CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

I THE PROBLEM MADE IMPLICIT

i The Problem

"What a thing is man! Among all wonders
The wonder of the world is man himself."
Sophocles

The plays of Sophocles reflect on human life and convey how mysterious man's life is not only to himself but also to others. In his works he visualizes man as courageous, strong and heroic in nature who makes his way through rising waves of the angry sea and who controls savage brutes and wild animals; the man who can protect himself from the "arrowy rain" and "the chill of the frozen sky," who speaks, thinks and the one who is competent to be "A match for all things" except death; he, who "climbeth on high" through his wisdom and also "falleth" down low due to the same wisdom.¹ Such a wonderful creature is man whose life is full of mysteries. This view of man by Sophocles has resemblance to the view of man, Walker Percy, a southern novelist of America, seems to hold. "For Percy and for Sophocles man is strangest of all, with strangeness (deimon) that is monstrous, overwhelming, violent."² Both, Percy and Sophocles, differentiate man from other creatures on the basis of man's strangeness.

Walker Percy's vision of man is very well explained in one of his books entitled *The Message In The Bottle* with a subtitle *How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, And What One Has To Do With The Other*. The
subtitle itself indicates the mystery in the nature of man. This book is a compilation of Percy's linguistic and philosophical essays through which he tries to define man by narrating certain inherent qualities of man which differentiate man from other animals.

In his philosophical essays he raises several questions about man which reveal the ambiguity and mystery in the nature of man. One wonders why man, who is the only speaking and intelligent animal of all the animals on this earth, behaves in such a manner. Percy asks:

"Why do people often feel bad in good environment and good in bad environment? Why is war man's greatest pleasure? Why have more people been killed in the twentieth century than in all other centuries put together?"

A series of such questions really puzzles a Percy reader. Almost all these questions reveal that man is an image of contradictions and if one intends to understand man then one has to study the contradictory nature of man. In his study of man through man's behaviour Percy has made an assumption "that the proper study of man is man and that there does not presently exist a theory of man" (MB.10). After a detailed study of man he finds that apart from other qualities mystery, ambiguity, and uncertainty are the immanent qualities of man which are closely connected with his fate. What makes man a wonderful creature is his fate as fate is "a fact of life." James Hastings rightly points out that each and every man is a victim of his fate:

Note: All subsequent references to this edition will be abbreviated as "MB." with page numbers.
"... it is the absolutely inscrutable power to which all men are subject, and may be either personified or represented as impersonal."

The present thesis aims to explore the nature of man and the ironic nature of his fate through a detailed study of the protagonists of Walker Percy's novels. The thesis will elaborately use Percy's essays compiled in the book *The Message In The Bottle*. These essays denote the philosophical set up of Percy's mind. In fact his protagonists, the progeny of his mind, have inherited the same philosophical background as a fact of their lives to live within the time and the space they are provided for. An attempt has been made in this study to trace Percy protagonists as the representatives of the contemporary American society. Efforts have also been made to explain the concept of 'irony of fate' with the supporting explanations of the concept of 'fate,' and the concept of 'irony' to prove that the latter is always involved in the first and both are combinely visualized in the life of man. Irony is a characteristic of fate. In the concept of "Irony of Fate" the form and matter of "fate" are united together. Fate, an abstract aspect of life, is made concrete and knowledgeable only through irony. Thus the matter can be realized only through the form. A detailed study of the devices exploited by Percy to sketch his protagonists with ironic fate is also intended here.

**ii  Review of Criticism**

Inspite of vast critical literature published on the writings of Walker Percy after the publication of his first novel *The Moviegoer* in 1961 no critic either from his native country or from abroad has studied intensively the protagonists of Percy's novels from the point of view they are studied in this
thesis. In the early stages of Percy's career as a novelist most of his critics attacked his works severely for the technique of his writings. One obvious reason for this kind of criticism was the philosophical stuff loaded in his works which the common readers find difficult to digest. But if one decides to brood over the ideas he has expressed in his works one moves closer to walker Percy; one likes to read and reread his works to understand the mystery of life in modern times. At present he is recognised as one of the famous novelists of the South in America. His readers are spread all over the world. Not only in America but also in many countries of the world like Germany, France, Japan, Spain, Norway, Sweden, Hungary, Italy, Rumania, Turky, and India people read him passionately. Massive critical publications which have outnumbered Percy's own writings is an indication of his wide popularity.

Critics have focused on different aspects of Percy's writings like the technical devices, the influence of the European philosophers on his writings, the biographical insertions, the role of Christianity in shaping his writings, and his southern connections. Yet many aspects of his writings remain to be illuminated for his works have as many facets as human life has. Of course, it is difficult here to record each and every critical work pertaining to walker Percy's writings but a brief survey of major book-length critical works and collections of critical articles is presented in support of the argument in this study. In fact, no other Percy critic has intensively studied the protagonists of Percy's novels with a purpose to reveal their ironic fate though it has been a major concern of this novelist in building up his main characters.

Martin Luschei's *The Sovereign Wayfarer, Walker Percy's Diagnosis of the Malaise* (1972) has been a remarkable study on Walker Percy's works. This book appeared in 1972 when Walker Percy was at the middle of his
career with the completion of his first three novels, *The Moviegoer*, *The Last Gentleman*, and *Love in the Ruins*, and a good number of essays-some of which were later on compiled in *The Message in the Bottle*. By that time several articles on Percy's writings had found their place in the literary journals of South America-disclosing various dimensions of his writings to his readers. But as J. Donald Crowley has rightly stated that it is with Luschei's critical appraisal of Percy's works "that this criticism can be said to have come of age."5

Luschei in his study claims that the theme of Percy's novels is to present man as a wayfarer, a pilgrim, who is always placed in a predicament. There are many gaps, abstractions, in the life of man which can be experienced by man himself but which can not be either met or explained by science. These gaps reveal mystery in man's life. At the heart of this mystery lies malaise, the fate of man. And Walker Percy is interested in disclosing the mystery in man's life, his feeling of uprootedness, estrangement, and anxiety. Thus Luschei is partially relevant to the argument of the present thesis. However Luschei takes only the first three of Percy's novels for analysis.

Robert Coles, a child psychiatrist at the Harvard University and the author of *Children of Crisis*, takes Walker Percy "as more than a novelist and essayist .... a person who helps the reader think altogether differently about life, a person, too, through whom one can recognize spiritual comrades ...."6 In the introductory chapter of his book entitled *Walker Percy: An American Search* (1978) he states how his coming across an essay, "The man on the Train," by Walker Percy turned out to be a fateful moment in his life. Robert Coles is highly influenced by the ideas of Paul Tillich who insists upon "the mystery of things, the strange and fateful 'moments' .... that make such differences in our lives."7 His encounter with Percy's first novel *The Moviegoer* too, is described
as a fateful moment that comes to his rescue in his search for life's meaning. He writes that with every fresh reading of Percy's first novel he discovered something new in it. It helped him in providing a ground for philosophical speculations and in arriving at the proper conclusions while working on five volumes of his work *Children of Crisis*.

Coles further states that he grasped the relevance of Percy's novels from the contradictions, and the existential facts that surround human life. The first section of Coles's book concentrates on the development of Percy's philosophical ideas particularly during the years after his graduation. In this section he points out how Percy tilts towards Kierkegaard, particularly in his adoption of the techniques of 'irony' and 'satire'. He illustrates how the tension on Percy's mind, and his turn to Kierkegaardian philosophy become obvious in the characterization of his novels. He writes that the entire direction of Percy's thinking about the nature of man in all the four novels can be summed up in short.

"He can not really be understood by a sociology of motivations but only by a larger view of man which takes account of what a man is capable of and what he can fall prey to."*8

Jac Tharpe's *Walker Percy* (1983), a book-length study of Walker Percy's works, opens up new vistas in Percy criticism. It also provides a different angle for the critics to review their criticism of Percy's novels. He remarks that most of his critics have misinterpreted Percy's writings because of the writer's belief in Roman Catholic faith. He further states that the main theme of Percy's novels is man, "and alongwith man, love, sex and religion are his interests in all his novels."*9 Tharpe emphasises more on religion and moral degradation rather
than on philosophy and revolt in Percy's fiction. His work consists of ten chapters, each chapter being an independent essay on a separate topic.

John Edward Hardy's *The Fiction of Walker Percy* (1987) follows a different 'line of inquiry' in the interpretation of Percy's novels. Unlike other critics he deviates his criticism of Percy's novels from Percy's biography. Contrary to other critics he makes efforts "to ensure our seeing at last how different the fiction is from the 'real life' story, if not to explain or account for the one in terms of the other." Hardy argues that the source of Percy's novels is a book entitled *Lanterns on the Levee* by William Alexander Percy, Percy's foster father. He analyses Percy's novels in support of his argument. But his argument can not be proved valid. Even if it is taken for granted that Percy's art imitates other art, one has to relate the other art somewhere to the reality of life. It means even by imitating other art Percy's novels imitate nothing else but life. The art which does not resemble life can not last longer and attract readers. If Percy's novels were not true to life they would not have gained increasingly wide popularity among his readers.

Mary K. Sweeney's critical analysis of Percy's fiction in her work *Walker Percy and the Post Modern World* (1987) draws out the plight of the post-modern man in the portrayals of Percy's characters. The book evaluates the change that took place in Percy's attitude towards science while he was recovering from tuberculosis. It also discloses how Percy's characters are lost in the scientific concept of "Mass man."

*Understanding Walker Percy* (1988) by Linda Whitney Hobson is mainly a Kierkegaardian approach to Percy's novels. Hobson introduces in the first section of her book the major events in Percy's life to reveal the chaos or the evil force in the mind of the author which directs him to pour the same in the
lives of his characters. This section further provides a short introduction to the novels of Walker Percy and the influence of Kierkegaardian philosophy, particularly Percy's adoption of Kierkegaard's three spheres of life-aesthetic, ethical and religious-in delineating his characters. She further explains Percy's "hurricane theory," the moments of crises which enable Percy's characters to free themselves from everydayness and come to the realities of their lives. Her analysis of Percy's novels in the other sections of the book is based on her argument developed through the first section. She studies the major characters from Percy's novels in the light of Kierkegaardian philosophy.

Mary Deems Howland's study of Walker Percy's novels which began in the form of "a dissertation under the direction of one of Percy's most perceptive and untiring readers, Lewis A. Lawson" found shape in a book entitled The Gift of the Other: Gabriel Marcel's Concept of Intersubjectivity in Walker Percy's Novels (1990).11 In this work she points out how Walker Percy has been gaining wide popularity among the readers from the younger generation for his being "a truly contemporary" writer "perfectly capturing the nuances of our times."12 Howland focuses on the inflow of Gabriel Marcel's idea of intersubjectivity into the fiction of Walker Percy. Her work is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter elucidates the influence of Marcel alongwith the influence of other European philosophers on Percy and introduces Marcel's idea of intersubjectivity. The subsequent six chapters manifest how Percy's novels can be interpreted in light of Marcel's philosophy. This work adds one more dimension to the study of Percy's fiction.

Walker Percy; Books of Revelation (1991) by Gary M. Ciuba is a latest critical appraisal of Percy's novels from the point of view of Christian ideals. Ciuba's work illustrates that the sufferings of Percy's characters are
symbolical of the sufferings of the contemporary Americans and these sufferings indicate that they are nearing doom. Percy's characters strive to come out of the sufferings and escape the doom. But during the course of the pilgrimage they lose their path and travel far away from their true selves. The only way that remains for them to recover from the mishap is to come back to their true selves through revelation. Thus, for Ciuba, Percy's characters, or the contemporary Americans, can save themselves and their nation only by following the path of revelation. In his critical analysis of Percy's novels Ciuba details the situations and factual events in the lives of Percy's characters which manifest their sufferings in this chaotic world and also their successful attainment of revelation by keeping themselves in the same world but being not of it.

A very recent biographical work on Walker Percy, Pilgrim in the Ruins, A Life of Walker Percy (1992) by Jay Tolson, is a ready reference on the biographical information of the novelist. This book provides to the readers with the history of Percy family. It describes major events in the lives of Percy's parents and his foreparents. This work presents detailed information on Percy's life history right from his birth and childhood till his death.

Rev. Dr. George Madathiparambil is probably the first Indian scholar to complete his doctoral dissertation on Walker Percy's works. His book entitled Prophecy in American Fiction; A Study of the Novels of Walker Percy with a foreword by a renowned Percy critic Lewis A. Lawson is based on his Ph.D. dissertation which he submitted to the Catholic University of America, Washington D.C., (U.S.A) in 1981. This work displays the prophetic role Percy has discharged in his fiction similar to that of the role played by prophets in the Old Testament. Madathiparambil acknowledges the two-fold message that Walker Percy's novels manifest in his attack on the materialistic way of life and
in his propagation of a New Testament image of redemption that Percy's characters envision. In his critical analysis of Percy's novels he makes sincere efforts to prove "what is very distinctive about Percy's fiction is that he has combined in them qualities that are until then thought impossible to be entitled philosophy, religion and modernity." There the work consists of four chapters in addition to an introduction by the author.

There are some books which are partially devoted to the criticism of Percy's works. Three of them need to be mentioned here. The Past in the Present: A Thematic Study of Modern Southern Fiction (1981) by Thomas Daniel Young, and Another Generation; Southern Fiction Since World War-II (1984) recognize the preeminence of Percy among the other southern writers and the influence of southern background upon Percy's art. Three Catholic Writers of the Modern South (1985) by Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr. groups Percy with the other Catholic converts, Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon and establishes resemblance among the three writers in carrying further "the Old South's Stoic Tradition" in their writings.

Two collections of interviews edited by Lewis A. Lawson under the titles Conversations With Walker Percy (1985), and much fresher one More Conversations With Walker Percy (1993) "make(s) ready at hand a potpourri of anecdote and opinion that relates the biographical and the fictional." These collections bring the readers close to the novelist, they attempt to explain problems that arise while reading his novels.

A massive publication of critical articles on Percy's works during the last quarter of this century made the editors feel "an embarassment of riches and the limitations of space" when they undertook the job of compiling critical articles on Percy's works to outline the critical reception and recognition of his
works. Whatever collections of critical essays on Percy's writings have come out, they have definitely made Percy's works more accessible than it would have been otherwise possible.


*Walker Percy: Novelist and Philosopher* (1991), with a "Foreword" by Walker Percy, is a fresh anthology of original critical articles on Percy's works edited by Jan Nordby Gretlund, and Karl - Heinz Westrap. This
volume provides "a comprehensive contribution to a deeper understanding of Percy's work" covering the entire writings by Percy. It consists of twenty one fresh critical articles by renowned Percy critics. These articles are divided under four parts: "The Novelist", "Novelist and Regionalist", "Novelist and Existentialist", and "Novelist and Moralist."

In addition to all these book length critical studies and collections of critical essays there are innumerable critical essays and reviews of Percy's works written and published by Percy fans in various literary journals in America and abroad. It is highly impossible to record each and every critical essay published on Percy's works due to the limitations of this thesis but at the same time I cannot resist the temptation of referring to a few names of Percy fans and their critical essays which proved extremely helpful in my understanding of the basic concerns and themes of Percy's novels.

Lewis A. Lawson's critical essays present a critical breakthrough to Percy's writings on several fronts. These essays focus on Percy's connections with the Kierkegaardian existentialism and the interrelationship between Percy's essays and his novels. His essay "Walker Percy's Southern Stoic" explores Percy's concern with the ideals of his foster father, William Alexander Percy, who acted as a great stimulus for him in being a successful novelist. In an another critical essay, "Walker Percy, the Physician as Novelist," Lawson discloses how Percy's experience as a physician filter into his writings. His other essays peep into the family history and the past life of Percy to convey how Percy moves honourably from his family tradition and his own life to his works.

Alfred Kazin's "The Pilgrimage of Walker Percy" is a biographical criticism of Percy's work. William Dowie's "Walker Percy: A Sensualist
of Percy's criticism makes obvious that the concept of "Ironic of Fate" has not been studied thoroughly by any one of Percy's critics.

iii  Defining "Ironic of Fate"

In order to understand the literary meaning of the concept of "Ironic of Fate" it is obligatory to get acquainted with the meaning of `fate' and the meaning of `irony' as words and as concepts as they are used in literature. The concept of `fate' has acquired vast shades of meaning in literary discourse. It is a difficult task to restrict it to a particular idea or a set of ideas. Its scope is as vast as life itself. However, efforts have been made to interpret these concepts in their literary transformations.

The origin of the word `fate' is found in the Latin word *fatum* which means `that which has been spoken'. Originally the Latin word meant "a sentence or doom of the Gods." It has religious connotations as its meaning implies the prophetic declaration, an oracle or divine determination. *The Oxford English Dictionary* provides different meanings of the word "fate" as:

"1. The principal power or agency by which, according to certain philosophical and popular systems of belief, all events, or some events in particular are ultimately predetermined from eternity.

2.(a) The Goddess of fate or destiny ..... 

3. That which is determined or fated to happen

(a) .... predestined events.

(b) Of an individual, an empire, etc. The predestined or appointed lot; what a person, etc. is fated to do or suffer.

(c) In etymological sense: An oracle or portent of doom."
4. What will become of, or has become of (a) person or thing; ultimate condition, destiny, often in to decide, fix, seal one's fate. (b) Death, destruction, ruin. (c) An instrument of death or destruction. The Random House Dictionary sums up the principal meanings the word 'fate' has acquired.

1. Something that unavoidably befalls a person; fortune, lot.
2. The universal principle or ultimate agency by which the order of things is presumably prescribed; the decreed cause of events; time;
3. That which is inevitable, predetermined.
4. A prophetic declaration of what must be (oracle).
5. Death, destruction or ruin ....... The above dictionary meanings of the word 'fate' reveal how the word has been used in various contexts and how difficult it is to assign any particular meaning to the word 'fate.' The Greek thinkers, however, were the first to "peer into the depths of the universe with clearer gaze" to search out the reality and the abstract power of the universe and give them proper shape in the form of human ideas. They believed in the helplessness of man before the secret forces of nature or God. Some of them heroically resisted against the forces of nature even after being conscious of its reality; while others submitted to it by taking it as an unchallengeable law of nature. Socrates felt that "vice is intentional and man can not in justice be held blamable for acting to the best of his beliefs." Plato stated that man is made to be "the plaything of God." For Aristotle "Nature in its entirety was full of reason and did nothing in vain." He further states that "the system of cause and effect which makes up what is called 'nature,' has been and will be ... of eternal duration and is modified, only slightly if at all, by the two incalculable elements of chance and human will." According to Greek philosophers, thus, fate is decided according to the law of
nature which is similar to the law of physics which is eternal and unchallengeable. It is only Aristotle who provides some scope for the 'human will' and 'chance' to challenge the law of nature, though with futile efforts as the ultimate winner is not man but Nature or God.

In *The Encyclopedia of Religion* the meaning of fate is given as: "the idea that everything in human lives, in society, and in the world itself takes place according to a set, immutable pattern."\(^{27}\) *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* finds fate in the unity of human life with nature. "Fate, indeed, is precisely this unity apprehended as an inevitable necessity controlling all things; it is the absolutely inscrutable power to which all men are subject, and may be either personified or represented as impersonal."\(^ {28}\) Man becomes a victim of fate when his conscious acts are not in conciliation with the supreme will, or with the higher level of intellectual development when he begins to doubt the order of nature. Ardaser Sorabjee N. Wadia in his book *Fate and Free Will* defines fate as: "a belief that the order of things is unalterably fixed and established from the beginning of creation once and for ever, and that no power we know of, human or divine, can hasten, stay or retard even by a second this predetermined succession of events or deviate by a hair's breadth its fixed line of direction."\(^ {29}\)

The above definitions and explanations reveal that 'fate' is predestined, unpredictable, and inevitable; it makes human life either tragic or comic, fortunate or unfortunate and in whatever form it appears it is mysterious. "... the notion of fate, in whatever variation, language, or shade of meaning it occurs, always retains a basic element of mystery."\(^ {30}\) Unpredictability and inevitability of fate cause several contradictory and paradoxical events in the life of man as a result of which man's life becomes ironical.
"The contradictory outcome of events is ironical whether fortunate or unfortunate and whether the victim is an individual or a whole civilization."  

Thus the fate of man by its very nature is ironical. The irony of fate lies in the conflict between the two contradictory beliefs like abstract and concrete, good and evil, immanent and transcendent. It is similar to Schlegel’s idea of the concept of irony as: "the struggle between the absolute and the relative, the simultaneous consciousness of the impossibility and the necessity of a complete account of reality."  

A brief note on the meaning of the term irony will obviously clarify its relation to fate as fate is visualized only through irony,  

_The Oxford English Dictionary_ offers one of the meanings of the word 'irony' as:  

"A condition of affairs or events of a character opposite to what was, or might naturally be, expected; a contradictory outcome of events as if in mockery of the promise and fitness of things."  

_Random House Dictionary_ paraphrases the meaning of the word irony in short as: "(a) a technique of indicating, as through character or plot development, an intention or attitude opposite to that which is actually or ostensibly stated. (b) (esp. in contemporary writing) a manner of organizing a work so as to give full expression to contradictory or complementary impulses, attitudes etc; esp. as a means of indicating detachment from a subject, theme or emotion."  

One of the general meanings of the word 'irony' given in the same dictionary is: "an outcome of events contrary to what was or might have been expected."  

For the Greeks the word 'irony' meant "saying one thing and meaning the contrary."  

Jonathan Swift, the master of irony in English language, exploited irony "to describe his whole attitude of blame - by - praise
and praise - by - blame." I. A. Richards defines irony as: "... the bringing in of the opposite, the complementary impulses" in order to achieve a "balanced poise." Vasant A. Shahane while commenting on the aesthetics of irony says that irony is also "a means of contrasting reality from appearance, truth from falsehood, subtlety from shallowness." The above explanations denote that irony is either an expression or visualization of the contradictory or paradoxical beliefs, ideas, happenings or events in the life of man or in the universe.

Thus it is quite clear that the nature of fate and the nature of irony have close resemblance. While the first is the fact of life the other is the technique through which the ambiguous and mysterious facts of life, that is 'fate', are made concrete in a particular form. The matter and the form coordinate with each other. The nature of life is dissolved into a kind of art through 'irony', a skill that enriches the art to make it true to life. There is no man without fate and "without irony there is no art" as all arts depict life. Hence the fate of man which is basically ironic is presented to the audiences, the readers, and the viewers very realistically and effectively by applying the technique of irony in different forms of art, including literature.

II LITERATURE AND THE IRONY OF FATE

i Development of the Concept

The concept of 'Irony of Fate' has prevailed in literature right from the ancient age. It attained its zenith in the ancient Greek literature. Sophocles is considered to be a great exponent of the concept as he explicitly manifests this idea in the protagonists of his tragedies. His tragedies Oedipus Rex and its sequel Oedipus at Colonus reflect the life of a heroic person Oedipus, the king of
Thebs, as a victim of his ironic fate. He is an epitome of the sufferers of the ironic fate. According to the oracle Oedipus kills his father, Laius, and marries his mother, Jocasta, without his knowledge. The tragedy of his life begins when he realizes the truth of his life, and the tragedy reaches its climax when he decides to face the bitter truth like a hero.

The great tragedy of this Greek hero lies in his belief that Nature or God is a supreme power and man is free to act but his freedom is limited to God. Through the characters of Oedipus Sophocles points out that however clever and mighty a person may be he is always belittled by the force of Nature/God. "So great and yet so helpless, aiming so high and yet falling so short, a plaything of God and essentially divine." Indeed, Oedipus is unaware of his predetermined destiny. He does not know anything about his past, present, or future. He is free to act but his freedom is limited at every point by the circumstances and by his temperament which are knowingly or unknowingly inherited from the past. The only thing about future he knows is that he is going to die. He is unaware of the limitations of the human knowledge and the complexity of human action. Sophocles, like all Greeks before him, had faith in God and so he believed that the universe is controlled by God. In his tragedies the contrast between man and his hopes, fears, wishes and understandings; man and a dark inflexible fate make enough room for the depiction of the tragic fate of his heroes.

The life of man depicted in the medieval literature is quite different from the life of man illustrated in the ancient Greek literature. The ancient Greeks believed in the freedom of man to act; whereas the people of medieval age were bound by the divine will. The belief in the Christian principle of original sin was quite prominent during that era. It was believed that man, a fallen creature, is born to suffer and "the salvation of the individual is not the
human but the divine will."\textsuperscript{42} The first man Adam preferred self to God and so humanity inherited evil for which there is no salvation except man's total submission to God. It is not in the power of man to know what is 'good' and what is 'bad'; only God can discriminate good from bad. Man's duty is only to accept and not to resist what God has bestowed on him. Because of this submissive nature of man, and his willingness to suffer, the intensity of his tragic fate was reduced; there was no real occasion for terror in his life, as a result no serious tragedy was produced during this period. "In general, the Christian ritual pattern has no tragic potentialities until some element of uncertainty or doubt enters some sense of actual mystery in the mysteries."\textsuperscript{43} The tragedies that were produced during the medieval period extensively used the Christian myth whereas the Greek literature of the ancient age was free from the Christian myth.

During the medieval period the universe was divided into heaven and earth, God and Satan, eternal and temporal. Not only the universe but even man was also divided into body and soul. Man's body, the physical nature, with desires and instincts, had always been devil's playground. It was not only the devil but sometimes God also miraculously intervened in man's life which made his fate unpredictable. The concept of this dualistic nature of man and the universe and the concept that the fate of man is decided by God, began to vanish with the emergence of renaissance with the new scientific discoveries by the scientists like Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Newton and Einstein.

The new discoveries revealed that nature is ruled not by God but by the laws of nature. The complexities of nature were being gradually manifested to man. The supremacy of power in the universe shifted from God to the laws of nature. With that shift in power there was a shift in the idea of fate too. Human fate, it was argued, was not decided by God but rather by the
established laws of nature. This shift was a long process of hundreds of years in
the history of man's development. As a consequence the center of power in the
medieval age also shifted from church to individual. Man became more
powerful and he thought that he was the master of his own fate. But later on he
realized that what he thought was not a reality, it was an illusion.

With the advent of industrialization human life was surrounded
and threatened by the problems of urbanization, labour strikes, expansion of
slums, air pollution, imbalance of nature, centralization of capital, exploitation of
labour, and others. With all these problems man had to struggle for his existence.
As a result the image of man as a unified whole, being centered within himself,
was completely shattered. Man's attitude toward God and man was completely
changed. The impact of materialism and technology was so devastating on
human life that the possibilities of life seemed to gradually vanish.

ii The Changing American Sensibility

The scientific and biological discoveries as well as the philosophy
of human life akin to these discoveries which became popular as naturalistic
philosophy in Europe found its place in American literature by the end of the
nineteenth century. It was but natural then for the American literature to share
the European philosophy of the time with some American twist to it as
Americans in matter and spirit were mostly Europeans in origin. Hence, as
Charles Child Walcutt points out: "All literature is founded on some concept of
the nature of man" so the American literature was founded on the nature of
Americans who had inherited the European traditions and the European
philosophy.44 As the "colonists from Europe were the inheritors of a long and
elaborate mythoreligious traditions, one in which the primary mythic
consciousness had been submerged in a complex of social and literary conventions, hidden behind apparently arbitrary and nonfunctional rules and ornaments;"45 so they also were the inheritors of the scientific and philosophical growth that shaped the life of the Europeans during the transition period of their material and spiritual shift from the medieval to the modern period.

The American renaissance liberated reason and emotion from the traditional authority of the church. But puritanism, which had wide impact on the American society during that period, did not allow the Americans to be completely free from the traditional concept of sin. As a consequence the medieval concept of dualism continued to linger in the minds of Americans even after their shift from medievalism to modernism. "Monist theory that the instincts were divine could not remove old attitudes. It became easy to denounce frankness as sensationalism, as morbid, as a rejection of American optimism."

The transcendentalist belief in the union of spirit with matter or mind with body was shattered by the freedom of knowledge which enabled man to see a crack in the union; the crack got widened as he was free to gain more and more knowledge. The widening of the gap between the two extremes led man to pessimism. Thus, though the scientific discoveries, and the socio-economic theories relieved man from the supreme authority by making man's life a subject to the law, of nature; at the same time the freedom of knowledge he enjoyed enabled him to peep through the cracks in the law of nature to witness the mystery in man's life as Walcutt states:

"Then .... the worship of reason - nature gathered momentum as an assault on convention, on moral and social values hitherto unquestioned, that rested on the dualist religious authority of the past. It swept on into an affirmation of progress through knowledge of hard scientific fact, and then the fact
grew dark, inscrutable, overpowering, and man cowered under the threat of forces he could not control."

Thus the growing freedom and the clarity of thoughts brought more confusion and so more tension leading to despair. Cane Brinton rightly states: "Freedoms we have, broader than ever before but more than ever before... we abide restless in the midst of plenty."  

The concept of Naturalism in American literature became popular for pouring the scientific spirit into it to manifest mental tension. This mental tension of literary characters reveals the fate of Americans as Walcutt rightly points out: Naturalism "is rather a mode of presenting in realistic 'modern' forms the forces, microcosmic and macrocosmic, against which man has always tragically contended. Naturalism is the modern approach to Fate."  

This fate of present man in America is really tragic, not in the Greek heroic sense but in the sense that it reduces his dignity and generates a peculiar brand of pessimism. The advancement of science and technology has, in fact, proved that human intelligence is not necessarily the source of happiness. On the contrary the more knowledge man accumulates the more he suffers for the increased knowledge does not allow him to have faith in the things he felt to have. "We have discovered that faith does not come from knowledge, that knowledge is more likely to destroy faith or to make its exercises all but impossible."

iii The Southern Tradition

The southern part of America was considered as the most backward and unprogressive part of the United States. Southerners lived a life of poverty and suffered from a sense of defeat and failure during the early decades of this century. The wave of shift in culture that marked the change in American
literary tradition during the first half of the twentieth century swept over the whole America. Walker Percy, who was born and brought up in the South could not escape the cultural shift. Though the southern community was more conservative and traditional compared to the northern American community, it could not hold on to its old traditions in the sweep of the industrial and technological developments that charged human life all over Europe and most of the America with its vices and virtues.

Civil war, after the defeat of the old culture, had already opened the door wide for the new culture to enter South America. The World War I, and the World War II proved the power of industrialization and the ruthlessness of modern technology of war and its everlasting effects on the whole humanity on this planet. Along with the external changes the internal life of the southern community also got gradually changed because of its attraction towards the materialistic way of life. But still the southern culture maintained its identity and could be differentiated from non-southern culture because of some of its peculiar trends typical of the soil and life in the South. Though "The atomic explosions over Hiroshima and Nagasaki had blown the past out of the present" the southerners could not easily deviate themselves from their past. Their resistance to the process of modernisation to the most possible extent became a characteristic of their nature.

Louis D. Rubin, Jr. points out that the change took place rather late in the South compared to other parts of America. "Not until the twentieth century did the South feel importantly the effects of the industrialization that was changing the face of America." The agrarian, homogeneous, self-sufficient and orderly community, previously settled in small towns to which the southern writers belonged, was then emotionally broken and physically thronged in
metropolitan cities. After World War I the southern writers found the life of the southern community becoming more and more complex with the individuals transgressing the boundaries of community life to assert their own identity. Most of the popular southern writers travelled in the North as if the social change that was taking place in the South compelled them to do so. But they realized that their dream of city life was not a reality. They felt homesick but could not return to their homes in real sense. Louis D. Rubin, Jr. rightly remarks that a young southerner who travelled in the North "could not in some important ways go home again. For what he learned in the metropolis confirmed in his inability to accept the conditions of the southern life any more. He could not look upon things which, as a child, he had accepted without question, without being struck by their insufficiency." 53

The process of amalgamation of two cultures, the North and the South, had already started and there remained "less and less difference" between these two. In fact it began in the early decades of this century. The emergence of geniusses like Faulkner, whose writings prospered in universal terms during that period, marks the same fact. In an interview Walker Percy points out the closeness of the two cultures as: "... Jackson is more and more like Cincinnati and more and more like Atlanta ..... Now I think the two cultures have merged so that the South is more or less like the rest of the country." 54 But at the same time he does not reject the possibility of differentiating the South from the North: "But I think perhaps it is still possible to characterize the South as having a tradition which is more oriented toward history, toward the family... toward storytelling, and toward tragedy." 55 Tragedy or the pessimistic view of life is a characteristic of southern culture according to Percy.
Eudora Welty and Walker Percy both agree that their works are the products of the southern culture but it is a fact that both of them are as interesting to southerners as they are to northerners. Percy states that the advantage of his coming from the traditional southern culture is to get a better perspective of the main culture from outside as "it is possible to see the forest better from the outside than from the inside."56 Thus the southern writers of this century found themselves in a dual culture which shaped the protagonists of their novels.

This cultural change in the southern society manifests the split of mind and body of a southerner. He feels his inability to adjust either with the metropolis community or with the traditional native community. By living in southern society he feels that he is a southerner but mentally he is a nonsoutherner. This duality of life of a southerner is obvious not only extrinsically but also intrinsically in the gap between his spiritual and moral ways of life. And to show his identity, to come to his real self, he has to meet the gap between his two selves. He realizes that narrowing the gap between his two selves requires lot of mental torture and suffering. And this suffering of a twentieth century southerner indicates his fate in the present condition of the technologically developed society. The study of the protagonists of the novels of southern novelists of this century after World War I manifests this fate of the southern Americans. The highlights of the lives of the protagonists from the novels of Walker Percy's contemporary novelists are presented here to support the argument and to emphasise that the protagonists of Percy's novels, too, belong to the same tradition.

**Flannery O'Connor:** The ironic fate of modern everyday man is clearly manifested in the stories of Flannery O'Connor than in her novels. O'Connor
employs narrators in her stories as well as in her novels to tell the stories of her characters exposing intellectual and spiritual pride against the power of God. "Everything That Rises Must Converge" is one of her famous stories narrated by an ironic narrator.

Julian, the hero of the story, inspite of his mother's care and whole hearted help in educating and making him a competent person to live in this complex world, hates his mother. He thinks that she is prejudiced silly lady living in a fantasy world. He gives credit of his education to his own intellect and wants to be free from the bonds of love by which, according to him, his mother is totally blinded. He detaches himself from all the emotional bonds and tries to live an objective life. But the narrator remarks: "This was a kind of mental bubble in which he established himself when he could not bear to be part of what was going on around him." Julian feels that his mother's love and affection, her sense of duty have their roots in the traditional racial socialized views of old South. They are not the outcome of her true self. Thus Julian is obsessed by his mother's weaknesses. He wants to teach a lesson to the old lady by marrying himself to a black girl against her wish and the traditional make up of her mind. He intentionally tries "to break her spirit," a sort of punishment to her, for the pettiness of her mind. The story reaches its climax when Julian, instead of rescuing his mother from the deadly attack of a black woman, adds to her suffering by his taunitings: "you are not what you think you are," and pursuing her to come to her own senses to enter the new world. Soon after the incidence Julian's mother dies as much a victim of her own son's torture as of the beating of the black woman.

More ironical is the fact that Julian, who insists upon his mother to come to her senses, himself comes to his senses and realizes the truth only after
his mother's death. It is not he who teaches a lesson to his mother, rather he is
taught a permanent lesson by his mother's death realizing how he was blinded by
the pride of the intellect, by his own ignorance that inflicted cruelty on his
mother. And this realization ultimately leaves him at the entrance of "the world
of guilt and sorrow." The suffering on physical and mental, and spiritual and
moral levels shown in the character of Julian's mother and Julian indicates the
fate of man in America. The pride of intellect, the corruption of the heart, the
horror of sex, all these traits in man, that lead to his suffering, are found in the
writings of Flannery O'Connor.

**Shelby Foote:** A life long friend to Walker Percy and a historical novelist
exploits the themes of modern novels in his writings. Themes like isolation of
twentieth century man from his neighbours and from himself, or man's
separation from the historical and traditional antecedents find place in his novels.
In *Love in a Dry Season*, one of his novels, he narrates a very bleak picture of
American society just before the start of the World War II. In this novel man's
attraction towards money and the materialistic way of life outweighs his true
romantic love. Harley Drew, the protagonist of the novel, gets more attracted by
money rather than by the love and beauty of Amanda Barcraft, a younger
daughter of Major Malcom Barcraft. His love for Amanda subsides when he
finds Amy Carruthers, who is more advantageous to him particularly after his
discovery that Amanda's father has decided "to leave a bulk of his estate to a
military school he attended as a boy." The place infertile for production or
regeneration and the time so dry for love depicted in the novel are symbolical of
the twentieth century South. Foote narrates Bristol, a small town, as a main
character that represents the whole American community that has become totally
passive at the sufferings of its fellow human beings. It is just reduced to a witness to watch the Americans turning to psychic patients and the process of their dehumanization. Foote tries to suggest through this novel that the modern Bristol (the Americans) needs true love and not an abstracted love "that is shaped by art, nature and history and expressed in manners, rites and tradition." But the present community in Bristol does not know what true love is as they are blinded by the material power of money. The characters like Major Barcraft, isolated from the society by military traditions; the couple Amy and Jeff Carruthers moved only by the pleasures of sex, luxury, and wealth; Mrs. Pentecost, a lady with inveterate pretension, who drives her own husband to drinks waiting for his death; Lawrence Tilden, owner of the Planters Bank and Trust Company, rich but barren, having no heir to his property; Harley Drew, a big snubb, always waiting for a chance to grab property through heartless love; all these characters in the novel symbolize the dilapidated society of Bristol, a tiny barren town in South without greenery but only with lamp "posts like iron trees growing out of concrete each with a pool of gold about its trunk." Amanda Barcraft, with her true love, is like an oasis in the desert in Bristol. In this novel Foote depicts the ironic fate of man who by trying to deceive others is deceived by himself.

Shelby Foote's another novel September September also depicts the economically and morally corrupt American society after the World War II. In this novel the characters have gained the allegorical qualities to crystalize the history of the time. The rise and fall of the two sets of characters, black and white, indicate the historical dimension and the change in the social atmosphere of the time. It shows how the white community is led to dissolution and death
because of their morally and economically corrupt nature. On the other side it states how the black community has acquired the sense of self, and the sense of communion with others.

Shelby Foote, a life-long friend and also a contemporary writer to Walker Percy, pictures very lucidly the real scene of the American society through his historical novels by applying a mastered narrative technique of a good story-teller. But his stories move mostly on the surface level. His pen does not penetrate deep into the minds of his characters to bring out what goes on inside there. This may be because he is not a physician psychiatrist but a social scientist, a historian. This kind of differentiation in the nature of these two writers is well diagnosed in their childhood play by Jay Tolson, the biographer of Walker Percy:

"Walker preferred to build planes that actually flew .... while Shelby liked putting together the kind that were only to be looked at, objects, one might say, of aesthetic contemplation. Slight though this difference may seem, it prefigures the contrasting views of art that the two novelists later came to. Shelby would embrace formalism, art for arts sake, while walker would arrive at more utilitarian position, a belief that art must serve some higher end. If nothing is more serious than the games or hobbies we pursue as children, perhaps nothing more accurately reveals what we will become than the little details of our childhood pursuits."

**Eudora Welty:** This contemporary lady novelist depicts the reality of life in the South in her writings by uniting the irreconcilable opposites together. Life for her can-not have dual existence, it exists only in the harmonious union of the contrary flows that arise in man's life. One pole of life can-not cancel out the existence of its opposite pole for the existence of one pole depends upon the
existence of its opposite pole. But the process of the union of contrary poles is the real test of man's life which actually gives meaning to his life. Man's constant struggle to unite the contrary poles of his life explores his ironic fate in this world. The study of Welty's characters reveal very clearly this ironic fate of man. Her characters are not only "innocent" persons but they are also heroic, they are cruel as well as kind hearted, they are coward and also courageous.

Clement Musgrave, the planter and a protagonist of Welty's novel _The Robber Bridegroom_ appears as an innocent person but his words about the high-way-man indicate that he has good knowledge also about the worldly things. Jamie Lockhart, the robber bridegroom, realizes the heroic qualities in Clement Musgrove.

The characters of Welty find out a way through the complexities of life. Their misunderstanding of the things in the world are resolved by their gradual understanding of the reality of the things. The progress of her characters is thus from fantasy to reality, from pastoral dream to capitalistic reality, from fairy tale to history.

The progress of the two characters, Jamie Lockhart, and Rosamond, from fantasy to reality, is finely illustrated in the novel. But their progress presents the darkest vision of life, which is the reality of life. When they realise this reality of life they find that life is nothing but a tug-of-war. The great irony of the novel lies in the character of Clement Musgrove who boasts of his wisdom in understanding the doubleness of the world but who does not understand the doubleness of the gentleman who steals the clothes, honour and the heart of his own daughter. In trying to find out others identity he loses his own identity. Ultimately he understands how mysterious and contradictory this world is.
Thus Welty, through her characters, manifests the way of living in the wilderness of the present world. She also suggests that the elimination of monstrous nature of human beings requires "love of a whole self by a whole self;" but the "full attainment of this lies beyond human power" and this is the "eternal tragedy" of human life. Rosmand and Jamie, both live in an Ednic world of fantasy in the beginning but lateron they come to the real earthly world by realizing each others real faces which were so far hidden behind the masks. They realise how torturing it is to come to the reality. Rosamond at the end understands that her husband is a robber and not a bridegroom. Though she is ready to give her true love to her husband he likes to rob it from her. The dramatization of love affair between Rosamond and Jamie is an indication of the fact that evil in real life is nearer than we expect it to be.

**William Faulkner:** Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha, "a microcosm of the Deep South" or his own little postage stamp of native soil manifests the fate of Americans or in particular of the South. His novels record the fall of the aristocratic families in this modern world of advanced technology because of the false pride in family history, the racial conflict, snobbishness, moral and spiritual corruption, unending desires for lavish life and sexual promiscuity. Disintegration of family system in Faulkner's novels demonstrates the erosion of its functions and the breakage of emotional bondage among its members. The characters of his novels represent the divided personality of southern individual who is exposed to the conflict between natural forces from outside and psychological forces from inside. The duality of man's existence presents the problem of survival before southerners in this modern world. How the same problem leads them to tragic suffering which ultimately becomes the reality of their lives is well illustrated through the characters of Faulkner's novels. This
suffering, the reality of their lives, is the fate of Americans living in this modern world.

Faulkner's most popular novel *The Sound and the Fury* accounts minutely the cultural change that was taking place in South during the first half of this century. The outward change in the family system, the behaviour of the members of the Compson family, and the inward change on spiritual and moral levels are skillfully presented through the characters of the novel. Though these characters feel themselves intellectually free from the Puritanic or Calvinistic traditions of the old South, in reality they are still unconsciously motivated and governed by the same patterns which are actually stronger than themselves. Thus it is ironical that while they are intellectually climbing up they are spiritually pressed down. *The Sound and the Fury* is a very fine portrayal of the breakdown of an inherited order and the run-down of the Compson family on both, the extrinsic, and the intrinsic levels. The characters like Quentin Compson represent the victims of such changes in South America. His self-destruction due to the derangement of his self on both, the personal and the psychological, levels is wisely connected to the family history and the cultural determinants. Quentin's father gives him a watch ironically not to remember time but to forget it because he knows to remember time is to remember the past full of despair. But in reality the watch does not allow him to forget the past, the more he tries to forget it by breaking the glass of the watch, the more he remembers it by the continuity of its ticking, an indication of the flow of the past into the present and a sign of despair as the reality of life.

Quentin's relation with his sister Caddy is one of the factors of his self-destruction for his love of Caddy is not an outcome of his true heart but it is a product of his family honour in Caddy's remaining a Chaste woman. He feels
guilty for driving off her lovers compelling her to demoralise herself. When he learns about Caddy's incest, her loss of virginity, he commits suicide for he is unable to tolerate the loss of family honour. Thus the tragedy of Quentin Compson is the consequence of the contrasting forces of social code of southern chivalrous honour and womanhood, and a Christian concept of guilt.

Faulkner's another novel *As I Lay Dying* also depicts the condition of modern man in despair surrounded by the mysterious world. The vanity of man in this world even on serious occasions like death of a family member is well dramatised in this novel. The author, through the characters of this novel, unveils the selfish nature of man who always struggles to hide his real face behind a mask spoiling his soul in this material world. When Addie Bundren, an old member of the Bundren family, dies and her family is ready to fulfil her promise to bury her dead body in her family burial ground the other members of the Budren family rejoice in the heart of their hearts for getting an opportunity of a trip to Jefferson for fulfilling their materialistic ambitions. Ironically the funeral ceremony makes everybody conscious of his worldly desires. Faulkner's this novel compels his readers to brood over the mysteries of human life like life and death, success and failure, loneliness and solidarity; and provides them the bitter truth of human life, and overshadowed dignity of man. Faulkner uses the device of monologues to bring out the inner mind, the secret desires of his characters. He also reveals their struggle to live life on both, individual and social, spiritual and moral levels, and also their miserably falling a victim to an unending conflict, characteristic of material world. The suffering of the characters becomes obvious in their efforts to hide the instinctive desires as in the case of Dewey Dell to seek an abortion; Cash, to buy a gramophone; Anse, to get a new set of teeth and a new wife. What they try is to impress others by
their superficial acts that they are acting rightly on moral level. This is the fate of man living in this material world that he is caught in an enigmatic existence: spiritual and material, he is destined to suffer in the midst of plenty.

Thus the above illustrations from the writings of the southern writers show that "irony of fate" is the concern of American literature, particularly of literature in the South.

III THE MAKING OF PERCY'S MIND

i. Biographical Allusions

The life of Walker Percy, the author of my interest whose works I have made an effort to explore and who lived his life during the period of cultural transition in South, is itself symbolical of the change that took place externally and internally on physical, intellectual, spiritual and moral levels in the southern community. Percy shares the same fate that most of the southern Americans of his time do. The most ironic and so interesting part of his life lies in those unfortunate events which ultimately lead his life to prosperity as a man and as a novelist. The glimpses of his early life unfold the tragic fate of Walker Percy, the most unfortunate person who lost his parents at his early age. When he was just thirteen years old his father, Ley Roy Pratt Percy, committed suicide by being a victim of his own fate, and two years after that his mother died in a car accident.

Apart from above fateful events one fortunate event that occurred in the life of Walker Percy as an outcome of the unfortunate deaths of his parents, was his adoption alongwith his two younger brothers by his uncle, William Alexander Percy, a great poet and the author of Lanterns on the Levee. "Having had life pull the rug from under him twice, he knew how lucky he was to be in
the house of a man like Uncle Will." The incident proved fortunate for Walker Percy not only in the sense that he, with his brothers, became an heir to the big property of William Alexander Percy, but he also became heir to the literary tradition of Uncle Will's house.

The other incident in Percy's life is even more fateful and ironical. Walker Percy, after settling down well in Uncle Will's house, began his education in the field of science to be a physician. But in the later part of his life very mysteriously he turned to be a novelist. When Percy was doing internship at Bellevue Hospital in New York as a part of his M.D. in Pathology while working on the autopsies of tuberculosis patients without taking due precautions he himself became a victim to the disease. The bouts of tuberculosis provided him with enough leisure to read the works of famous novelists and philosophers like Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard, Sartre, Camus, Marcel and Heidegger. These readings put Percy on a search into his own personal mystery, and to discover how he had been left out of his own earlier medical research. His own life was overlooked by science which accounted for everything except the human predicament. The tuberculosis did not remain only a disease on the physical level but it penetrated into his mind and compelled him to have an insight into himself. "Even in the terminal stages of cancer, his fear of TB was stronger than his fear of the disease that was killing him. To him, clearly, TB had come to represent something more than physical death: death-in-life, or despair." The only consolation that came to his rescue during the period was reading books.

When Percy realized after recovering from recurrent bouts of TB that "he was ill suited for any clinical work" he turned to writing. The more important and ironical change that the disease brought in Percy was regarding his
attitude towards science. The following passage clearly indicates the ironic change that took place in Percy's attitude towards science:

"I gradually began to realize that as a scientist -- a doctor a pathologist -- I knew so very much about man, but had little idea what man is'. The positive result of this realization was that it gave Percy an idea of what his true calling might be --- not research, with the aid of an elegant method, but a search with the aid of nothing more than his own wits and intuition. He also knew what the object of his search should be: The mystery that surrounds the individual life."

Thus the disease brought drastic change in the intrinsic life of Walker Percy by opening a new vistas of philosophy to him. The works of European philosophers and novelists and his contacts with Catholic friends during his stay in Trudeau Sanatorium at Saranac Lake gradually prepared a ground for the turn of his mind. He discarded science as a means to bring ultimate happiness in man's life and accepted novel as a means though not to bring happiness to man but to explore the mystery that despair is the true quality of man's life. This he could achieve by uniting his knowledge and intuition about man's life and presenting it in the form of novels to his readers.

Another remarkable incident in Percy's family life was the unexpected birth of his daughter Ann Boyd. Percy's married life was altogether happy except one blot that Bunt, Percy's wife, had not become pregnant. They waited for an issue for few years after their marriage but due to routine x-rays during Percy's illness both, the husband and the wife, had a doubt about their own issue. So they decided to adopt a child and they did adopt one in 1948. But ironically enough to their surprise Bunt became pregnant and delivered a child on July 11, 1954 relieving them of the earlier fear of Percy's sterility. The
mystery of Percy's married life did not end with the arrival of an unexpected child in the family but it continued further. The happiness of the birth of their second child did not last longer as just after three months they realized that Ann Boyd, the child, was born deaf. Walker Percy and his wife did not get disheartened by the unfortunate happening in the life of their innocent child but they faced the problem courageously and took every care of Ann Boyd in educating her so that she would not suffer in her future life and fall shorter than other children of her age in learning. All these catastrophic and ironical events in the real life of Percy lateron find place in part or fully in the lives of the protagonists of his novels.

ii Philosophical Inheritance

A close study of Walker Percy's writings indicates his indebtedness to the existentialist philosophers whose philosophy he came in touch with during his rest years after his falling a victim to tuberculosis. He has said:

"... I have read Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Gabriel Marcel, then Sartre and Camus. These writers were a revelation to me. They fulfilled a tremendous gap in my view of the world, indeed they seemed to take it over at one time."67

The existentialist writers whose philosophy of human life exerted influence on Walker Percy's writings can be divided into two groups, that is, Christian existentialists, and the non-Christian existentialists. This division of these philosophers is based on the basis of the two different dimensions on which they developed their philosophy. Soren Kierkegaard, and Gabriel Marcel belong to the Christian group of existentialists whereas Martin Heidegger, and Jean Paul Sartre belong to the non-christian group of existentialists. Walker Percy being a
Catholic writer his view of looking at life is closer to the views of the first group of existentialist writers. Among all the existentialist philosophers the influence of Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish Christian existentialist philosopher, is acknowledged by a large number of Percy critics. The ideas of this existentialist philosopher find their existence not only in the philosophical essays by Walker Percy but also in the lives of the protagonists of Percy's novels.

The important concept in the philosophy of Kierkegaard is that an individual develops or gains maturity in consequence of the freedom he avails. Because of his freedom he becomes aware of the wide range of possibilities facing him in his life. Whenever the individual tries to bring any possibility into actuality it creates anxiety in the individual, and his freedom enables him to tolerate the anxiety. So whenever there exists choice there exists anxiety. An individual comes to the reality of life only by facing the unpleasant experience of anxiety that exists in his life. The individual chooses as well as he thinks. He is free and because he is free he suffers. His future is unpredictable because it depends upon his free choices. "The existentialists have in common the fact that their philosophies reflect the disordered and tragic character of their world."68

The key teaching of Kierkegaard which is incorporated in all of his writings is that there are three "stages" or "spheres of existence" of individual activities; and the progress of an individual can be realized by the attachment of his self within the three spheres. He names these three stages as "the aesthetic," "the ethical," and "the religious." There is shift from one sphere of existence to the other. But there is constant tension between two spheres of existence of individual activities. This tension creates a choice before the individual of an Either/Or, and puts him in puzzle. What happens with most of the people is that they move back and forth among these stages. So it becomes difficult to identify
them because what they are at this moment may be quite different from what they will be at the next moment.

Almost all Percy protagonists go on constantly shifting from one sphere of existence to the other creating a problem for the readers to understand the reality of their lives. Binx Bolling, Will Barrett, Tom More, Lancelot seem to be attracted by the aesthetic things in the beginning. They enjoy the material life with all modern amenities. But it is also found that during the moments of catastrophic events they realise the barrenness of material life and desire to live life on the ethical or the religious sphere of existence. They appear to be going through a tremendous mental torture due to the tension because of their inability to fix themselves to a particular sphere of existence. This mental torture or the inner suffering is indicative of their fate in this modern world. The success of all Percy protagonists at the end of novels to fix themselves to the religious sphere of existence is an indication of their coming back to their own selves, the reality of their lives.

The French existentialist philosopher, Gabriel Marcel's influence on Walker Percy can be ranked next to the influence of Kierkegaard. Among other Percy critics Mary Deems Howland has substantially analysed Walker Percy's indebtedness to Gabriel Marcel in her critical work entitled The Gift of the Other: Gabriel Marcel's Concept of Intersubjectivity in Walker Percy's Novels. Gabriel Marcel's philosophy, in short, might be described as a phenomenology of selfhood or, more precisely, of selfhood as the locus of being's unfolding. Marcel's conviction is that self can exist only in relation with others. So man's existence in this world can be realized only in his union with the other beings, his knowledge about the external world. "To be is to be in relation." His failure in this act causes him despair. Marcel differentiates
between "to have" and "to be." "To have" means we own some thing that is external and "to be" means we possess something internally. But in this material world "we dwell in the region of having rather than being and are vaguely aware of the dissatisfaction which flows from the inner need for transcendence."69

Love for other beings, the intersubjectivity, leads to the ultimate Being and those who cannot experience this love for others get involved in the sphere of immanence, being aware of only having and not either of other beings or the ultimate Being or God. Percy exploits Marcel's this concept first in his philosophical essays and then in his novels. He asserts that a sign presented by one can get the recognition as a symbol only when it is recognised by others. This act of symbolization brings consciousness to one's self about others. It means one gets knowledge only by one's being conscious about others or other things. Percy points out in his writings that a sign responder is always in despair and he can come out of despair only through the act of intersubjectivity, that is the process of symbolizing other things. Binx Bolling, the protagonist of Percy's novel The Moviegoer, "seems to have the best of all worlds" yet he feels alienated until he "comes to knowledge of his news from across the seas through intersubjectivity with Kate, with Lonnie even with Sharon and Stanley Kinchen."70 In The Last Gentleman Will Barrett attempts to establish intersubjective relationship in the beginning with Kitty Vaught and then with her brother Sutter.

The quintessence of the philosophy of a German philosopher Martin Heidegger, like other existentialist philosophers, is man. He strives to explain the true nature of man. "...... it is the nature, the vocation of man, to ask the all important question, What is it to be?"71 Walker Percy also, in his philosophical and linguistic essays, does the same thing by disclosing the
inherent qualities in man which differentiate him from other organisms. According to Heidegger the real self, which is hidden, can be revealed only by understanding the betrayal of the self by other beings. Walker Percy makes use of this negative approach of coming to the reality of life, one's own self, while delineating the lives of his protagonists. His protagonists realize that good comes out of bad, suffering leads to happiness, death is the beginning of new life or the quest for evil is the quest for God.

Heidegger's concept of 'dread' is similar to Percy's idea of 'catastrophe'. Dread, according to Heidegger, "is one mood which is unique, which does recall human being from self betrayal to self-knowledge." It alone brings freedom to man. For Percy it is only through the catastrophic events, the moments of crisis, man comes to his true self. His protagonists discover their true identity in this quotidian world when they face the catastrophic events in their lives. In The Moviegoer The protagonist, Binx Bolling's dream of the Korean war reminds him of a minor incidence of watching "a dung beetle ... scratching around under the leaves" when he was on the front. But even this minor incidence which he watched in his dream changes his whole attitude of looking at life. Lancelot, the other protagonist of a Percy novel entitled Lancelot, realises the true face of his father when he finds ten thousand dollars in the sock drawer, the terrible sight of which unveils him the reality how corruption hides at the heart of honour. Heidegger's philosophy asserts that human existence is built up from death. And death for Percy is a major event in the life of man for it defines his identity in this world.

Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Walker Percy found imaginative literature, the novels, an effective media to ventilate their existentialist philosophical ideas which essentially illustrate the tragic life of
man through the protagonists of their novels. Sartre insists that being is completely independent of the fact of its appearing and it is impossible to fix a being in a particular set of appearance as the being is capable of projecting itself through an infinite number of appearances. His novel *Nausea* (1949) reveals how man is lost in the world of infinite choices making his life purposeless. Likewise Percy's protagonists are also lost in this material world and they are unable to make a suitable choice to project the realities of their selves. But unlike Sartre's characters, Percy's protagonists, at the end of the novels, succeed in transcending the immanence.

The Percy critics have found that both Percy and Albert Camus, a French novelist have developed a line of metaphysical investigation in delineating their characters. They have dived deep into the riddles of the human existence to bring out the reality of human life in the material world of this century. Both these writers have shaped their abstract philosophical ideas into a concrete form of the individual characters in their novels. The novels of these existentialist writers have become more realistic because like other existentialist writers they have also portrayed their real lives in the work of art. "Passionately concerned with the most intimate aspects of the real, they cling to it obstinately, even if it hurts them; and if blood flows with such sincerity in their works, it is because their own is very often mingled with it."73

Along with the existentialist philosophers Walker Percy acknowledges the influence of Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky, a Russian novelist of the nineteenth century, the readings of whose novels, in fact, brings Percy in contact with the existentialist philosophy, and the tragic elements in the life of modern man. His novels *Crime and Punishment* and *Brothers Karamazov* expound the contemporary life with an expansion of his idea that happiness can
be brought only through suffering. He makes it clear that the materialistic way of life or the scientific discoveries can not bring the ultimate happiness to man. He emphasises on the spiritual aspect of life, the Christian ideal, that only bread can not bring happiness to man. Dostoyevsky dramatises the same ideal through two contrast sketches of Raskolinkov and Sonia in *Crime and Punishment*. Walker Percy believes in the unpredictability of events in human life. But unlike Dostoyevsky Percy unites the two ways of human life, materialistic and religious, in one person. His protagonists are the wayfarers; their journey is from materialism to spiritualism, from immanence to transcendence.

iii Percy's Essays: The Source of His Novels

Walker Percy's philosophical ideas about the nature of man are a synthesis of the bitter experiences in his own life and the impact on him of the European philosophers and novelists. Before Percy started writing his novels his ideas were already published in the form of essays in various southern literary journals and the same were later on compiled in a book entitled *The Message in the Bottle* (1975). The cause of his shift from essays to novels becomes obvious by the statement he made to his wife Bunt Townsend: "Nobody reads these things [essays] ..... I need to put some of the things I'm saying into a novel so that people will read them." Percy's novels have their roots in his philosophical and linguistic essays.

development. After he comes in touch with the European philosophy while recovering from tuberculosis he becomes aware of the futility of science in guiding a person to the reality of his individual self. His essays propagate "his awareness that science does not concern itself with the individual but only with the individual as part of a group. In fact ..... the individual is lost in the scientific concept of mass man." The essays manifest the paradoxical nature of modern man who feels "bad in good environment and good in bad environment"(MB.3). Same is the case with all the protagonists of Percy's novels. They are never happy whenever they are at ease. They come to the realities of their lives, the glimpses of hope of their future lives, only after suffering. The Christian view of man is no longer credible to all men. Today what exists "is a mishmash view of man, a slap-up model put together of disparate bits and pieces"(MB.19). In this age it is impossible for us to understand ourselves; because we do not know of what part we are made. The condition of the present man has become similar to that of "the cartoon cat that run off a cliff and for a while is suspended, still running, in mid-air but sooner or later looks down and sees there is nothing under him"(MB.19). He is "at home yet feels homeless." His condition is just like "one of the old gods who lived above the earth but took their pleasure from the maids of the earth"(MB.21). The scientific revolution has revealed man not what he is but how he is like others. As a result he has not lost his self but has become incommunicable to himself not knowing what his real self is. He is alienated from his own self.

Percy feels that in the present situation it is the duty of a novelist to write such novels which would perform the function of a profecy signifying danger, the end of the world ahead, and help readers to prepare themselves to avert the end, to avoid the danger. Percy indicates the nearing end of the world
by illustrating the uneven condition in which the modern man lives. He feels that the twentieth century has been hard on mankind. He states that in this age man has to undergo such an unbearable suffering that the brain of man may blast any time. The world is at the verge of end and in this situation the duty of a novelist is not to be a prophet but to be "the canary that coal miners used to take down into the shaft to test the air. When the canary gets unhappy, utters paintive cries, and collapses, it may be time for the miners to surface and think things over"(MB.101). Percy puts his protagonists in such a predicament that one feels they are in a coal mine polluted by poisonous air and now it is time for them to come to surface to save themselves from the total destruction. Percy puts them in such a time and at such a place that there is no escape except through suffering. This is the irony of fate of the modern man that he lives in the most technologically developed world in the history but what he lives is the death in life.

To Percy a serious novelist is like "a man teetering on the brink of the abyss here and now, or worse, like man who is already over the brink and into the abyss...." away from the dread of nuclear weapons(MB.102). After reading Percy's novels one feels that his protagonists live in an abyss and the author who has a good experience of the lower world now keeps himself away from them and observes from a distance the dreadful life of his offsprings, the protagonists.

In his essays Percy compares this world with a battlefield and whoever enters this world has to go on the front like a soldier, get wounded while fighting, suffer the hardships and come out of it successfully realizing the reality of this world or sometimes meet the tragic end. The content of human life, according to Percy, which consists of various known and unknown,
conscious and unconscious events is more important than the superficial, attractive form of life. What one sees in a person from outside may be quite contrary to what he sees in him from within. So he penetrates deep beneath the surface level of the lives of his protagonists and digs out from there the reality of their selves and shocks his readers by presenting something contrary to what they had expected about the protagonists by observing their behaviour. The niceness of a person can not be understood by his outward appearance because he knows that "The triumphant secular society of the Western World, the nicest of all worlds, killed more people in the first half of this century than have been killed in all history"(MB.105). He gives a long list of the acts and feelings of a modern man that contradict with each other unveiling his cunningness, false pride, grandiose and futility in the modern scientific culture. He reveals the ironies in the life of the twentieth century man who lives in plenty but feels his life empty, who takes pleasure in the worries of others, and who is most interested in wars. The modern man is unhappy though "he has succeeded in satisfying his needs and making over the world for his own use"(MB.3).

Percy differentiates between a scientist and a novelist stating that a scientist treats only the general properties of an individual which are common in all individuals where-as a novelist brings out the mystery and paradoxes in the life of an individual that characterize the particular individual. He says it is easy to write about the life of a common man. "But the present-day novelist is more interested in the catastrophe than he is in life among flower people"(MB.109). The present-day novelist is more interested in observing the drastic change that has taken place in the life of a rich man after a heart attack, the catastrophe of his life. The rich man completely gets changed after the catastrophe in his life and he finds himself a strange person surrounded by strangers. It is a kind of
revelation to him. The whole world gets changed for him into a new 'world within a short period of the catastrophic happening. He comes to himself. And the process of this sudden ironic change in the life of man becomes the content of the novel of a modern novelist. The change that takes place in the person during this process is not extrinsic or technological but it is intrinsic and psychological.

Percy believes that in this technologically developed modern world God is not dead but a tempestuous restructuring of consciousness is taking place in man which does not allow him to take account of God:

"For what has happened is not merely the technological transformation of the world but something psychologically even more portentous" (MB. 113).

A layman is not as much affected by the scientific methodology as he is affected by the atmosphere created by the scientific developments. In such atmosphere he very easily falls "a prey to a kind of seduction which sunders one's very self from itself into an all-transcending 'objective' consciousness and a consumer self" (MB. 113). Thus the layman's self is bifurcated into two, angelic and bestial, and when his self is divided it becomes impossible for him to differentiate between devil and God. He starts judging the world by his own hierarchies. It is only through a catastrophic moment that he comes to his real self and realises that he is a wayfaring animal somewhere between an angel and a beast.

Notes:

Chapter I


7. Ibid., P. X.

8. Ibid., P. 143.


12. Ibid., P. IX.


15. Ibid., P. 18.


21. Ibid., PP. 95-96.


25. Ibid., P. 24.

26. Ibid., P. 24-25.


29. Wadia, Ardaser Sorabjee N., Fate and Free Will, P. 6


35. Ibid., P. 1009.


42. Ibid., P. 36.


47. Ibid., P. 19-20.


53. Ibid., P. 9.


55. Ibid., P. 497.

56. Ibid., P. 496.


58. Ibid., P. 420.


60. Ibid., P. 114.


65. Ibid., P. 178.

66. Ibid., P. 177.


70. Ibid., P. 33.


72. Ibid., P. 460.

