure in the memory of times when men did things with a strong belief in one's own ability and power. Thereafter Binx muses, "There was such a time and there were such men" (p.92). It is the time past and the heroic men of history that Binx always has in his mind. An important concern throughout the novel is Binx's search for clues to his father. For ten years he has looked at the picture of his father on the mantelpiece and tried to understand it. There is his father along with the elder Bollings who look serene in their posture. Binx's father is not a match with them for he looks different. What interests him is the eyes of his father because "Beyond a doubt they are ironical" (p.25). Binx perceives that his father, in the portrait, maintains an ironic distance between himself and the elder Bollings. After all he does not belong to the heroic tradition that the other Bollings try to sustain. This knowledge will help Binx to understand his own position in relation to his father's.

The world Binx lives in is a haunted and guilt-laden world that
he tries to come to term with. His visit to his mother's fishing camp with his secretary, Sharon turns out as his attempt to understand his past. It is the "repetition" - a return to the past in order to review it. At his mother's house, Binx awakes at three in the morning "amid the smell of dreams and of the years come back and peopled and blown away like smoke" (p. 144). Binx is haunted by the past all these years but the situation becomes worst during the night because "At night the years come back and perch around my bed like ghosts" (p. 144). Such a haunted man tries to seek clues from his mother by engaging her in conversation about his father. She begins the talk by telling Binx that "You're just like your father" (p. 149). It is true that the elder Bolling had conducted a kind of search of his own like Binx. Mile after mile he would saunter along the levee on his famous walk. He lacked the gentlemanly qualities that were found in the elder Bollings. "Dr. Wills and Judge Anse were big hunters and fishermen and he pretended he liked it but he didn't" (p. 150), Binx's mother tells. Twice in his life elder Bolling had simply quit eating. When Binx asks the reason, she answers, "He was overwrought" (p. 153). And when Binx insists, "How was he overwrought?" She answers, "It was his psychological make-up" (p. 154). Psychologically Binx's father was carrying a burden of the family past that affected his necessities such as sleeping and eating.

First time he had quit eating and lost thirty pounds. Binx's
mother discovered the idea of feeding him herself while reading for him from the book *The Green Murder Case*. He would get angry if she stopped reading. He too was a kind of moviegoer. Next time he quit eating because the treatment had failed. What cured him was the catastrophe of war, which revived him instantly. His wife asked him what had happened, he told, "Why, Germany has invaded Poland, and England and France have declared war!" (p. 156). He packed his suitcase and went to New Orleans to see the Canadian Consul. By the time he left in the blue uniform of RCAF flight surgeon, he gained thirty pounds. It happened so quickly as if he was waiting for a war. He was killed during the Battle of Crete in 1914 with a copy of *A Shropshire Lad* in his pocket. Binx reflects on his action:

> He had found a way to do both: to please them and to please himself. To leave. To do what he wanted to do and save old England doing it. And perhaps even carry off the grandest coup of all: to die (p. 157).

In Binx's reflection over his father's death, we feel the immense weight of his past on him. Earlier in the novel Binx tells that the English romanticism, which was at the heart of the old South, had killed his father. Moved by his father's story, Binx tries to relate his own experience in war with the experience of his father. But his mother passes the experience off with a joke, making it too familiar. His mother has her own view of the past and present, she looks at them "in terms of
a standard comic exaggeration" (p.151).

William sees a parallel between All the King’s Men and The Moviegoer on the ground of the protagonist’s return to his mother’s home in each novel to understand his father. He writes, “Jack’s return to Burden’s Landing is, like Binx’s to the fishing camp, motivated by a search through the past for clues to a man’s character. Jack and Binx are obsessed with learning the truth the past holds…” (p.56). The protagonists in both novels are obsessed with the past and the obsession is on the level of consciousness. In Binx’s case the past life of heroes and heroism clutch at his consciousness all through the novel. And this is the reason that motivates him for his search. His trip to Chicago with Kate becomes a return to the past which is the thoroughfare of his search. In Chicago Binx, being a Southerner, sees the sadness of the Northern city:

Nobody but a Southerner knows the wrenching rinsing sadness of the cities of the North. Knowing all about genie - souls and living in haunted places like Shilon and the Wilderness and Vicksburg and Atlanta where the ghosts of heroes walk abroad by day and are more real than people. (p.202).

Binx’s assumption of the Northern city reflects the frame of his mind in which “the ghosts of heroes” are “more real than people”. Chicago is unbearable to Binx for the another reason in addition to his Southerness; it reminds him of his father. Twenty-five years earlier his father had brought him and his brother Scott to the World Series there.
Binx recalls how in Chicago his father had also taken him deep down into a building "to see the pool where Tarzen-Johnnie-Weissmuller used to swim" (p.203). But Binx's memory of another visit with his father after his brother's death is a painful one. As a detective Binx travels back into the past to examine him closely. He recalls one of his earliest and important memories of his father. The father had tried to live through the son and the boy had refused it. Binx tells, "I, seeing in his eyes the terrible request, requiring from me his very life. I... refuse him what I knew I could not give" (p.204). It is the guilt-ridden "return" or "repetition" on the part of Binx by which he comes to know that he is partly to be blamed for his father's loss of desire to live. The revelation is against Binx's assumption that his father has been responsible for his present problem. Binx has shunned the responsibility of a son towards the father and this thing impels him to accept the responsibility of Kate.

After attending 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 to Harold proves again how the past of heroism lives deep in Binx's consciousness. His love toward Harold is conditioned by this fact; "I love him because he is a hero. I have a boundless admiration for heroes and Harold is the real thing" (p.208), Binx tells. He deliberately tells Kate and Harods's wife how Harold had heroically saved his life in war. But a sudden confrontation with the
past for Harold is frightening:

It is too much for Harold, not my gratitude, not the beauty of his own heroism, but the sudden confrontation of a time past, a time so terrible and splendid in its arch-reality; and so lost – cut adrift like a great ship in the floor of years (p.210).

Harold’s view of the past provides a contrast to Binx’s view; Harold sees no connection between the past and the present, past is “lost”, but Binx lives the past in the present, it is the part of the present.

As earlier noted, Binx’s search also leads toward the shared consciousness with Kate Cutrer. Her role, occupying long portions of the narrative, underscores the theme of history and individual consciousness. Though the theme is muted, it can be seen in a dialectic: whether she has to play a sweet and docile Southern belle or a whore. The change that swept over the South after the Civil War has affected the role of Southern woman in society. Since she is confused about her role, she sways between the extremes of whore and lady business. Kate is portrayed on this line of confusion and she is totally disturbed. She suffers from frequent anxiety attacks and also given to occasional suicide attempts. Apparently the reason to her situation seems to be the death of her fiancé in an accident, but on her own account the accident has given her life. Kate tells Binx “That it gave me my life. That’s my secret” (p.58). Later she tells Binx that the thought of suicide only keeps
her alive. Kate like Binx is alienated from the culture and history and as a result succumbs to despair. She moves slowly to the forefront of the novel as her presence is required in the narrative. Her decision to accompany Binx during the trip to Chicago brings hope in her life. On the trip, Binx proposes her but she suspects his intention that he may substitute her to the series of secretaries. Though she refuses to marry Binx, she thinks she ought to indulge with him on the train because she assumes sex is what he wants of her. She believes that copulation is purely physical act without any moral or emotional ramification. She acts, outside the context of history, as a whore but Binx must treat her like a lady in the context of history.

The most specific statement about the theme comes when Binx and Kate are on the way to visit the Graebners. Binx confesses to Rory Calhoun that he has failed in the sexual episode with Kate. He fails because he is concerned with the burden of history than with sex, he confesses, “The burden was too great and flesh poor.” So that Kate’s boldness frightens Binx, “The truth is I was frightened half to death by her bold…. carrying on”(p.200), he tells Rory. What follows in Binx’s conversation with Rory is his view about sexual morality. He continues that this “latter-day post-christian sex” is a sickness. To be neither Christian nor pagan, but marooned in “the cult of the naughty nice wherein everyone is nicer than Christians and naughtier than
pagans" (p. 207) is a sickness too. Binx tries to fix Kate in the past of the Old South and will treat her accordingly; he will not perform sex with her until they are married. Towards the close of the novel, Binx and Kate head to the shared consciousness since they agree to marry. Binx leaves his search because, he tells, "It is not match for my aunt" (p. 228). He does that which is "match" for his aunt: marry Kate and enroll in medical school. He has planned his future on the knowledge of the past. To Kate Binx tells:

> There is only one thing I can do: listen to people, see how the stick themselves into the world, hand them along a ways in their dark journey and be handed along, and for good and selfish reasons (p. 233).

In future Binx will live by the Old South's value of "sense of community" implied in his declared intention.

In his second novel _THE LAST GENTLEMAN_* (1966), too Percy has shown his view of how Southern history has affected the consciousness of modern Southern character. History impinges upon the novel's protagonist, Williston Bibb Barrett, as he witnesses the South changing. He desperately struggles to hold the slipping roots of the past that his ancestors lived by. To be precise, Will is presented as a Southerner obsessed with the myth of the Civil War battleground and living under

the strain of the gentlemanly code while dealing with the meaning of his father’s suicidal death. Being a scion of an old Southern family, Will had inherited the gentlemanly past from his great-grandfather. His ancestor “knew what was what and said so and acted accordingly and did not care what anyone thought” (p.9). To act with assurance and follow one’s conviction boldly was characteristic of Will’s great-grandfather. So decisive was he that upon once meeting the Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan in a barbershop, he challenged him to a duel. However, over the generations the Barretts lost this certainty in action. Will’s grandfather was a brave man and he would also have challenged the Grand Wizard “if only he could have made certain it was the thing to do” (p.9). Will’s father was a brave man, too, who felt the strain of honor so intensely that “He became ironical” (p.9). As a result, even to walk down the street on a September morning became, for Will’s father, an accomplishment of a gentleman.

The initial ability of the great-grandfather to act with certainty declined into his son’s uncertainty and his grandson’s irony. As for Binx, the last gentleman, the narrator tells, “he did not know what to think. So he became a watcher and a listener and a wanderer” (p.10). Being conscious of his position, as the last in the line of the gentlemen, Will tries to act out the virtues such as honor, gallantry, graciousness, ease and gentility towards women. He admires his father giving
speeches on topics such as ‘noblesse oblige’ and ‘importance of character.’ He also loves to hear the stories of the ancestors told by his father. He is very keen in following the pattern of behavior set by his father and grandfather. Like them, Will goes to Princeton to educate himself and lives in the same room occupied by his grandfather in 1910. He is as admired by his classmates as his father and grandfather were admired by their classmates. While there in Princeton, Will sees a small Union monument that terms the Civil War as “the infamous rebellion”. He blows up it because “It offended me” (p.257), Will tells. The past event of the Civil War hovers over his mind since it has ended the gentlemanly era making him the last of it. He lives at Princeton until one afternoon while the “ghost of his grandfather howled around 203 Lower Pyne”, he decides that this “is no place for me for another half hour” (p.15).

Upon his return from Princeton, Will works as a clerk in the family law firm against the wishes of his father who wanted “to awaken (in Will) a fondness for the law” (p.15). After his father’s death he considers farming, but he is not happy doing it. Thereafter he is drafted in the U.S. Army – a profession that suits the gentleman. For him being in army is not a hardship until he is discovered wandering, in a state of amnesia, “about the Shenandoah Valley between Cross Keys and Port Republic, sites of notable victories of General Stonewall Jackson” (p.17).
To the army, Will’s wanderings may have seemed unaccountably irrational but to us it is a symbolic action of, what Linda Calls, “his hiding in the past” in order to transcend the present. Although Will has fled the South, he still keeps fighting the battle of the Civil War in his consciousness; history is internalized in his case.

At the beginning of the novel, we find Will in New York City working as a “humidification engineer” (p.18), at Macy’s departmental firm. He attends to his physical health by eating and sleeping regularly. He punches a sandbag an hour daily and afterwards he swims or takes a cold shower. For half an hour he watches television and in remaining three hours he tries to “set his thoughts in order” (p.44). He begins his day by reading a few lines from Living, a volume of maxims for businessmen. In spite of his gestures at normal life, Will has mental problem. From his childhood on he has been experiencing the “spells”, that he inherited from an ancestor of his namesake, and which are called episodes of deja vus. It follows by spells of amnesia in which he sometimes cannot remember even his name. He has deafness in one ear which is not organic but hysterical. To Will these problems fall in the sphere of psychology so that he has undergone psychotherapy under a psychiatrist, Dr.Gamov, up until the action of the novel beings.

Will’s sickness accounts for the stance he has taken toward his own past. Surprisingly, he remembers the remote past but his particular
form of amnesia allows him to forget the immediate past. "The
engineer's amnesia was now of this order: he forgot things he had seen
before, but things he had heard of and not seen looked familiar" (p.180),
the narrator tells. Will's amnesia or 'forgetting' is a temporary defense
that he has discovered to escape the problem, what Lawson calls of
"accepting something that occurred in his past." The metaphor of
amnesia is appropriate to the novel's epigraph which Percy quotes from
Kierkegaard's Either/Or along with Romano Guardini: "If a man cannot
forget, he will never amount much" (p.1). What Will wants not to
remember is his father's suicide on the eve of victory ignoring his son's
appeal of doing it not. He was present there when his father killed
himself with a shotgun - the blast of it resulted in hysterical deafness in
his right ear. Will's problem is how to admit the event which happened
after his liberal father had defeated the racial bigots. In reality, Will
cannot free himself from his past because it wells up in his
consciousness soon after the spells of amnesia are over.

*The Last Gentleman* has similarity with *The Moviegoer* in
many respects. The protagonist in each novel has a sense of haunted
past as well as obsession with the dead father who provides a model of
behavior hard to follow. Like Binx Bolling, Will Barrett has come from a
Southern family of gentleman but unlike him, Will tries to live an
honorable, courteous, dutiful life, to be a protector of women, a real
gentleman. Will's concern with what it means to be a gentleman influences his decision to return to the South with the Vaughts. Will's return to the South turns out as his return to the past in order to recover it, deal with it and get relieved from it. After his accidental meeting with a Southern family, the Vaught's from Alabama that know Will's father, Will accepts the job offered by Chandler Vaught. The reason behind Will's consent to Mr. Vaught's offer is not just a professional one but to play a gentleman and "return to the South and discover his identity" (p.76). His job as a companion to Jamie requires his return to the South of history where lies his own identity. Mr. Vaught grasps Will not without reason, he spots in him "a stout Southern lad in the old style, wellborn but lusty as anyone, the sort who knows how to get along with older men" (p.62). The gentlemanly posture that Will bears with his personality is due to his obsession with his father who stands as a model of conduct. He always thinks "father said" or "father thought" this or that and even his actions are conditioned by the similar actions of his father or grandfather.

Will is subjected to a series of memory of his father soon as he meets the Vaughts that know him. The first sustained memory occurs to him in Central Park the night after Kitty Vaught helped him through his first fit of amnesia. The memory is stimulated by the warm smells of summer and discovery of a quotation from Montaigne in notes left by
Rita for Kitty. Reading the notes, Will recalls that his father had quoted Montaigne on summer nights. He suddenly stops reading and says "wait" - an earnest appeal to his father. In his memory his father is pacing up and down under the water oaks while the boy Will tends the record player pouring out Brahms from old 78 discs. His father is angry about the whites fornicating in cars on the levee to the west. The father expects this sort of behavior from blacks, but the whites fornicate too. As the son listens intently, the father tells him, "Go to whores if you have to, but always remember the difference. Don’t treat a lady like a whore or a whore like a lady" (p.97). But the memory breaks off suddenly, leaving Will wondering, "Then what happened ..." (p.97). All at he finds himself alone in Central Park, ten years later. His father’s angry speech on fornicator and lay-whore dichotomy reflects a typical Southern sexual attitude. The Southern code denies "erotic appeal" to the white woman. A sexually ardent white woman was unthinkable and was automatically a whore. His father’s sexual ethic gives a way to confusion in the mind of Will Barrett as he later confesses, "I’ve never really got the straight of this lady and whore business" (p.172).

Will tries to treat Kitty as his father advised him in the scene that follows the memory of his father. After the memory is over, Will goes straight to Rita’s apartment, walks in and proposes to Kitty. After a brief talk with Rita, Will takes Kitty out into the central park. As they sit
there in park, Kitty goes away, undresses herself and returns in her nakedness. At first he is surprised by her sexual boldness, "the astounding and terrific melon immediacy of nakedness" then he fails to love her for he "felt just bad enough – his head was caulked, the pressure turning him ever away into a dizzy middle distance"(p.106). It reminds us the unsuccessful sexual encounter Binx and Kate suffered through in *The Moviegoer*. Being obsessed with the Southern past, Will suffers a failure in love. In an age of sexual license, Will goes backward into an era of social and moral values. Kitty asks Will to talk to her about anything after the unsuccessful sexual encounter in Central Park. He recalls how, even during the worst time of the Civil War, Confederate officers attended balls cotillions. Will cites a letter from his forefather, an infantry colonel, which says, "Met Miss Sally Trumbull last night. She said I danced tolerably well. She gave me her handkerchief"(p.108). Will's recollection of the simple decorum of the Old South is significant since it follows immediately after he witnesses Kitty's sexual boldness. The sexual ethic of the Old South seems a bliss as compared with the modern sexual looseness. Because he sees a possible mate in Kitty Vaught, Will decides, "I shall court her henceforth in the old style"(p.159). He is confident that through his conduct he can transform Kitty into a lady. After his encounters with Kitty, Will becomes serious about her and decides "to take Kitty to a
proper dance, pay her court, not mess around” (p.167). Will’s seeing Kitty as a dancing partner is his attempt to live history in the present.

Will’s return to the South covers a major portion of *The Last Gentleman*. The protagonist’s return to the South has a thematic concern: it is a return to the past he tries to escape. Will heads to the South alone because the Vaughts have left already without taking him with them. His entry into the South requires of him, as he thinks, a gentlemanly action like his grandfather. In Levittown at Morte Prince’s house, Will is mistaken for a block-busting real-estate agent threatening the white ghetto. Will looks for a fight, “Perhaps the time had come again when you could be insulted, hear it aright, and have it out then and there as his grandfather used to have it out” (p.137). When required, Will judges the situation in the present in relation to the past; seeing that his honor is at stake, he recalls what his grandfather did in such a situation. Travelling through the South, Will Barrett’s sense of haunted past becomes stronger and stronger. After the incident at Levittown Will has an amnesic spell and he comes to himself one misty morning in Virginia “experiencing the interior dislocations which always afflicted him on old battlegrounds” (pp.143-144). The battlegrounds in the South cause his consciousness to cloud with the history of the Civil War. When Will comes to the vicinity of Richmond, he ponders over “how Richmond might be today if the war had ended differently” (p.144). It

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would have been different had the South won the war, Will means it. The Civil War to Will is not a 'remote' event happened in the 'past' but it is still going on and he is doing his best to change the course of history. At the Vaughts's place Will reads Freeman's *R.E. Lee* and the narrator captures his working consciousness and physical action:

...the engineer had read a chapter of Freeman’s *R.E. Lee* and was still moving his shoulders in the old body-English of correcting the horrific Confederate foul-ups, in this case the foul-up before Sharpsburg when Lee’s battle orders had been found by a Union sergeant, the paper wrapped around three cigars and lying in a ditch in Maryland. I’ll pick it up before he gets there, thought the engineer and stooped slightly (p.216).

The Civil War that ended the 'golden era' of the South, turned inward of the Southerner Will, now the fight is with himself rather than with the enemy. The defeat in the Civil War not only disrupted the Old South civilization but also made him the last gentleman. This knowledge makes Will to cling desperately to the roots of history. He reads about Lee because he is the ideal hero in the South who led Confederate army in the Civil War. He is a gentleman in true sense of the word and Will’s reading about him has to do with it. The history that he is haunted by is a thing to be cherished and, more importantly, by which the Southerners can claim the superiority of the South over the victorious North. Will musing on the South says that the
Southerners “had everything the North had and more. They had a history” (p.178).

Acting as his particular form of amnesia requires, Will remembers the remote past but blocks out his immediate past related to his father. On the way to the Southwest, to his father’s town, Will forgets everything, he feels “only the nameless tug pulling him back” (p.282). When he meets Val, he is still in an amnesic state, memory tugging at him with a “terrific claim” (p.285), and he cannot say Val’s name. For the first time in the novel, the memory of his father chases Will through the region because South is “a place redolent with memories” (p.178). Next morning not tugging but memory itself comes to Will. He sees his father reciting Arnold’s “Dover Beach”, or speaking of the grandfather and “the days of great deeds” (p.297). The memory that comes to Will this time is crucial one because it gives him certainty in action - a virtue of the gentleman - in Forney Aiken’s episode following it. Forney and the company of the black playwright are in an immediate danger of arrest and Will wants to save them. They are shut up in the Dew Drep Inn which the two policemen break in. Will knows both of them, but the one named Beans snaps him on the fly with a finger. The incident evokes the spirit of Will’s grandfather and father who had fought the same battle with the same people. Will, who is not certain of things until the event, recovers from his condition and plants himself
firmly, "For once in his life he had time and position and a good shot, and for once things became as clear as they used to be in the old honorable days"(p.312). At his best, Will tries to live up with the pattern of behavior that is set by this father and grandfather.

Will Barrett's action in the Levittown episode, the earlier one, is not as certain as in Forney Aiken's episode. Perhaps the time had come Will says there, suggesting a lack of certainly on his part. We mark a great change in his encounter with Beans that provides, what Luschei calls, "a fitting entry"8 to his hometown Ithaca. Having acted out history with certainty, Will prepares himself for the 'return' - a confrontation with his father's suicidal past. In Kierkegaardian sense Will's return to Ithaca is an existentially authentic repetition which will enable him to assess his father's suicidal past and get redeemed from it. As he approaches the house, the memory regarding to the event of his father's suicide comes to him in secure form. He stands before his father's house in a moonless night among the water oaks. Nothing is changed; the house is the same as it was. The aunts are laughing as they watch the television on the porch. Will recalls that it was on just such a night that his father died. This time the memory does not break off and within linked passages Will's life of wandering and amnesia is explained. Although Lawyer Barrett drove his opponent out of town he thought that they had actually won because their moral corruption was

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spreading throughout the South. Will recalls his father’s talk:

"Once they were the fornicators and the bribers and the takers of bribes and we were not and that was why they hated us. Now we are like them, so why should they stay?" (p.317).

Even after opposing and routing out the local forces of evil, Ed Barrett finds victory hollow. The struggle merely has exposed the narrowness of the moral margin between winner and looser. His suicide is a deliberate attempt to escape the present age of bribers and fornicators. He refuses to accept the erosion of the Southern value, which in the past, made life intelligible. In the series of Will’s memory of his father, Ed Barrett emerges as a man possessed by brooding sense of loss apparent in his taste in literature and music. He recites Arnold’s “Dover Beach” and strolls to the strain of Brahms’s Great Horn Theme. Ed Barrett has the violent sense of honor which leads him to a duel with himself because at the core of gentlemanly code is a love of death. He is killed, as the narrator describes, “by the strain of living out an ordinary day in a perfect dance of honor” (p.10). Will also recalls his father having told him, “They may have won, but I don’t have to choose that” (p.317). Suddenly Will feels a terror and calls out “Wait” as his father turns away. He goes upstairs neglecting his son’s appeal and shoots himself. In a moment Will’s problems, such as his wandering away from home, even his amnesia and deafness are explained. Now Will is able to judge
his father and the time he lived:

I think he was wrong and that he was looking in the wrong place. No, not he but the times… It was the worst of times, a time of fake beauty. And fake victory (p. 138).

What Will tries to understand is that his father’s self-consuming philosophy has finally killed him.

After the memory is over, Will mounts the stairs of the house to the attic. The room still has a sense of the past because it “had not seen touched, they were still here; the grandfather’s army blanket, Plattesburg issue, the puttess, a belt of webbing” (p. 320). There he also finds the Greener shotgun, with which his father had killed himself, and a collapsible boat that he and his father used for duck hunting years ago. Will stays in the room rest of the night, “presumably”, William writes, “going over the past”. In the morning after having his breakfast, Will sets on to the river with his boat to Uncle Fannin’s Shut Off, across the Mississippi. The world of his uncle is shut off from changes going on just across the river. Uncle Fannin and his black companion Merriam live the life of old Southern family romance. Apparently it seems the Old South world but Will sees nothing useful in it and he bids his uncle and Merrian farewell. Having confronted and exorcised the traumatic past relating to his father’s suicide, Will with his clear consciousness leaves for Santa Fe in search of Dr. Sutter Vaught.
By the time he reads the inscription on the Union monument in Santa Fe, all has changed. He is able to accept history as it happened:

Strangely there occurred no stirring within him, no body English toward the reversing of that evil day at Valverde where, but for so-and-so’s mistake, they might have gotten through to California. Then if they could have reached the ocean- But he felt on the cold (p.344).

History no more offends him, it does not stir him but makes him ‘cold’. Will’s memory that always has failed him before he has confronted the past now “instead of failing, became perfect”(p.359).

Will’s association with the Vaughts brings him to the South as well as brings him in contact with a desperate man Sutter Vaught. He sees same thing in Sutter that the other lot cannot have. Sutter is different from the other because there “was something old fashioned about him”(p.197). Will chases Sutter with some sort of problem for which, he thinks, Sutter will have answer. We have realized of Will that he is obsessed with his father. In his ordinary relations with the other people, Will sees his father’s gestures in the people. Talking about Jamie’s delaying the trip to Rita, he observes her gestures, “she set her jaw askew, made her eyes fine” and “moved her chin to and fro in the web of her thumb.” This gesture of Rita “reminded him strangely of his own father”(p.250). When he meets Sutter, Will’s approach is in accordance with his own nature. Particularly, Sutter’s playing with a
gun and his “perky”, “gossipy interest” in religious matter, remind Will of his father (p.214). What we discern from his interest in Shutter is that he sees a father figure in him. Like his father, Sutter is engaged in suicidal effort and holds the same ethics on sexuality. Sutter tells Will, “Fornicate if you want to and enjoy yourself but don’t come looking to me for a merit badge certifying you as a Christian or a gentleman or whatever it is you cleave by” (p.216). Will associates Sutter’s desire of suicide with his father’s and takes a step to, what Howland calls, “the possibility of his redeeming the past by saving the despairing Sutter Vaught.”

When Jamie dies, Sutter tell Will that he is returning to ranch where he has a date. Will struggles to keep him away from going by engaging him in conversation because Sutter has already told him that he would not outlive Jamie more than two hours. Will asks Sutter to “Wait”, the word repeated several times in the novel, as he asked his father before. His effort in saving Sutter and his commitment with dying Jamie is as heroic as is required of a gentleman.

**LOVE IN THE RUINS** (1971) the third novel by Percy, is a fine example of using the theme of history and individual consciousness for the making of the novel. Its narrator – protagonist Dr. Thomas More has an acute sense of past that enables him to view history from different

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perspectives. At the opening of the novel, the forty-five years old, heavy drinking psychiatrist awaits for the end of the world. Sitting against a young pine, Tom More meditates that God has at last removed his blessing from the U.S.A. and feels “the clank of the old historical machinery, the sudden jerking ahead of the roller-coaster cars as the chain catches hold and carries us back into history with its ordinary catastrophes” (pp. 3-4). Tom More sees the coming catastrophe as a secular event and a part of the historical process. What prompts the narrator’s thinking of impending doom is the certain signs and events happening around in present America. He sees the vines are coming up through the cracks in the streets and sidewalks. Goods and services are breaking down. Poison ivy has captured the speakers post at the local drive-in movie. Cars are left rusting in the parking lots because there is no one to fix them. The American society is polarized: the rightist knotheads and the leftist Left papas can no longer speak to each other. The blacks known as Bantus are in open rebellion and as a result, the violence is spread everywhere. Even the Roman Catholic Church has fragmented into three competing groups. Tom More summarizes the situation as “The center did not hold!” (p. 18), associating the present disintegration of the American civilization with the one described by W. B. Yeats in his poem “The Second Coming.” On the individual level, the disintegration is resulted into the split in Tom More’s self: he suffers
from simultaneous depression and exaltation, hate and love, trust and mistrust. Unable to reconcile the contradiction, he suffers a mental breakdown. He is declared crazy, hospitalized and kept under lock and key for a good long time.

Tom More's assessment of the present is governed by his knowledge of universal history. He perceives history as process, a steady progression towards disaster or, a great cycle like the seasons uniting beginning and end. That is why his adherence to Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History*, the book in which the writer views the course of history as cyclical. The dying age, as Tom More sees it, was first ushered in by the emergence of modern science in the seventeenth century. For weeks he has been reliving the Battle of Verdun in Stedmann's *History of World War I*. Half a million died there in a year-long struggle that left the battle line unchanged. Affected by his reading of the book, Tom More says, "Here began the hemorrhage and death by suicide of the old Western world" (p. 47). Verdun symbolizes for him both destructiveness of technology and failure of modern science. As for the present cultural crisis is concerned, it is epitomized in the split between spirit and flesh. According to Jedeo-Christain tradition, the split first occurred when man lost his innocence in the Garden of Eden. In modern times the split is pervaded “ever since the famous philosopher Descartes ripped body loose from mind and turned the very soul into a
ghost that haunts its own house (p.191). The separation of mind from body transforms the individual into a "mythical monster, half angel, half beast, but no man" (p.383), Tom More thinks. He can diagnose man's sundered self as spiritual malaise with his new invention, lapsometer. Lapsometer, literally a device for measuring lapses, is designed to diagnose a kind of second fall. It is clear in the conversation between Tom More and the director to the Fedville hospital. Hearing of lapsometer, the director says:

"It implies, I take it, a lapse or fall"
"Yes", I say tonelessly
"A fall perhaps from a state of innocence?"
"Perhaps" (p.205).

Tom More sees the present situation in America in terms of fall - fall from new Eden. He tells that God gave the Americans "the new world" and asked to pass "One little test: here's a helpless man in Africa, all you have to do is not violate him" (p.57). But for the Americans the test proved too much and they flunked it incurring the wrath of God. For Tom More the violation of the Negro becomes original sin hence cause of the fall. Tom More's pursuit in the novel is for the prelapsarian harmony of Eden. With his new invention, he will help man to reenter paradise and return to early phase of human history, will allow man to reconcile body and spirit. Like his namesake ancestor Sir Thomas More of the Middle Ages, the modern Dr. Thomas More not
only dreams of utopian existence but also yearns for the prelapsarian harmony. His efforts are oriented to turn history into actuality. Tom More’s response to the present cultural crisis is subjective and has strongly to do with his own past and his Southern origin. He is mentally disturbed man because, he tells us, “My daughter died, my wife ran off with a heathen Englishman, and I fell prey to bouts of depression and morning terror” (p.20). The loss of daughter Samantha and wife Doris is a burden heavy enough to bear. Unable to face reality, particularly the death of Samantha, he turns to mythologizing the past. “Samanth’s death”, Godshalk comments, “seems to have been the unbearable reality that pushed More into his role as mythmaker.”

Southerner’s predilection of mythmaking is an inevitable result of Southern history; when the present is unbearable they turn to mythologizing the past. As a Southern American Tom More conceives his own past into a particular myth, the myth of death and loss, as he sees American past in terms of myth.

Tom More frequently reverts to his past so as to contradict the present. He recalls idyllic love making with Doris, his “Apple Queen”, his horseplay with Samantha, his fated daughter, and his life in the old “auto age.” Tom More’s life with his wife and daughter in the Paradise Estate is blessed one like Adam and Eve in Paradise. Glimpses of this happy times appear in several flash backs emphasizing his longing for
it. One of the important recollections dealing with his happy past appears in a passage describing summer evening after communion:

The best of times were after mass on summer evenings when Samantha and I would walk home in the violet dusk, we having received Communion and I rejoicing afterwards, caring nought for my fellow Catholics but only for myself and Samantha and Christ swallowed, remembering what he promised me for eating him, that I would have life in me, and I did, feeling so good that I'd sing and cut the fool all the way home like King David before the Ark (pp.12-13).

It is the happy world like King David of the Old Testament. While living in the world of innocence and integrity, Samantha developed a brain tumor and "The disease", Lawson writers, "presaged for Tom a fall from Old Testament security into contemporary alienation." The time after the death of Samantha is the time of trouble and suffering for Tom More. He and his wife shut off their hearts from one another, not forgiving each other for the child's death. Finally Doris ran off with a heathen Englishman leaving Tom More with his irregular life. His life is filled with despair consequently he attempts suicide by slashing his wrists and then he turns to promiscuity. Courting danger, Tom More dwells on scenes of destruction, on Verdun and other battlefields. The deaths of his wife and daughter are constantly in is mind. He is a man preoccupied with destruction and sees an apocalypse that is ready in
his mind. He has had enough in his own life to believe in the myth of apocalypse hence the significance of the novel’s subtitle, *The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End of the World*. Governed by cyclical view of history, Tom More sees his life fit the Toynbee pattern of history and hopes for the “return.” “Toynbee, I believe”, he tells, “speaks of the Return, of the man who fails and goes away, is exiled, takes counsel with himself, hits on something, sees daylight – and returns to triumph” (p.25). In the epilogue “Five Years Later,” though Tom More is older, he is happy having all the time in the world because he has escaped the temporality of history.

In the light of Tom More’s seeing the past in mythic way his struggle with Art Immelmann can be seen as a confrontation with evil temptation. Because Art is portrayed as a devilish figure who smells bad and dresses out of style and shakes hands poorly like a man with no practice. Art knows things no one had told him. He comes to Tom More with an offer of a bright future such as funding his innovative technique and recommending More’s name for Nobel Prize. Art’s asking Tom More to sign a contract is a temptation to avoid. Tom More sees Art’s devilish purposes, calls him “why he calls me those extraordinary names” (p.376). Being a Devil, he has no mother, “neither here nor there” (p.329). Art is bent upon an evil purpose such as to create anarchy in the society by distributing lapsometer and to prevail his
dark kingdom. His purpose is foiled by Tom More's prayer appealing his ancestor saint Sir Thomas More to "pray for us and drive this son of a bitch hence" (p.376). Making an assessment of Tom More's life we see that in his own persons he recapitulates the entire history of mankind regarded from a Judeo-Christian perspective. His life has a phase of innocence and happiness followed by suffering, apocalypse and alienation and then a phase of temptation and finally reconciliation with God.

Tom More's habit of mythologizing the past overshadows his present denying him access to his immediate experience. On a warm Christmas Eve, Lola and More lie in the grassy bunker where they kiss hungrily. Tom More thinks of his wife Doris as he goes around after Lola, whispers "Doris" forgetting that she is Lola. To him Lola "is like Doris" (p.95). The memory of his past life with Doris and Samantha haunts Tom More throughout the novel. While waiting for Moira to shower in the ruined motel, Tom More drinks a toddy and thinks not of Moira but of "Doris, my dead wife who ran off to Cozumel with a heathen Englishman" (p.253). He holds Moira in his arms and pats, "her just as I used to pat Samantha when she had growing pains" (p.255), he tells. Moira lying crooked in Tom More's arms reminds him of Samantha's first abortive date, which brings tears in his eyes. The past wells up in his consciousness as he caresses the waist of Moira and
wonders whether the purpose of the past is to chase the man. "I squeeze her pliant belted roughlinened waist. The linen reminds me of Doris. Was that why I got it?" (p.265), Tom More asks. Sometimes Tom More himself reverts to the past in order to escape the present. While answering Ellen’s questions, he is surprised why he does so, then he tells, "I remind me of Samantha, who used to come home from school letter-perfect in her catechism and asks me to hear her nevertheless" (p.350).

The narrator-protagonist's preoccupation with the past channels his relations with the girls in the novel. To Tom More what “needs to be discharged is the intolerable tenderness of the past, the past gone and grieved over and never made sense of” (p.339). Lola Rhoades, the auburn-haired Texas girls and the cellist may help him in his need because she can play music and “Music ransoms us from the past, declares an amnesty, brackets and sets aside the old puzzles” (p.339). She sustains the agrarian stability is well underlined in her speech to Tom More. She tells “When all is said and done, the only thing we can be sure of is the land. The land never lets you down” (p.279). She lives in a huge mansion called Tara but Tom More knows it is a “fake house” because it is purchased from a gangster who built it from the original plan. Tom More is asked by Lola to come and live with her in Tara, although it never happens. The second girl Tom More has relations with is Moira
Schaffner who represents modern romantic love to him. "She's a romanticist and I'm not" (p.130), he tells. She requires a historical setting for her love because "Ruins make her passionate. Ghosts make her want to be touched" (p.133). Tom More knows that Moira's historical romanticism is thoughtless since she is "not strong on history" (p.134). Her past is urban-past, made up of salesman and flappers; this past is gone and Moira calls it gone with the wind, making an allusion to Margaret Mitchel's novel Gone with the Wind. Tom More loves Moira's fantastic romanticism so that he selects the ruined Howard Johnson for lovemaking. In both girls, Lola and Moira, Tom More looks for the "speciousness" of the past.

In Ellen Oglethorpe, Tom More sees conservative tradition. She is "a beautiful but tyrannical Georgia Presbyterian" (p.155). Her strict observance of her religion makes her free to herself and allows her "a kind of chaste wantonness" (p.155). She is a strict churchgoer and a moral girl but does not believe in God. What she believes in is doing right and being honest. Hester is the fourth girls Tom More is attracted to. She is twenty years old, brown haired, hazel-eyed and, he tells, "Hester is my type" and sees in her "pagan innocence like a shepherd girl piping a tune on a Greek vase" (p.49). Hester is ahistorical, standing outside the sphere of history. As Tom More looks into her clear hazel eyes, he sees "only clarity here and no shadow of the past" as if "she's wiped the
sleek clean” (p.366). Tom More does not conceal his physical attraction towards Hester but cannot move with her. Unlike Hester he has a strong sense of tradition, a sense of past and cannot wipe his slate clean. Taken together, Lola, Moira, Ellen and Hester seem to embody the agrarian stability, past glory and the saving power of music and love. In the company of the girls, Tom More attempts what he does for his third patient Charley Parker “historical therapy”, recalling of the good old days, “a recapture of the past and one’s self” (p.43).

Tom More’s tendency of mythologizing the past accounts for the trait of his Southern character. He is obsessed with history - universal history and Southern history as a part of it. He conceives the Civil War and the First World War as linked events in the history of the world, one preceding the other. He tells that the slaughter at Verdun in the First World War is an improvement over nineteenth century Civil War in which eight thousand Grant’s men were killed by Lee’s army in forty minutes at Cold Harbor. Though the comment is ironical, Tom More’s obsession with Southern history as part of world history is very clear. He is obsessed with the great events in Southern history leading to the defeat in the Civil War. His choice of the day of the year 4th July is not without significance. On July 4, 1983, he feels, he will join Washington and Lincoln, when he uses his machine to preserve the union. Before one hundred and twenty years, i.e. on July 4, 1863, the Union army
forced both the Confederate surrender at Vicksburg and the retreat at Gettysburg. Tom More always sees the great historical events as chained ones and its relevance to the present.

Percy portrays Tom More as he does Binx and Will having a sense of past and tradition. Like them he has psychological problem. His knowledge of the past and tradition helps him to judge the present “fall” in Southern context. The obvious impact of the fall is seen in the social behavior of Southern woman. Tom More sees that the old sexual inhibition is gone and the Southern woman has become an unintellectual sex object. Moira and Hester fall in the category of modern free women having no sense of the past. Moira, as Tom describes her, is not strong on history so is prodigal. Hester is post-protestant, post-rebellion, post-ideology being clean of history. Lillian is a woman, far ahead of these two, who proudly displays, during orgasm a “cruciform rash” for a cheering team of sex researchers in the Love Clinic. Her exhibitionism shows how symbol of shame has become the matter of show in the postlapsarian world. The very institution the Love Clinic symbolizes the failure of sex in society where the couples come to be treated. Along with the sexual morality, the other thing that Tom More is concerned with is the relationship between the black and white folks. In Victor Charles, the black character, the Old South’s mutual concern and affection is seen retained
though he participates actively in the black uprising. He warns Tom More that he should move in with his mother for something is going to happen. Victor’s loyalty to Tom More is tested when the later is abducted and taken into prison. He tells Uru about Tom sitting with his grandmother whole night when she was ill. It was Dr. More who came to see her and treated her, Victor tells.

Including the Bantu episode in the novel, Percy touches the very problem of the South, the problem of Negro. At the end of the novel, Uru, the northern black, returns to the North because he cannot understand the Southern ways, Tom More tells, "Uru, baffled by Southern ways, left in disgust" (p. 385). It was Uru who led the Southern blacks and Percy knows that the Negro problem is created by the outsiders but the Southern sense of community keeps the black and white together in the South.

*LANCELOT* (1971), the fourth novel by Percy, describes the title character’s obsession with the ancestral past as mores, and his fury at the collapse of values in the modern times, specified by sexual betrayal and bribery within the family. Being the scion of a Southern family of gentlemen, the protagonist Lancelot Andrewes Lamar has a sense of honor as a property of hereditary social status that his family enjoys “as


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an enclave of the English gentry" (p. 14). When the later members of the Lamar family do not maintain the social status, he becomes violent to restore it. In a sense, the character of Lancelot is a good example of the Southern mind closed within history and is ever ready to act it out when situation demands. The primary focus of the novel, thus, is on the past-ridden consciousness of Lancelot, which affects everything he does in the present. In order to examine the issue of history and individual consciousness, it is necessary to refer to the Lamar family heritage that has formative influence on Lancelot's character. The Lamars have been a noble family in the South for its members lived by the code of chivalry. Lancelot's great-grandfather Manson Maury Lamar fought under the command of Lee in the Civil War "on the bloodiest day of the war" (p. 217). The same ancestor had had a duel with a man who questioned his blood relationship saying that his mother, a white Creol lady, had had sexual relations with a Negro. The ancestor had cut the throat of the man, setting an example of defending family blood, which in turn was defending honor by violence.

In the later generation of the Lamar family, Lancelot's uncle keeps himself with the family tradition by fighting in the Argonne in the First World War. Lancelot grows up on the line of the family heritage with a repressed need for performing something courageous or heroic. He defends the Buells, a slave family, and their black Baptist church.
from the local Kluxer who threatened them to kill and destroy their church. Following up the soldierly tradition of the family, Lancelot joins the army but he cannot stay longer there because he “is discharged from the army not bloody and victorious and battered” but “with persistent diarrhea” (p.28). When Lancelot was a student of Southern history, he studied the history of the Civil War with a religious fervor and thought Lee as a patron saint of the region. The influence of the past tradition on Lancelot’s character is felt in his attitude towards life. He thinks of women either a lady or a whore, as his ancestor did, and one could consort with whore but marry a lady. He marries Lucy Cobb of Georgia, because she is an ideal type that he dreams of; “Lucy was a virgin! and I did not want her otherwise” (p.85), he tells. His relations with Margot, his second wife, are governed by this romantic - idealist view of women. It is made clear by Margot herself in her last words with Lancelot before she is burned in the fire of Belle Isle. She tells him, “With you I had to be either - or - but never a - uh - woman” (p.245).

Although Margot comes from west Texas, she has been posing herself as a Southern belle the day both she and Lancelot have meet at Belle Isle. She charms him with her first words, “You must be the master” (p.73). In the early days of their marriage, it is Margot who encourages Lancelot to identify himself with the Old South figures. Restoring Belle Isle to its pre-war splendor, Margot puts a plantation
desk and chair in Lancelot’s study room for turning him “into Jefferson Davis writing his memoirs” (p.82). In order to revive the past, she insists her husband to drink toddies and juleps and wear linen suits. Lancelot’s mute consent to Margot’s attempts of restoring the mansion and its master to the past glory is understandable enough in relations to his obsession with the past.

The central action of the novel LANCELOT, in fact, is Lancelot’s desperate attempt to defend “the grand mythic Lamar tradition” (p.92). As the central character, he puts the novel in action soon as he discovers Siobhan’s, his daughter’s blood type not corresponding with his own blood type. The discovery of incompatibility of blood type creates a “worm of interest” in Lancelot that carries him into the root of the matter. He ponders over the possible blood type of Siobhan from the equations of his blood type with Margot’s. To be sure, Lancelot consults with a physician, his cousin, and learns from him that his blood type cannot beget a type ‘O’ that is his daughter’s. Still hanging upon the problem, Lancelot comes to know the possible time when Siobhan was conceived by subtracting two hundred and eighty days from her birthday, April 21, 1969. From the past documents and calculations, Lancelot learns that in the year 1968 Margot was in Texas at Bob Merlin’s acting workshop for the entire month of July during which Siobhan must have been conceived. It is clear that Margot committed
adultery in 1968, and the proof of which was a daughter who possessed a blood type not determined by her father’s. Lancelot’s meticulous act of pursuing the truth of his daughter’s blood type exhibits an intensely Southern obsession with blood relationship that decides one’s status in society.

The discovery of Margot’s infidelity reminds Lancelot of the discovery of his father’s bribery and also his mother possible affair with uncle Harry. Lancelot’s father was accused of taking the kickback money from the crooked politician but the Lamar family denied the accusation thinking that it was the “usual story of the honorable man besmirched by dirty politicians” (p.41). Aftermath of the accusation – denial period, the child Lancelot discovers some ten thousand dollars in his father’s sock drawer while searching for ten dollar for his mother’s shopping. The sudden discovery of money confirms Lancelot’s father being a crook and for Lancelot the “old world fell to pieces” at the sight of money (p.42). The worst follows, Lancelot’s father, demoralized, retires from the world into a fantasy of Southern romanticism leaving his wife Lily to a distant relative called uncle Harry. Lancelot recalls how his father asks uncle Harry to take Lily for “joyrides”, “Get her out of the house, Harry!” my father said – leaving him, my father, to his beloved quiet” (p.215), Lancelot tells. Lancelot’s belief in his father’s sexual failure and his mother’s possible love affair with uncle Harry is made certain.
by a woman in a hallucination before he kills Jacoby. The woman, whom Lancelot calls "Our Lady of the Camellias", tells him that his mother and Uncle Harry were lovers. Lancelot draws a comparison between his father's corruption and sexual failure, and Margot's infidelity concluding that in both cases the members of the family have failed to live up to the traditional moral code – rule of honor.

Lancelot's actions after the discovery of his wife's adultery is conditioned by the sense of lost honor which almost drives him mad. He oscillates between two different views of his wife's infidelity. His first view, shaped by the scientific mind, sees "Margot's fornication, anybody's fornication, amounts to no more than molecules encountering molecules" (p.89). This view reveals that sexual act has nothing to do with honor and performing it, no honor is spoiled. Lancelot's other view, shaped by the heroic tradition, sees Margot's sexual relations outside the marriage as a blow to the moral code and hence unforgivable. The later view prevails and Lancelot will retrieve the lost honor in a way his ancestor had done in the past. Lancelot prefers the old style of life because for him it is the only way to live by in modern Sodom; "I could live that way, crude as it was... But it is at least a way to live" (p.155), he tells. The old code demands violent action against the culprits but one must be sure of oneself before doing it. That is why Lancelot tells, "I had to be absolutely certain" (p.43) of what
Margot has done and is doing now. He undertakes a quest leading to the truth of his wife’s infidelity by the way of spotting her in the bed with her lover. In other respect, Lancelot thinks, the search will reveal him a “sin” or an “evil” which is necessary to prove the existence of God. He calls himself the knight of the Unholy Grail and sexual sin is the “Unholy Grail” he seeks. He knows that his search is peculiar but peculiar time needs peculiar search. Lancelot’s sense of sin reflects Southern writer’s common tendency that has its source in the region’s history in which one race did injustice on the other by enslaving it.

Lancelot’s quest is rightly understood as his romantic obsession with the heroic ideal which is sprung from his honor – conscious feeling of jealousy. He is single minded in his pursuit of the exposure of his wife with her lover whom he still assumes to be Merlin. In his search, Lancelot seeks help from Elgin, the most trusted black servant, whom he asks to keep a log of the film crews activities in the Holiday Inn where they are staying. What he asks from Elgin is note of “what a person may carry with him, what they do, the smallest item of behavior” (p.58). Lancelot infers from the log kept by Elgin the only possibility that Margot might lust for someone not him. The next step in his quest is to film, by using hidden camera in the rooms, Margot and her lover making love. For this commission there is no better man than Elgin who has technical competence and can be trusted absolutely too.
The movie made by him exposes the fact that Margot has two lovers, Merlin the ex-lover and Jacoby the present lover. Being certain, now, about his wife's infidelity that is the prerequisite for violent action, Lancelot makes preparation to avenge his honor. In the action against the culprits the innocents must be spared so that Lancelot sends Tex and Siobhan away and surprisingly, asks Merlin to leave the place. Lancelot forces Lucky who wishes to stay with Rain to go to school. His manner of acting out of certainty impresses the people around there who "acted as if I were an ancestor who had wandered out of his portrait and begun giving orders" (p.205), he tells. Lancelot's pose for an ancestor surprises Lucy who asks Suellen, "What's got into Papa?" (p.205).

Lancelot's act of killing Jacoby and Margot is replica of the past example of using violence for defending honor. He arms with a bowie knife, supposed to be one of Bowie original, and walks in on the bed where Jacoby and Margot are making love. He takes fight with Jacoby, holds him and cuts his throat in the same manner as the Lamar ancestor had cut the throat of his adversary. History is acted out in the present. Lancelot retrieves his lost honor by using violence in the grand Lamar tradition. It is an act of a Southern mind pregnant with history controlling the person who possess it. Lancelot performs the 'great deed' of defending honor in the killing of Jacoby and Margot in the traditional sense, but there is a discord with the tradition. He lacks the
great feeling – of anger, joy, revenge – as he was taught to have to match the great deed being performed. He performs the great act without having such feeling; “I remember casting about for the feeling and not finding one” (p. 242), Lancelot admits. In a sense, it is an attempt on the part of Lancelot of keeping distance between himself and the act performed. Even years after when he looks at the past incident he feels “nothing … except a certain coldness” (p. 253).

The quest that Lancelot has undertaken to find evil in the sexual act between Margot and her lover is failed because he finds nothing there except the “beastliness” of the act. After the failure of the quest, Lancelot rejects the present age calling it the “the great whorehouse and fagdom of America” (p. 176) which hits his wife, daughter, son and mother. With the burning of the Belle Isle symbolizing the past, Lancelot, what Sweeney calls, “has literally blown away his own past” 14. Burning the past and rejecting the present, Lancelot will start afresh initiating a new order in the Shenandoah Valley, the old womblike seat of Southern glory and defeat. The new society will be based on the codes of courtesy and chivalry, the codes the noble men of the past lived by. In the new order, Lancelot tells, “there will be tight-lipped courtesy between men. And chivalry toward women,” because “women must be saved from the whoredom they’ve chosen” (p. 58). And women shall be treated as either ladies or whores. Anna the gang-raped girl must be the new
woman and Lancelot be the new man in the new society, because, he tells, they “were suited to each - other each stripped of the past” (p.250). Though Lancelot talks of starting off a new order of things, he ends with repeating a good many aspects of the worn-out past revealing his preoccupation with Southern history. His vision of a new age bears a strong resemblance to the old, mythic Southern past. But Lancelot denies any such resemblance, “Don’t confuse it with anything you’ve heard of before” (p.156), he warns. In his idea of a new society populated with chivalrous, violent men quick to defend honor, and women being categorized as either ladies or whores, we hear an echo of the old South tradition. Lancelot’s disgust with the modern world of corruption and adultery makes him plan a new society based on stoic values without knowing it.

Lancelot’s preoccupation with history is presented in his attempts to understand the time - time past, present and future. As a part of his habit, he sees things in terms of time, for example, he corresponds the three stages of his life with the divisions of time into three periods. The first period he calls Romantic Period when one falls in love; the next is a sexual period in which men and women cohabit as indiscriminately as in a soap opera; the third is a period of catastrophe. There is a Romantic Period in Lancelot’s life when he falls in love with Margot; it is followed by a sexual period when Margot lusts for other men; there is a period of
catastrophe when Lancelot burns the Belle Isle with his wife. Even his idea of the divisions of time is a part of his sexual theory of history which in turn born out of his sexual hang-up caused by Margot’s adultery. After the period of catastrophe, Lancelot foresees a new order that he calls ‘The Third Revolution’ patterning his idea in the course of American history. The course of American history begins with the First Revolution won against the Britishers in 1776 through the Second Revolution – the Civil War – lost against “the money - grubbing” North. And Lancelot’s Third Revolution “will begin in the wilderness where Lee lost”(p.158).

The discovery of Margot’s infidelity is a great blow to Lancelot’s concept of time. The very thought of his wife loving the other man the way she once loved him arouses jealousy in Lancelot. To him “Jealousy is an alteration in the very shape of time itself. Time loses its structure” (p.122). Time is altered; what was good time for Lancelot is changed into bad one. In original structure, the time present is an extension of the time past into the time future. But in its altered form, time present bears no relation with the time past. Lancelot tells that his and Margot’s “great locker-room lust had no relation to the present. Lust is a function of the future (p.235). Time and again Lancelot tells us his problem with time and his attempts to deal with it. To him to live in the past and future is not a problem but to live in present is not easy. “To live in the
past and future is easy. To live in the present is like threading a needle” (p.235), Lancelot tells. In this respect Lancelot’s actions in the novel can be seen as his attempt to set the time in order.

Year after the incident at the Belle Isle Lancelot is unwilling to even remember the past because he is sure “that the past is absolutely dead” (p.62). Instead he looks forward to the future that is “absolutely new”. What is the more of the past is, he confides to Percival, that the past is intolerable “just because it is so goddamn banal and feckless and useless” (p.105).

Lancelot tries to come to terms with the intolerable past in order to have the pure future. He is aware that “the passage of time is nothing but the encroachment of the horrible banality of the past on the pure future” (p.106). To endure the horrible banality of the past, Lancelot has to find a clue that he missed in the past. In other words, the past holds knowledge and Lancelot has to unravel it, “so” he tells, “I won’t make the same mistake twice” (p.108).

As do the earlier novels of Percy, his fifth novel, THE SECOND COMING* (1980), explores the theme of history and individual consciousness with its central character Willistom Bibb Barrett increasingly obsessed with his past. Returning to the character of Will


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Barrett that he has left at the close of *THE LAST GENTLEMAN*, Percy projects him in his middle forties as yet still plagued by memories from the past that make it impossible for him to live in the present. He is not of the present and at the outset of the novel the narrator draws our attention to his characteristic illness and to his mental make up. He is feeling depressed and is subjected to "spells" — "petty — mall trance" (p. 11), doctor calls them. He thinks life more senseless, even demented and the world to him has become farcical. He inquires the doctor whether the tendency to suicide is inherited while entertaining the thought of shooting himself. He does fall down as well as he remembers everything, a symptom the narrator describes is "the opposite amnesia" (p. 9). He muses on the apocalypse for the Jews have returned to Israel that he takes a sure sigh of the second coming of Christ is at hand. Taken together, the illness of Will Barrett accounts for the state of alienation that Soren Kierkegaard describes and Percy uses it to view his character from existential perspective. To explore why Will Barrett senses the end of his life and the world, it is necessary to examine his past or his relationship with the past.

*THE SECOND COMING* depicts the protagonist’s relationship with his dark past relating to his father’s suicide. The past is called back into his consciousness since. "Everything reminded him of something else" (p. 9). Lying in the bunker on the golf course at the Linwood Country
Club on an ordinary October afternoon in North Carolina, he hears a sound that reminds him of an important event in the distant past which "he had managed until that moment to forget it" (p. 3). Will Barrett is not willing to recall and still is overtaken by the memories of the past because they are "memories of extraordinary power and poignancy" (p. 12). The memories now intrude upon Will Barrett's consciousness are of the hunting trip with his father to Thomasville, Georgia, thirty years before when he was a boy. The event on the hunting trip is significant to Will Barrett for it is the only event that "ever happened to him in his life," other that happened afterwards is "non-event" (p. 52). It is that event which is pregnant with meanings that he longs to know and still its memory that he wants to escape from.

Throughout the novel, Will Barrett is haunted by his past owing to his conditions of total recall of the past. The memory that visits him, brings with it the knowledge of the present. The narrator acutely puts it that "at the very moment of his remembering the distant past, the meaning of his present life became clear to him" (p. 71). Now Will Barrett realizes that he always wanted to get rid of his past related to his father and all that his father stands for. In one of his mental colloquies with the father, he admits the fact:

Ever since your death, all I ever wanted from you was out, out from you... out from the ancient hatred and allegiances, allegiances unto death and love of war and rumors of
To escape the past, Will Barrett runs away from the South to the North. He runs after love, money and little Christianity. He marries Marion, the only daughter of wealthy Peabody; becomes a successful wall Street lawyer. After Marion’s death, he inherits her fortune, retires early and returns to live on his ten thousand acres of mountainside in Linwood, North Carolina. Lately, he has been named Rotary’s Man-of-the year for his service to the community. Now as he remembers the distant past his successful Yankee life of thirty years in the North seems to him “a long night’s dream” (p.73). At the same time he realized that he cannot evade the memory of the past, “after all,” he tells his father, “no escaping it for us” (p.73).

The memory of the past rushing into Will Barrett’s mind and his relentlessly probing it, have been central to the texture of the novel. Many times the memories of the past flood his consciousness, each time he tries to grab meanings from them. What he tries to discern from the memories is that what actually happened on the hunting trip and why his father later killed himself. Trying again and again, Will Barrett finally penetrates into the obscurity of the event on the hunting trip. In his memory, now at this time, he clearly sees that just after the cursing at the fence and just before an unsuccessful suicide attempt, his father had attempted to kill him, Will Barrett. Those two blasts from the
father's shotgun, which everyone said had been intended for the single quail in the brush, had actually been intended for Will Barrett himself. The scars on his cheek are visible signs of the wounding, physical and psychic, that he received from his father. In the event, there is a steady, awful escalation of the father's violence towards the son; first the curse, then the father's suicide attempt and the father's attempt to kill the son. Will Barrett's analysis of the past is essentially an attempt to understand his father and his frame of mind. Seen from this perspective, the two interrelated incidents, the father's suicide and his attempt to kill his son cannot be understood without relating them to the Southern Stoicism that the father had imbibed.

The Stoical view perceives that the virtues of truth and courage and honor are inevitably doomed to defeat at the hands of unworthy masses. To emphasize the father's Stoical frame of mind Percy has Will Barrett recall his father discussing the present state of existence one evening during Eisenhower years. Trying to describe the present state of living, the father fumbles for a word to describe it. "What is the word for a state," the father asks, "which is not life and not death, a death in life?"(p.126). He even wonders if such a time happened in history before. The only cure for the malady of the present times is war; for the father war counters the death - in - life state. When the Second World War breaks out, the father enters the war with a great joy; when peace
follows, he becomes unhappy. The things he brings home from the war are the most prized possessions to him; they include a German Luger, an officer’s hat, and some photographs he removed from the body of a dead German soldier. These things remind him of the honor and gallantry of war in a world that lacks them. Interestingly, the father, as Will Barrett remembers, never mentioned the horrors he witnessed at Buchenwald.

The father’s dissatisfaction with the present existence extends to his world of hunting. He is not happy with the results of the present hunting in comparison with the past hunting. The father and grandfather had a great hunt here when the father was a boy, but now there is a falling off. Now the guide is poor, the dog is untrained and even the hotel is not as good as the father remembered from his trip. The old items are always better in every important way in the father’s memory. In his search to know his father, Will Barrett realizes that the father was dissatisfied with the world and loved war for death. Underlying these two traits - dissatisfaction and love of war - is anger that motivated the father to suicide. Will Barrett recalls how the father knew by heart a letter by Marcus Flavinius, a Roman centurion, who had imbibed the Stoicism of the Empire. Hearing that corruption and decay were rampant in Rome, Marcus sounded a warning, “beware of the anger of the Legions” (p.133). This memory brings forth the crucial
trait of the father-anger, "You were possessed by anger", Will Barrett tells the father, "anger which in the end you turn yourself" (p.133).

Not just the anger, but the sudden anger was characteristic of the father is perceived by Ewell McBee, a childhood friend to Will Barrett. He tells Will Barrett how his father, once, "was getting hot under the collar" (p.175) while listening to a preacher who kept on talking about church, money and saving soul. Then he tells how the father told the preacher about the soul, about the man in an abusive language and ultimately Ewell tells Will Barrett, "I'm telling you, your daddy was a pistol-ball." (p.176). The father was consumed by sudden anger that was appeased with his suicide. Intimately related to the anger is the Southern code of honor. The father suffers a sense of lost honor as does Jim in Lord Jim by Conrad, the novel the father reads and the son saves it for himself. Will Barrett tells how his father "had the guilts like Jim and an enemy he hated, himself" (p.146). Honor, melancholy, anger, love of death and pessimism are the traits of the Southern Stoic which shaped the vision and mood of the father in terms of which he attempted to kill his son and ultimately committed suicide.

In his consistent efforts to know about the past, Will Barrett comes to know the secret of his father, i.e., death. Like Hamlet, he calls the father "Old mole" telling him that "it was death you loved most of all and loved so surely that wanted to share the secret with me because
you loved me too” (p. 126). The father leaves his son, Will Barrett, a terrible legacy; he passes on to his son his fear of life, his fascination with death, legacy of anger and self-loathing. That Will Barrett shares the personality traits of his father is clearly revealed in his father’s dialogue with the son on the hunting trip. The father says, “You are like me. We are two of a kind” separate from “The ignorant armies that clash by night” (p. 55). Will Barrett retains the father’s anger in his nature which Allison Huger first points out and even he himself sees it. In their confrontation, Will Barrett to collect the balls and Allison to bring them, she asks him, “Are you still climbing on your anger?” (p. 76). Anger repressed is the principal emotion in Will Barrett’s life, as it had been in his father’s. This repressed anger releases itself at his daughter’s marriage rehearsal party when he calls Yamaiuchi, Marion’s servant, but he does not turn around. The anger rises in his throat “exactly the same sudden rage his father had turned on the black guide” (p. 171), Will Barrett remembers. Having shared some of the personality traits of his father and knowing that his father was obsessed with death, Will Barrett wonders whether the same obsession will claim his own life.

As the memories of the past crowd Will Barrett’s consciousness, the father’s voice haunts him. There are a number of long passages of Will Barrett’s mental colloquies with the father in which the father insists the son to join him in death. The voice of the father tells the son
that he has to make a choice: whether to live in a rotten world or have a
courage and integrity to end his life. The father believed that at some
time, his son would conclude like his father because suicide is the only
solution to the present predicament man forced to live in. The doom of
the father hovers over Will Barrett and he seems to yield to it when he
tells the father, “You win” (p.176) meaning that he will follow the example
of the father. He combines a suicide plot with an apocalyptic
experiment; he descends in to Lost Cove cave “looking for proof of the
existence of God and a sign of the apocalypse” (p.198). If no sign of God’s
existence forthcomes, Will Barrett will by starvation join his father.
However, he thinks that his suicide in the cave will represent progress
in history of suicide because it is, unlike his father, “done in good
faith” (p.211). He knows that the father’s suicide is “wasted” for it proved
nothing, solve nothing. Even in the cave the memories of the past chase
Will Barrett and the father’s voice insists to go ahead. When Will Barrett
asks the father what he is doing down here under the earth with him,
the father replies, “Because there is no other place for you” (p.215). Will
Barrett’s experiment in the cave fails since toothache compels him to
leave the place. He comes out of the cave to fall down into Allison’s
greenhouse giving the novel a new mode.

With the appearance of Allison Hunnicutt Huger, the book
becomes a dialectic, highlighting the theme, of death and life, past and
future, father and lover, and ending and beginning. Indeed the novel celebrates victory, in Freudian terms, of eros over thanatos and Will Barrett being pulled between these two emotional poles. Allison provides an alternative of eros to thanatos that the father represents. The first encounter between Allison and Will Barrett occurs when she brings the two golf balls and he goes to collect them. He is surprised by Allison holding the balls in two outstretched hands and asking "Are these yours?" (p.74). There is a symbolic invitation for Will Barrett from Allison to consider her as his love. Allision Huger is in the early twenties, talented and, according to her doctor, psychotic. She has just escaped from the Valleyhead Sanitarious where she had been put as a patient. Her present condition springs from her past which she cannot remember. In the past Allison has suffered a lot at the hands of her parents. In a sense, they violated her and their violation involves not distance from, but control over their daughter. Kitty and Walter Huber have had high expectation for their daughter, but she short-circuited the parental aspirations. Allison tells, "My mother refused to let me fail. So I insisted" (p.94). So severe is their manipulative domination that Allison feels continually in danger. She looks for a place to hide herself and first place she seeks is drugs and then the psychosis itself. Allison senses that her problems arise from an inordinate desire to please other people.

But Kitty's story about Allison's conditions differs from what
actually happened to her daughter. Kitty tells Will Barrett how Allison remembers her another life, after having one session with Ray, a true mystic, because “her Karma” is too much strong. In her trance Allison saw that she had been a camp follower of the Union Army before the battle of Chancellorsville. She called herself “original hooker”, the word first applied to camp followers of General Hooker’s army. But Ray in his trance saw Allison as a courtesan spy for the North in Richmond. There she was known as a great Southern belle who charmed many officers with her wit and conversation. To Kitty, these two versions of Allison’s another life might be right because there had been a famous Union spy in Richmond who had been a prostitute, a hooker. Kitty thinks that Allison’s past of another life explains her present life: in her another life, she knew many men, talked too much, lied too much and abused her body; in this life she knows nobody, never lies, doesn’t use her body at all. In such condition Allison has sought a resort of psychosis for that she is subjected to electroshock therapy which has left her with almost no memory. As a result, she has to rely on her “INSTRUCTIONS FROM MYSELF TO MYSELF” (p.27) written before the most recent shock treatment to organize her present life in the greenhouse. Allison’s writings in the notebook not only do they guide what to do at the present but also they, what Tremonte calls, “provide her with a history.” 15

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After consideration of the character of Allison Huger and Will Barrett, we surmise that they are complementary figures: one supplies what the other lacks and vice versa. Percy deliberately intends them to be complementary to each other. The third part of the novel relating to Will Barrett ends with, "He remembered everything" (p.79) and the fourth part relating to Allison begins with "She remembered nothing" (p.80). Will Barrett always falls down, Allison hoists the things up so that she assures him, "When you fall down, I'll pick you up" (p.256). Allison begins her life with learning about the word "love"; Will Barrett struggles with his life by pondering over various names of "death". She mints a fresh language, he can interpret it. These two characters though come together, do not think to let the other know of their respective pasts. Will Barrett never tells Allison about his preoccupation with his past, with suicide, or with God. Neither does Allison tell him about her conflict with her parents or about her experience in the mental hospital. These two fight in their consciousness with their pasts but they still know little of what is going on in each other's mind. Percy's treatment of growing relationship between Allison and Will Barrett owes to a great to his interest in existentialist philosophy. Percy devotes to, considerably, developing intersubjective relationship between the two characters.

While the relationship between Allison and Will Barrett marches
on its way to maturity, the past still makes its intrusion on Will Barrett’s consciousness. After his physical recovery from harm he received when he fell down the cave, he leaves Allison’s greenhouse making his way to his Mercedes. There in his car he suffers from a flashback this time to a trip in the summer after the hunting accident. He and his father had traveled together, to the West Coast as his father attempted to become “pals”. Now he realizes that even at the age of thirteen, he knew that since his father could not defeat him by killing him, nothing could or can. “If you didn’t defeat me, old mole”, Will Barrett says, “loving father and death-dealer, nothing can, not wars, not this century, not the Germans” (p.270). Yet there is no absolute solution to his problem; if death is in the genes, in the heredity passed to him from his father and grandfather, then his struggle with enemy may not be successful. But a breakthrough is made and he knows the name of enemy - death, and its various names. Knowing the various names of death, Will Barrett will not submit to death because “To know the many names of death is also to know there is life. I choose life” (p.274). He accuses his father of giving into death. Naming death even grants power over the “death genes” that he fears he may have inherited from his father.

In spite that Will Barrett has acquired knowledge about death, there is no loosening of strong hold of the past on his mind. He still must struggle with “death genes” - that taint in his blood which seems
to lead the men in his family to suicide. In one of his spells, he drives his Mercedes up a tree cracking his head on the windshield. Leaving the car there, he wanders to a bus station where he falls into a conversation with a man travelling to Georgia. It is the same place where his father had made his first suicide attempt so Will Barrett has to go there to make 'repetition' or 'return'. In the bus to Georgia, Will Barrett struggles to choose among death and life, past and future. He is not sure whether it is his life that he had left in the Georgia swamps, or death which he had escaped there. Only returning to the scene can tell him but the memory of Allison calls him back. Now his going to Georgia mean "He was loosing something. Something of his as solid and heavy and sweet as a pot of honey in his lap was being taken away" (p.297). Though the physical return to childhood place never occurs in this novel as does in its predecessors, Will Barrett returns to the place in his memory.

Towards the end of the novel, Will Barrett confronts the past finally in order to relieve it. As he approaches the greenhouse, he symbolically kicks down the half-rotten fence that had set off memory of his father's suicide, thus preparing himself for final confrontation with his past. He takes Allison to the Holiday Inn in order to save her from her mother and sheriff who are due to come to take her. Leaving Allison in the inn, Will Barrett goes to consult with his trusted friend about
Allison’s legal competence. He admits to defend her legal competence in the court. On returning to the Holiday Inn, Will Barrett climbs into bed with Allison who is soundly sleeping. He cannot sleep because he is visited by his father who tempts him to suicide with increasingly most inviting arguments. The father implores Will Barrett “Come, it’s the only way, the one quick sure exit of grace and violence and beauty” (pp. 336-337). When Will Barrett persists in saying “No” to his allurements for suicide, the father tells the son that you will do it “because you’ve got my genes and you know better” (p. 337). Thereupon Will Barrett says “Yes”, and then father asks him to go to his car, get the shotgun and Luger and walks carrying them to the edge of the gorge. Standing there, in a surprised move, he flings the guns into space and turns to go back to Allison, not even waiting for them to hit bottom. Minutes later, the lovers finally make love for the first time, and Ero’s victory over Thanatos is complete. At the close of THE SECOND COMING, Will Barrett is exorcised the past relating to his father’s suicide by allowing the memory to return and then confronting it to put it aside.

Following its predecessors, Percy’s last novel THE THANATOS SYNDROME* (1987) describes the theme of the past and the Southern


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character in its own way. The novel reintroduces Dr. Tom More as a narrator - protagonist however changed to a certain degree and his reappearance makes the novel sequel to LOVE IN THE RUINS. As a changed character, Tom More is not an alcoholic but an older and wiser Southerner in his fifties having acute sense of past with concurrent sense of ending. The Southerners' sense of ending or, their sense of death or, their sense of apocalypse claims its root in the defeat in the Civil War which affected the religious pattern in the South adding to it the element of apocalypse. More importantly, the Southerner’s response to the ‘modern mind’, which is the embodiment of the change followed the Civil War, accompanies terror. They see in modern mind what Cash calls “the Faustian hell-compact, a gigantic conspiracy to crush truth out of the world, loose the beast in man, and strip them of their ancient sway.”16 Tom More’s view of the modern mind is not different from what Cash describes; he sees Dr. Bob Comeaux and Van Dorn as modern avtar of Faust who are engaged in a conspiracy against society. As a doctor, gentleman of “Feliciana” country - a distinctive region - Tom More discharges his duty to his patients up to the level of a doctor and a gentleman. He knows how to act in a given situation that is the foremost trait of a gentleman. Bob Comeaux appreciates this trait of Tom More saying that “You’re the proper Southern gent who knows how to act,” and adds “You have style..”(p.347). When Tom More senses
the conspiracy of Bob Comeaux and Van Dorn against the people, he
sets out to save the people at any cost he will have to pay.

The novel opens with the protagonist noticing, “something
strange is occurring in our region” (p. 3) just after he is released from
prison where he served time for selling drugs to truck drivers. During
his two years stay in prison, Tom More learns about the present age
including many other things. What he learns of the present age is, in a
sense, his diagnosis of the present civilization based on his study of
history. His reading a new history of the Battle of Somme enables him
to conclude that the two battles, the Battle of Somme and the Battle of
Verdun, are “events marking the beginning of a new age” which might
be described as the “the age of thanatos” (p. 87). Tom More’s obsession
with the Stedman history evokes in him the sense of ending which lasts
throughout the novel. This is clearly stated towards the end of the novel
when he goes on a trip to the Disney World with his wife and children.
There he reads Stedman in the car when he comes out in the delightful
people, he reacts “I experience the sensation that the world really ended
in 1916 and that we’ve been living in a dream ever since” (p. 339). With the
new knowledge that he has acquired in the prison, Tom More can see
symptoms producing death in society that Percy calls the thanatos
syndrome. What else Tom More learns in the prison is “a certain
detachment” and a “low-grade curiosity” which in fact not only enables
him “to notice small things” around but also to carry out a search leading to the cause of the things \( (p.67) \). The small things Tom More notices are related to his patients in whom he sees certain personality changes. His old patients who earlier suffered from depression, anxiety, phobias, now display “a curious flatness of tone” \( (p.68) \) or, as he says at one point, “They’ve all turned into chickens” \( (p.90) \). No more high exaltations and morning terror for them. Even in his wife Ellen, Tom More sees a definite change. She had become materialistic, acquisitive, hard drinking and more competitive at bridge. His other women patients show changes in their sexual habits presenting and exhibiting other signs of estrus behavior. Considering all these changes in the patients, Tom More asks “Is this a syndrome? If so, what is its etiology?” The syndrome that Tom More mentions here is the thanatos syndrome and he attempts to find out its cause.

Fired by curiosity and concern for the patients, Tom More undertakes a search to track the mystery of the thing. The search includes his horizontal as well as vertical journey to different places exploring and exposing, satirically, modern man’s dream of perfection. As a detective in a mystery tale, Tom More searches the truth slowly as he solves the puzzle piece by piece. The search is marked by Tom More’s intense individualism, a trait of Southern behavior, because though he seeks help from Dr. Lucy Lipscomb and other, he never
speaks about it to her, or anyone in the novel. His search is more personal so heroic; he is purely self-asserting from the beginning to the end in the search. Above all, having the sense of the past and the sense of ending, Tom More carries out the search more successfully. Tom More’s first visit to Father Rinaldo Smith in the tower - a vertical journey - reminds him of his search and makes him known of the situation down in society. In their meeting, Father Smith tells Tom More that he can no longer preach because the words do not signify; they are deprived of their meaning. He has gone to the top of tower because he is angry at the people below for living in wickedness, falling away from faith and into the hands of Satan who is waiting for the final war to send him millions of souls. Father Smith mistakes Tom More for a member of doctors to turn their backs on the back of Hippocrates and kill millions of useless people, unborn children, born malformed children “for the good of mankind” (p.127). Father Smith’s comment is not so much directed at Tom More as at Bob Comeaux and Van Dorn. Before Tom More leaves the tower, Father Smith tells him “I think you’re on to something extremely important”, and at the same time warns him “There are dangers down there, Tom, you may not be aware of” (p.131). But Tom More has sensed something similar to that Father smith wants to tell him and in order to define it, he has undertaken a search.
Tom More's visit to the plantation Pantherburn - a horizontal journey - owned by his cousin Dr. Lucy Lipscomb turns out as his visit to the world of the past. On the way to Lucy, the green and pleasant geography reminds Tom More of the past of the rich English planters who painted the birds and taught dancing for living. Back toward the river and Grand Mer, there is a great widening of the river into a gulf where the English landed with their slaves from the Indies, took up indigo farming, and lived the happy life of Feliciana. Tom More's memory of the past is not nostalgic but the life wish of the old people, he thinks, is worth to appreciate in a world governed by death wish. There stands semblance of the old world, Lucy's plantation Pantherburn with its two thousand acres; its façade, gallery and public rooms for living and dining are decorated in the old style with heavy silverware and worn oriental rugs. Then there is uncle Hugh Bob with his memories of the past and of the Second World War. He tells Tom More how the Yankees stole everything in the house except the silver inset handles and how General Van Dorn slept in Dupre's room in Pantherburn overnight. He cherishes the memory of his experience in World War Second in Germany where he lived with a German girl for three weeks. Uncle's memory of the war and the German girl prepares a way for Tom More's later comment on how romanticism made the Southerners to view war as romantic adventure.
Tom More's encounter with Lucy brings forth much of his mind. He sees Lucy as a reminder of the past, of the Southern women in old novels - a splendid girl, not beautiful but full of teasing and high spirits. To him she is a Southern Belle, the traditional model of feminine behavior in the old South, in a white-columned mansion. He tells, "She reminds me of a chatelaine, the ole, miss of Pantherburn" (p.146). Her sight and her smell evoke the bygone days in the form of déjà vu in Tom More's consciousness. The form of déjà vu, which overtakes him in company of Lucy has to do with, he tells, cars, women, girls, youth, the past and the old U.S.A. Though Lucy retains much of the Old South, she does not avert the idea of the New South. The plantation Pantherburn is decorated in the old style but back in the private windowless room, Lucy has well lighted lab stocked with computers. And only here with the help of Lucy and her computer, Tom More makes a real breakthrough in his search. He and Lucy conclude that the patients may have heavy sodium (Na-24) poisoning because the poisoning pattern in Feliciana follows the water supply. Van Dorn's Grand Mer nuclear power plant had heavy sodium reactor and it is less than a mile from water intake. Tom More hypothesizes that the reactor is being leaked into the water or, as Lucy says, being added deliberately to the water. The effect of the heavy sodium on the patients is very frightening; there is decrease of human symptoms such as anxiety, depression, stress,
insomnia, suicidal tendencies and chemical dependence. Essentially
these characters have become more normal psychologically, but less
human as Tom More tells Lucy, “Think of it as a regression from a
stressful human existence to a peaceful animal existence” (p.180).
Although heavy sodium seems to create some positive, attractive
results, it ultimately produces a kind of death - a death of human spirit.

Being a gentleman and knowing how to act, Tom more sets out to
see the Ratliff intake in order to be certain about it. His journey from the
plantation Pantherburn to Grand Mer with Virgil Bon and Uncle Hugh
Bob in a boat is yet another occasion for Tom More to review the
Southern past. As their boat passes over the water of Lake Mary, Tom
More tells that this clear stretch of water once was a Grand Mer where
the boats were loaded with cotton and indigo and unloaded with grand
piano, port wine, even one or two books of Shakespeare, John Bunyan
and later Sir Walter Scott by the hundreds. He adds how Walter Scott
was “as inevitable as the King James Bible” in every plantation house
and the same “Walter Scott sending all these English-Americans to war
against the Yankees as if they were the Catholic nights in Ivanhoe gone
off to fight the infidel” (p.181). What Percy wants to emphasize here is the
fact that the Southerner’s craving for death in the form of their
willingness to fight is a direct result of the imported romanticism of
Scott.
Tom More's interview, a part of his search, with Bob Comeaux after Tom's release from the jail where he was temporarily held, is significant because it reveals that the addition of heavy sodium to water is a means to fulfill Comeaux's dreams of ideal society, and also his rationalization of that dream as the restoration of the Southern past. Dr. Bob Comeaux, the modern Faust tells Tom More that dosing the people with the heavy sodium produces tremendous results in the society as if he waves a magic wand and change the society overnight. "What would you say if I gave you magic wand you could wave over there ... and overnight you could reduce crime in the streets by eighty-five percent?" (p. 191), Comeaux asks. An experimental project Blue Boy - a magic wand - headed by Bob Comeaux is aimed at eradicating social problem and Comeaux comes out with its results. Since the start of the project the child abuse has been reduced by eighty-seven percent, hospital admission for depression, chemical dependence and anxiety by seventy - nine percent. The heavy sodium does affect the female biology effecting the regression from menstrual cycle to estrus. While the female human is in heat seventy - five percent of the time, the percentage falls to nine percent for the female mammal. Not only is this "a marvelous built - in natural population control" (p. 196) but more significantly it means the end of useless sex, as modern Faust describes it, "goodbye pills, rubbers, your friendly abortionist. Goodbye promiscuity,
goodbye sex” (p.197). Thus Bob Comeaux’s Blue Boy project aims at “improving the quality of life for the individual” (p.190), and seeks solutions to all problems through technology.

What we learn from Bob Comeaux is his concern for “the decay of the social fabric” (p.265). His dream is social, sometimes cultural and even sectional too. To him the ideal society is the society of the Old South in which people knew their way of life. In a sense, his dream is regressive, looking backward rather than forward. That Comeaux’s dream has to do with the restoration of the Southern mythical past is obvious in his talk with Tom More. “Tom, would you laugh at me if I told you what we’ve done is restore the best of the Southern Way of Life? Would think that too corny?” (p.197), Comeaux asks. In his attempt to restore the elegance and graciousness of the Southern way of life, Bob Comeaux admits stratified society in which every stratum is separated. In this context, the social disruption is the evil, the plague that threatens the order of society. For the social disruption Bob Comeaux holds the blacks responsible as it is recognizable in his use of stereotypical image, such as “young Punks”, “rape your daughter” (pp.197-198). The Southerners have developed a rape complex which implies there is a subconscious fear that the white woman will be raped by the black. The restoration of the old order of society of the South clearly means that the blacks and the white thrash must return to their stratum where they were
belonged. Bob Comeaux’s dream makes safe return of the blacks if not to their African origins but to the practice of their native art. Thus restricting the blacks to their native art, Bob will have an orderly society that he dreams of.

The nature of Bob Comeaux’s dream of restoring the best of the Southern way of life is again revealed in his remarks to Tom More who is temporarily back in prison. Comeaux says. “There is still grace, style, beauty, manners, civility left in the world. It’s not all gone with the wind” (p.265). Here the words grace, style, etc. are the best of the Southern way of life and the reference to Margaret Mitchell’s Gone with the Wind echoes Ashley’s yearning for a motionless society. What Bob Comeaux wants to suggest to Tom More is that if the disruptive elements be controlled and immobilized, then the antebellum society could be restored in the present. Bob Comeaux has his dream of an orderly society sanctioned even by Jefferson, as it is clear here, “We’re not talking about ‘old massa’ and his niggers. We’re not talking about Uncle Tom. We’re talking about Uncle Tom Jefferson and his yeoman farmer and yeoman craftsman” (p.198). Here, Bob Comeaux modifies the view of Jefferson who never made the black the yeoman craftsman. But he does not bother about the facts. Instead he refers to Jefferson what he thought Jefferson was. The sole purpose of Comeaux is that his dream must be sanctioned by actual history and thereby to make Tom More to join the
Blue Boy project. He asks Tom More to help him to stop the ongoing "decay of the social fabric" (p.265). However, Tom More sees Comeaux's dream of restoration of the mythical past as a sham since the Blue Boy project effects the symbolic death of human race and he would flout his appeal. Tom More finds that the language of the patients is diminished and with it diminished their being. The consciousness which is the locus of the past, is damned by Comeaux as "the scourge and curse of life on this earth" (p.195). Tom More fears the danger of breaking the life of the people loose from its past moorings.

The Blue Boy project of Comeaux also encompasses a component of real, physical death. By accepting euthanasia (literally "easy death") of the terminally ill, they might to easily move to euthanasia of abused infants and unwanted elderly. Here the scientists' aim of improving quality of life harks back to the Nazi dream of perfection that Father Smith warns Tom More in the tower. In his confession, Father Rinaldo Smith tells Tom More about his meeting the most prominent psychiatrists and eugenicists of the Weimer Republic in Germany. Then he never thought that these cultivated, scholarly men who in few years, would preside over the murders of countless numbers of the unfit in Hitler's hospital and death camps. During his tale of his experience in Germany, Father Smith asks Tom More "Do you think we're different from the Germans?" (p.256). With this question, Father Smith wants to
communicate a message that the attempts of the scientists, whether they are Germans or Americans, to better society will inevitably end up with killing the innocents.

Father Smith carries the burden of the past related to his experience in Germany. While in Germany, Rinaldo was impressed by Fascism because “Fascism was then thought of as a bundle of sticks, faces, stronger than one stick and not necessarily a bad thing”\(^{(p.241)}\), Father Smith tells. As Rinaldo’s interest grew in Nazi ideal, he felt admiration for his cousin Helmut who joined the Nazi force. Father Smith admits that if he had been German and not American, he would have joined Helmut. This is the burden Father Smith carries until he confesses it to Tom More. For his fascination to the Nazi ideal, Father Smith holds his own father responsible; his father’s self-indulgent romanticism led him to idolize the iron-willed young Nazi Helmut Jager. Father Smith tells that his father was “a type familiar in the South, not successful in life but an upholder of culture, lofty ideals, and the higher things”\(^{(p.241)}\). Being a romantic, his father was a music lover and when in Germany, he was invited to join the chamber-music group of Dr. Jager and his friend. They played Brahms, while his father at piano tears in his eyes. Fascination with Germany has a part of the Southerners consciousness. Father Smith makes it clear when he says “being a student at Heidelberg was as much a part of the Southern
tradition as reading Sir Walter Scott”(p.240). Fascination with the Germans led the Southerners to imitate them as it is proved in Father Smith’s case and in Comeaux’s Blue Boy project.

Father Smith’s association of the scientist’s ideal of improving upon the society with Hitler’s gas chamber parallels with what Tom more thinks of the Blue Boy project. Exploring the mystery, Tom More comes upon the fact that John Van Dorn assists Comeaux in his social engineering by supplying the heavy sodium. If Dr. Comeaux is a modern Faust, then Van Dorn is his modern servant, Wagner assisting his master. According to the local paper, Van Dorn is a Renaissance man; computer wizard, world-class contract bridge player, headmaster of an exclusive school. He claims to have been a Southerner in the neighboring state of Mississippi, but Tom More sees there is something a bit stagy about his manner and speech. On a fishing trip when Van Dorn tells Tom More that he is back to his “own people” and a “way of life”(p.59) thereupon Tom More reacts “If there is such a thing as a Southern way of life, part of it has to do with not speaking of it”(p.60). The fishing trip provides Tom More with an occasion to judge and deflate Van Dorn’s Southernism. Van Dorn recently bought the plantation house, Belle Ame, named from the French “beautiful soul”, and it is restored to its antebellum splendor. The physical plant at Belle Ame is beautiful and so typical of everyone’s image of a Southern
plantation that has been used as a set for several movies. Now Belle Ame is used to run a public school founded "to revive the traditional Southern academy founded on Greek ideals of virtue"(p.214). But in reality, behind its façade, the school children are molested sexually by making them drink the contaminated water. The plantation house, Belle Ame provides contrast to the plantation house, Pantherburn; one is fake, the other is genuine.

The master of the plantation school, Van Dorn, instead of teaching the Greek ideals of virtue, advocates the sexual liberation of civilization and that is the ultimate goal. His heroes are Eistein with his repressed Jewish sexuality and Don Juan with his sexual frivolity. He claims to have gotten to the origins of love and affection by initiating young children into sex. Van Dorn is more villainous than Comeaux. Tom More and Lucy discover that the children in the school are not only being given the treated water, but also been sexually abused. They also discover the child pornography that Van Dorn and his curious band of associates have produced. Tom More learns that the school children at Belle Ame outperform themselves physically and intellectually but lost spiritually. Once the syndrome is defined, Tom More can see the danger looming over the young children as well as over the society, both need to be helped. He knows the dangerous consequences of the social engineering, which is nothing but a
conspiracy against society. He prepares to raid the Belle Ame with the help of Virgil and Uncle in order to seek the final evidence of Van Dorn’s worst proclivities to foil his scheme. At Belle Ame, Tom More as a good cowboy, forces Van Dorn and his company to drink the modal sodium. What follows is the funniest episode in the novel in which the tutors revert to ape behavior, going about on all fours, picking lice and grooming one another. Creating a concrete evidence of proclivities, Tom More successfully routs out the secret scheme of Bob Comeaux and Van Dorn.
ENDNOTES


5. Allen, p.35.


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