CHAPTER II

THE THEME OF VICTIMIZATION

I  Binx Bolling : A Victim of Material World

The theme of victimization is found to be one of the prominent themes in all Percy's novels. This has remained relatively undiscussed by his critics. This study aims to focus on the protagonists of Percy's novels to illumine their ironic fate which is decided by the existing conditions in which Percy's protagonists live and the temptations they face. In fact, they are creations of the change that has taken place due to the scientific and technological development in contrast with the conservative attitude of South Americans. "In his novels Walker Percy presents his view of modern man lost to himself in the categories in which science and technology have placed him."

Percy became popular as a novelist when his first novel, The Moviegoer, got the National book Award of 1962. The reason for the book to receive wide popularity among the readers was its textual richness. It consists of a variety of themes drawn from the lives of contemporary Americans. This book unveils the concealed reality of the life of Americans through its thematic concern and also warns of the forthcoming destruction of American social life. Many critics have analysed the book to disclose the life currents that flow through it but the book is so rich in themes that one always finds something new with every new reading. The theme of victimization is one of the major themes which has not yet captured the attention of the critics of this novel. The present study of the protagonist of this novel by name "John Bickerson 'Binx' Bolling" reveals this fact.
In the beginning of the novel itself Binx Bolling appears as a man of material world. He is a stock and bond broker from a well-to-do middle class family nearing the thirtieth of his age when one longs to enjoy the pleasures of material world and multiply money to the maximum extent. He is a model citizen of Gentilly, "a middle class suburb of New Orleans." He realizes his existence in this world by keeping his wallet "full of identity cards, library cards, credit cards," and he owns "a flat olive-drab strong-box, very smooth and heavily built with double walls for fire protection" in which he keeps his "birth certificate, college diploma, honorable discharge, G.I. Insurance, a few stock certificates ..... and a deed to ten acres of a defunct duck club down in St. Bernard Parish."*

Percy introduces Binx with all the belongings which are quite essential to live in a material world. But a man of the material world is not happy only with the minimum requirements for his life. He takes pride in possessing the luxurious amenities like "a first-class television set, an all but silent air conditioner, and a very long lasting deodorant"(M.7). Binx uses perfumes, and he is very much alert for the announcements and ads broadcast on radio and shown on TV. He is a fan of film actors and actresses. He goes to movies or watches TV and very often spends week-ends on the Gulf-coast. Percy provides frequent references to films, film actors, TV programmes, and ads on TV, radio, and in newspapers to assert the importance of mass media in the material world of today:

Note: All subsequent references to this edition will be abbreviated as "M." with page numbers. The original edition was published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1961.
"During the eight days of the novel proper, he refers to the twelve specific and several unidentified movies, and to thirty seven actors and eight actresses. During the same time, he goes to the movies no less than four times, including a drive-in on Sunday night. His appetite seems indiscriminate: he sees Panic in the Streets, with Richard Widmark, on Wednesday night, an unidentified Western on Thursday night, Fort Dobbs, with Clint Walker, on Saturday night, and The Young Philadelphians, with Paul Newman, on the following Monday night."^2

Thus through all these details of Binx's possessions, and his day to day activities Percy manifests that Binx Bolling lives in a material world and he is fascinated by the life of comfort and luxury. But what Percy puts forth through all these details is the upper layer of the life of materialist Binx. As we proceed further in the depth of the novel we find Percy loosening the threads of Binx's life-fabric to reveal of what quality, in reality, is the fabric made.

The mass media, particularly movies and TV play a vital role in creating illusory images in the minds of the viewers. If such images are created in the mind of an individual the individual desires to act in accordance with these images. In the process he has to deviate from the traditional and natural ways of life which his inner conscience does not permit him to do. Ultimately it results into a conflict. The self of the individual is divided into two, one favouring the external material world while the other favouring the inner spiritual world. In trying to be true to both at the same time the individual's life becomes ironical and his failure to be true to both ultimately leads him to despair. Sven Birkerts points out how mass media affects the minds of individuals in the present era:

"One of the most telling effects of the electronic media has been the creation of a persuasive sense of an eternal present, a Now. So powerful is the hold
of the image and the rapid-shift sequence, so mesmerising the juxtaposition of contents, that the watcher is gradually seduced away from the casual historical habits of mind."

Percy has cleverly exploited the electronic media in his novel, *The Moviegoer*, to manifest the inner conflict of its protagonist. "Percy is hardly the first novelist to appreciate the profound influence of the films on the development of all other fiction in our time."³

Binx Bolling, being born and brought up in the material world of the modern age, shares the banalities of this age. His frequently attending to movies forces him to interpret the day to day happenings in his life, family, and society in conformity with the film images created in his mind. When aunt Emily discloses to him the bad news of his brother Scott's death it reminds Binx of the scene in a movie which describes "a great tragedy" in the life of a man who, in a boat accident, loses his memory. Binx recollects this image because of its similarity with the happening in his life.

It is not only his going to movies which accounts Binx his material identity, there are other activities too. Apart from the work of a stock broker he performs the work of a searcher. Binx goes on search, for what he does not know, but he wants to find out something mysterious, the ultimate truth of life. While on search he goes on observing the world around him. He observes people from South and also people from North. *The Moviegoer* is actually an account of Binx's pilgrimage from New Orleans to Chicago and back. His eyes work like a camera and go on taking snap shots of those individuals who come in the range of his eyesight "for he is as much movie camera as moviegoer."⁴ His camera catches minute details of the changing appearances of people and their
surrounding. It enters the houses and churches to capture discussions at the dining-table and the performance of religious rites.

Binx finds that men in America move with masks over their faces. They try to deceive others by hiding their real faces. The true face is revealed only during the moments of catastrophes. Binx witnesses the behavior of a person when he is on his return journey from Chicago to New Orleans. After careful observation of this person; "How does he sit?" "How does he read...?" and what does he read? Binx comes to a conclusion that the person pretends to be reading just to receive others attention; he is longing for his recognition by somebody (M.214). His suffering reflects over his "extraordinarily well modeled" face. The people in New Orleans look to Binx like the participants of the parade held in celebration of Mardi Gras during Carnival. The participants put masks over their faces and pass by merry making with the pretention that they have forgotten the pain of crucifixion which, in reality, they can not. Binx also, being a member of the same society, makes faces. Whenever he is around Emily, his aunt, he pretends to be an honest and hard worker. Ironically his family members do not understand what sort of person he is.

Binx Bolling is obsessed with death right from his early age. "I remember when my older brother Scott died of pneumonia: I was eight years old" (M.3). He recollects his past in connection either with somebody's death or deadly events in somebody's or his own life. "He is obsessed with death, not the fear of death, but the sense 'that everyone is dead', himself particularly." Binx's recollection of his brother's death also reminds him of the deadly location where his aunt, Emily, had disclosed to him the sad news of Scotty's death. The location "behind the hospital" with "the power plant and blowers and incinerator of the hospital" on one side, and "a row of Negro houses" on the other side with
"hot meaty smell" is an abode of death on the earth (M. 3-4). Constant references to Binx's world as a "dead world" strengthens the notion. The name of the place "Elysian Fields," where Binx lives as a tenant to Mrs. Schexnaydre, indicates a place where one lives after death.

Man, obsessed with the fear of death, in spite of his being handsome, prestigious, intellectual and rich, is always engrossed by an inward suffering. The "night time prowling" of Binx's father who suffered from insomnia is the best example of this. Binx's father, a member of a well-to-do, royal family, could not get sleep even in the "healthful" porches where Binx and his brother Scott used to get a sound sleep "on even the coldest nights," but "He tossed like wounded animal" even in " A Saskatchewan sleeping bag from Abercrombie" which proved to him "the corpse of his dead hope"(M.85).

When Binx grows up he is haunted by the memories of the past. During night time he suddenly wakes up breaking his dreams at three O'clock in the morning. He says: "At night the years come back and perch around my bed like ghosts"(M.144). And during daytime he is caught in the grip of everydayness. The grip of everydayness is so strong that "nothing breaks it but disaster" and it is felt in every nook and corner of the material world.

Binx observes the snobbishness of people from all walks of life when he witnesses the religious functions performed in Biloxi. He understands that people attend mass functions just to put on a show; otherwise they hardly know anything about religion. If somebody asks them about religion they get embarrassed: "eyes are averted, throats are cleared, and there occurs murmuring for a minute or two until the subject can be changed"(M.159). He sees everybody coming to church a big snob. He knows that the position of church has degraded to "a post office" in the material world of Biloxi where everybody
comes to show what he is not in reality. Richard Pindell has rightly judged that "The world of The Moviegoer is a bazaar of life styles, a costume room." In this novel Percy pulls together a variety of persons, businessmen, actors and actresses, officials, newly married couples, and common persons to present a living picture of the American society that had fallen victim to the material world.

Binx, like the tradesmen of the material world, is totally absorbed in the money-making business. The ups and downs of the market upset his mind.

"The last week-end of Carnival before Mardi Gras; business is very slow. But this morning I awoke with a strong feeling about American Motors. I sell my Ford Common and buy American Motors at 26 1/2" (M.64).

He finds people around him possessed by money without caring for romantic love. In Sharon Kincaid, "one of those village beauties of which South is prodigal" Binx sees the pure romantic love (M.65). Binx knows that though such beauties are found in New Orleans "by the millions", as common as sparrows, "No one marvels at them; no one holds them dear" in this world; "even their men pay no attention to them, anyhow far less attention than they pay to money" (M.65). Binx loves her and yet his materialistic mind treats her as "an item on a list."

Percy establishes a close relationship between Binx's love for money and his love for Sharon. "If ever my business should suffer because of my admiration for Sharon, then my admiration for Sharon would suffer too" (M.102). If there is money then only there is love. In this material world Binx does not expect the possibility of a money-minded person forsaking everything for the
sake of love; but on the other hand he expects in this world the exploitation of
love for the sake of money.

"The trick, the joy of it, is to prosper on all fronts,
enlist money in the service of love and love in the
service of money. As long as I am getting rich I feel
that all is well"(M.102).

Binx's intimacy with Sharon enhances her work efficiency in the office. Binx
knows that a slight deviation in their intimacy will hamper his business; so he
tries to please her in all respects. He offers her sandwiches, coffee, makes likable
gestures and condescends tactfully her acquaintances.

Binx's camera eye catches the activities at a business-point where
people are busy making money. He presents how businessmen play deceptive
tricks for raising money. In Chicago while in the company of decent
businessmen Binx comes to know that highclass businessmen are of deceptive
nature. So he believes that even great businessmen with fine appearances are not
to be trusted. One Mr. Sartalamaccia, a contractor and owner of the housing
development, tries to trap Binx but he himself gets trapped by his own deceit.

At the age of thirty Binx feels that his life has been a "dark
pilgrimage on this earth" knowing less than what he knew before. He senses that
the century in which he lives is:

"...... the great shthouse of scientific humanism
where needs are satisfied, everyone becomes an
anyone, a warm and creative person and prospers
like a dung beetle, and one hundred percent are
humanists and ninety eight percent believe in God,
and men are dead, dead, dead; and the malaise has
settled like a fall-out and what people really fear is
not that bomb will fall but that bomb will not fall --
on this my thirtieth birthday, I know nothing and
there is nothing to do but fall prey to
desire"(M.228)
At last Binx understands that in this material world there remains nothing important in life, everything is dead except desire which "comes hawling down" on man like the cold wind from north. Binx compares the American society with "The little pagoda of aluminium and glass, trim and pretty on the outside but evil smelling within" (M.228). In such a society Binx feels his self not in communion with him. As a result he has to undergo mental torture. Ultimately he realizes that in this world a new life is possible only to those who survive in the end creeping themselves out of the holes finding the whole past world in ruins.

II WILL BARRETT: A VICTIM OF FAMILY PAST

Will Barrett, the protagonist of Percy's second novel The Last Gentleman, a curious young man beset by curious symptoms, a Princeton dropout, presently working as a humidification engineer at Macy's department store in New York, is a scion of an aristocratic family haunted by his family past. The major part of this novel is devoted to Percy's efforts in stretching back the protagonist to the southern roots. Will Barrett constantly goes on brooding over the ideals laid down by his forefathers. "...The hero in Percy's fiction is a man much given to brooding upon his personal and family history."8 Percy's critics have related this trait of Percy's protagonists to Percy and the Percy family saga. They have drawn similarities between the lives of Percy's forefathers and Percy, and the lives of his protagonists: "...like a number of real-life Percys for many generations, characters in Walker's fiction risk, attempt and sometimes accomplish self-destruction by various means."9 Or as Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr. states that Percy "needed to ground his fiction more in the central dilemma of his own life: how does modern man live? By probing this problem Walker Percy
could become a novelist. His philosophical concerns could be expressed while the real and vibrant tensions from his own life kept the novel down to earth.\textsuperscript{10}

Like Binx, Will Barrett, too, is fascinated by the grandeur and ideals of his family past but cannot isolate himself from the existing social conditions. He is in a perpetual tension about what to do, what to follow, the present or the past, whether to live according to the past ideals of an aristocratic family or to follow the material way of life. His life also, like Binx’s, becomes ironical because he cannot totally do away with material life while longing to be the last gentleman of the aristocratic Barrett family.

Will’s family history of last three generations depicted in the very first chapter of the novel reveals how “it turned ironical and lost its gift for action.”\textsuperscript{*}

“It was an honorable and violent family but gradually the violence had been deflected and turned inward. The great grandfather knew what was what and said so and acted accordingly and did not care what anyone thought........... The next generation, the grandfather seemed to know what was what but he gave much thought to the business of being brave........The father was a brave man too and he said he didn’t care what others thought, but he did care. More than anything else he wished to act with honor and to be thought well of by other men. So living for him was a strain. He became ironical. For him it was not small thing to walk down the street on an ordinary September morning”(LG.9).


Note: All subsequent references to this edition will be abbreviated as "LG" with page numbers.
While striving to inculcate in himself the heroic qualities of his forefathers Will Barrett gets more and more enmeshed in the past. William Alexander Percy, Walker Percy's foster father, in his famous book, *Lanters on the Levee*, illustrates how past affects the present and the future life of man. He points out the condition of a young man living during the flux of time:

"During my day I have witnessed a disintegration of that moral cohesion of the South which had given it its strength and its sons their singleness of purpose and simplicity. Today there is fretting and fuming on the past of young people over what they should do, how they should act, what is worthwhile. Standards are in flux: there is no commonly accepted good way of life and the hospitals can't hold the neurotics, the blasted who strove to build a pattern because none existed."

Unlike his forefathers the life of Will Barrett becomes ironical because of his inability to stick up to the values either of the past or of the present. The forefathers "knew what was what and said so and acted accordingly" (LG.9). Whereas he feels "he must be all men and do everything" (LG.4). At young age he expects to be recognised as "an Apache youth who at the right time goes out into the plains alone, dreams dreams, sees visions, returns and knows he is a man" (LG.11). When he is a mature person he does not know what he is and how he must live. He tries to act as per the wishes of others and falls in trouble when he fails to do that. He cannot assimilate himself with any group and so "the group activities were pure sadness" for him (LG.13). Inspite of Will's being a man of "pleasant appearance", "strongly built" he has to live a life of pure possibility which does not strike him as remarkable, a concrete one.
Right from his childhood Will suffers from the attacks of *déjà Vus*, amnesia, and fugue states. These attacks serve the purpose of catastrophes in his life. During these moments of catastrophes, as it happens with Binx, Will forgets everything about the material world in which he lives and he appears as a stranger which, according to Percy, is not a bad condition at all because such a person is "like a man who has just crawled out of a bombed building, like the sole survivor of a bombed building" who is able to see things afresh (LG.11). In this regard Martin Luschei compares Will Barrett with Faulkner's Benjy Compson: "...though he is by no means an idiot. His time and sense is almost as dislocated as Benjy's, but the sound and fury he experiences belong to an abstract post-modern world, shorn, like Benjy's, of the benefit of the past." Percy himself comments that Will's amnesia is seen "as a more or less appropriate reactions to a new order of things, as and yet unnamed era which may have begun without being aware of it." It is only during the moments of catastrophes he gropes in the past to search for his identification in the present. Each and every object he looks at, smells or feels becomes a symbol of the past.

The symbolical representation of past through various objects obviously indicates that Will is a psychological patient.

Percy depicts Will as a representative of those southerners who are psychic patients. Like a sorrowful old man Will suffers from *déjà vus* and feels haunted even after he is refreshed by a long sleep. "sometimes he 'fell out' and would wake up hours later in his bed refreshed but still haunted" (LG.11). As very often, Will suffers from these attacks most of his life is blank like blank pages in a book. Cut off from himself and others, he seems to be haunted by his own existence. he does not know what he is and what he should do. Dr.
Gamow's diagnosis that Will is "having difficulty relating to others in a meaningful way" is very accurate (LG.39).

Whenever Will suffers from fugue states he develops the tendency of getting things backward. He feels bad in good environment and good in bad environment. When he tries to go ahead he actually goes back; he judges his present by the past incidents. While in service as an engineer at Macy's it was his practice for several days to come out of Macy's subbasement in the morning and watch the traffic. One day as he was watching the traffic he suffered from fugue state and felt hallucination from inside.

"...it seemed to him that the scene which took place before his eyes was happening in a time long past .... It was like watching a film of bygone days .... It reminded him of a nurse he had in the South. Once his father took some movies of him and his nurse in a little park" (LG.43).

Will Barrett's accidental visit to Vaught family in the hospital, and Mr. Vaught's memories of Will's father carry Will back to his past. Jamie, Mr. Vaught's son, the patient in the hospital, reminds Will of his hospital days when he suffered from amnesia for the first time. Will finds the traits of southern life in all the members of Vaught family. "Collectively the Vaughts alternately entice and abandon Barrett, drawing him all the while deeper and deeper into the South, both geographically and psychologically."14 As long as Will is in the company of Vaughts his "memory hovers from time to time around the outskirts of a crucial scene from his past."15 The crucial memory is the memory of his father's attempt to kill Will to rescue him from the rotten world and the suicide of his father. As Will climbs the Washington heights to visit Jamie the fourth time the smell of the hospital and the look motivate Will's past memories and he
gets lost in the memories like a man lost in the woods. As Binx's Wallet is full of material things Will's mind is full of past memories with the help of which he tries to identify himself in this world.

On a summer night when Will strolls in the Central Park there the signs of his being a psychic patient become obvious as the surrounding objects and the atmosphere make the past scenes appear on the screen of his mind. The past memories take hold of Will while he is on journey from New Jersy to South by a "bottle-green Chevrolet, an old' 58 Junebug" model along with Forney Aiken, a photographer. He feels "The steep streets and old 1937 brick-and-lime stone high-schools and the sooty monkey Pullman smell" familiar to him (L.G.132). He recollects his conversation with his father and also the names of books he read fifteen years before. He remembers that in a novel, The Farther Journey, the writer hero is involved in sexual relationship with a neighbour's housewife not with an intention to commit adultery but just to assert his freedom in the sick society.

Will, thus, is thoroughly obsessed by the memories of the past. Wherever he goes, whatever he sees or smells reminds him of his father. Even while dancing with Kitty, as they agree to marry each other, holding her tight in his arms he suddenly reminds of something his father had told him when he was just sixteen years old.

"When my father reached his sixteenth birthday, my grandfather said to him: Now Ed, I am not going to have you worrying about certain things - and he took him to a whorehouse in Memphis. He asked the Madame to call all the girls in and line them up. O.K., Ed, he told my father. Take your pick"(L.G.170-171).
Will Barrett is assaulted by ghostly legions of *déjà vas* immediately after he reaches South. Lewis A. Lawson rightly remarks: "All the time that Barrett is suffering from his attacks of compulsive memory, he is actually travelling rather slowly and unpurposively towards the house of his father." The sight of the pistol in the hand of Sutter Vaught suddenly reminds Will of the past incident that happened with his father and with himself. As a result "He had become extremely agitated ...... and paced up and down the bedroom;" he feels uneasy and takes his pulse that counts: 110(LG.206).

One evening as Trav-L-Aire roars through Louisiana down into Blanton street via Illinois central tracks he remembers his father's night strolls, his discussions with the passersby, the whites and the blacks. It also reminds him of his father's inner-sufferings, his last discussion with his father there, and the most thrilling incident of his father's death. Now he gets a clue to the fact that victory is the saddest thing of all. He understands that his father, though a victorious person, had to undergo an unbearable suffering which compelled him to commit suicide. The whole scene of his father's suicide moves before his eyes.

"The sound came crashing through the music, louder than twenty philcos, a single sound, yet more prolonged and thunderous than a single shot"(LG.318).

Thus, throughout the novel Percy depicts Will as a man constantly haunted by his past memories making his present life miserable. His efforts to reconcile with the present go futile as the power of the past surpasses the power of the present. It is only at the end of the novel that Percy shows some hope in Will's reconciliation with the present as he plans to marry Kitty and joins Sutter on his journey.
It is after a gap of twenty years from the day Will disappears with Sutter Vaught catching his Edsel at the end of *The Last Gentleman* that he reappears again in *The Second Coming*, Percy's fifth novel. Though this long period of twenty years is not a part of action of any of these two novels the flashbacks of Will's past life disclose what type of life he lived during the period. There is enough ground to guess that he lived a considerably happy life after his marriage with Marion Peabody. It seems that the company of his wife brought a lot of fortune necessary to live a happy life and relieved Will of the burdens of the past. But Percy cleverly keeps this part of Will's life out of the action of both the novels for it seems a straightforward happy life is not at all the concern of Percy's novels. The flashbacks of Will's happy married life intrude the action of this novel just to heighten his present sufferings. These flashbacks further assert that man's life is not totally happy but it is an amalgamation of both happiness and sorrow. But Percy tilts more towards sorrow than happiness in narrating the characters of his protagonists.

Will of *The Last Gentleman* could recall his past only during the moments of catastrophes when he suffered from the attacks of *deja vus*, amnesia, and fugue states, but Will of *The Second Coming* is totally changed and now he remembers everything. However, memory plays a vital role in Percy's both the novels as Alan T. Belches remarks:

"In *The Second Coming* Percy continues to build on this common theme in southern literature, the capacity of memory to contribute to the present; in order to show how man can live meaningfully in the malaise of twentieth century American culture. In both novels memory proves to be a major influence in characters' lives and it appears in the mind of Walker Percy."

Percy is of the opinion that man conceives his world by the "mirror" of sensuous symbols. It is man's fate to "know one thing through the mirror of another" (MB.82). This principle attracts a lot of attention while reading The Second Coming. J. Gerald Kennedy points out that in this novel "the writer expands his treatment of signs and symbols to explore the code of images inscribed in human memory and recalled through both deliberate and involuntary recollection." 18

The most important event in Will's past life which he recollects very often through different signs is his hunting trip to Georgia swamp along with his father who commits suicide after making an attempt with a double barreled Greener, a shot-gun, to kill his son who luckily escapes with minor injury on the cheek. The different signs that Will accidentally comes across in day to day life revive his memory of the same event which haunts him throughout the novel and drags him in despair. "Since any moment may be the point at which time doubles back upon itself, Will often seems to live in two tenses at the same instant." 19 Will, like other Percy's protagonists, is a representative of the twentieth century American society, a sufferer, a victim of his predicament. Linda Whitney Hobson points out the cause of Will's suffering, and what he suffers from.

"In both The Last Gentleman and The Second Coming, Will is suffering from what he calls a 'nervous condition' ..... In any case, Will is a sick man in both novels, and his sickness symbolizes for Percy a spiritual malaise caused in part by his father's abandonment of the boy through suicide." 20

The opening of the novel itself gives a clear hint about the mental sickness of the protagonist. "The first sign that something had gone wrong
manifested itself while he was playing golf, or rather it was the first time he admitted to himself that something might be wrong. For sometime he had been feeling depressed without knowing why. "* A cumulus cloud," his falling "down in a bunker" and striking the ball "out of bounds" indicate the psychological depression of Will(SC.3). As he goes on searching for the ball in the woods he hears a sound which reminds him of an important event in his past life and further adds to his suffering; he becomes "even more depressed." The sound causes "an unpleasant twisting sensation in his head" and there appears a scene of one most important event that had once occurred in his life in the distant past(SC.6). The inner torture reaches its peak and an idea to "shoot himself" enters his mind. But the intensity of his suffering gets reduced and he gives up the idea of suicide when he comes to know that he is not the only sufferer and those who suffer do not necessarily shoot themselves.

The symptoms that Will shows after listening to the sound, a sign that takes Will to his past, are quite opposite to amnesia, the illness that Will suffered in The Last Gentleman. Now everything that he looks at reminds him of something in the past. "A whiff of rabbit tobacco in North Carolina reminded him of Ethel Rosemblum and a patch of weeds in Mississippi. An odd shaped cloud in the blue Carolina sky reminded him of a missing tile in the Columbus circle subway station." ...."(SC.9-10). Thus whatever Will looks at becomes a sign that excavates the past events buried deep in his psyche.

The Greener, the gun, the Luger, grandfather's Ivanhoe, and his father's Lord Jim, the things which he has saved but not looked for last twenty

Note: All subsequent references to this edition will be abbreviated as "SC." with page numbers.
years now attract Will. The two barreled gun reminds Will of the gun shots his father had fired in the Georgia swamp. Right from the moment he finds Greener he concentrates his attention on the same object.

"An electric shock seemed to pass into his body from the greasy metal clamped in both hands like an electrode. A violent prickling went up his back and into his hairline"(SC.147).

Will Barrett, like other people in Carolina, is never a hundred percent himself. "All too often these days they were two percent themselves"(SC. 16). But when he listens to a gunshot his memory miraculously restores the missing ninety eight percent and he knows what he is and what he has to do. The sound of the gunshot directly connects Will to the event of his hunting trip to Georgia in which he was brought very close to death. He himself does not understand what connection there is between himself and the sound of a gunshot or the sight of a gun, nonetheless he feels that "everything is going to be settled in the end with a gun"(SC.18).

Will also recollects the facial appearances and the behaviour of his father when the important event occurred. At young age Will did not understand the meaning of his father's those typical appearances and the cause of his strange behaviour because of his ignorance as a child. But now as the scenes of that incident pass on the screen of his mind he gets a clue why that time he was "getting an awkward hug from his father" which was generally possible only on the occasions of "funerals and weddings," why his father did not allow him to go but "held him still and gave him regular pats(SC.54). In retrospect he also begins to understand his father's behaviour.

As the pictures of the past events start moving on the screen of his mind ultimately there appears the picture of the most important of all events that
had happened in the Georgia swamp. He sees "the muzzle burst and flame spurting from the gun like a picture of Civil War soldier, shooting"(SC.56). He witnesses the picture, how he was hurt on the cheek by a bullet and fell down in the leaves with blood flowing down on to his lips. Again he remembers the sound of the second shot; his father, severely hurt by a bullet and lying down beside a tree "like a country man taking a nap"(SC.57). This memory takes Will closer to death. Now after a gap of 40 years Will does not understand how that time he escaped from the mouth of death, and how his father who could hit a quail at 50 feet missed him at 15 feet. He does not understand whether it was his father's "love or failure of love" that caused him to hesitate in killing him at the last split-second(SC.148). Will undergoes a tremendous mental torture which Percy makes obvious in the first part of the third chapter.

The memory of this past event continuously haunts Will and makes him feel guilty because he knows that his father wanted him dead and he is "alive by fluke like the sole survivor of Treblinka, who lived by a fluke, but did not really feel entitled to live"(SC.324). His life turns actually into "a living death." Now he longs for such a death for which he will not be held responsible. Mary Deems Howland compares Will's condition with Percy's man "who is more worried that the bomb will not fall than that it will, the problem of what to do if the bomb does not fall involves facing the ordinary mystery of living from day to day in a world where a man can not face four O'clock in the afternoon."21 Will does not want to follow his father and commit suicide, death by one's own hands. He wants to get killed by the hands of God if at all there is God. He says:

"My death, if it occurs, shall occur not by my own hand but by the hand of God. Or rather the handlessness or inaction of God"(SC.186).
Will, thus, is constantly abstracted by the memory of his father until he suffers from the tooth-ache which ultimately driving away all the illusions brings him down to the earth facing the reality of his self.

After passing through several hardships when Will enters Lost Cove cave on a mission to find out the existence of God in this world he gets lost in an illusory world but then the severe pain of toothache brings him to the reality. "The onset of toothache," says Jeffrey J. Folks,."... rescues Will Barrett from a pointless effort to 'prove' the existence of God." He takes three capsules to get relief from toothache and as he lays down happily with his eyes closed he feels "the same dead calm and certainty he had felt when he knelt beside" his father in the Georgia swamp when both of them were hurt by bullets while shooting a quail(SC.214). He finds the cave a proper place to receive the memories of the distant past. There he feels as if he is in the company of his father and starts conversing with him. "What am I doing down here under the earth with you, old mole?" he asks his father (SC.215). He is totally lost in the past. He remembers his kindness to a Negro girl, his father's happiness during war and his unhappiness after the war, his marriage with Marion Peabody, his daughter's prattle, so on and so forth. Ultimately he comes to a conclusion that "Lost Cove is no laboratory yielding definite conclusions about God but a problematic realm where he loses himself only to find himself."23

Will is allright till he does not feel the burdens of the past, and the death dealing affair of his father. Percy intends to convey here like Nathaniel Hawthorne that the burdens of the past do not allow man to live a happy life. Man can be happy only after he is psychologically relieved of the burdens. And in this material world it becomes possible when man gets involved in money and sex. The period of twenty years of Will's married life is "a long night's dream" in
opposition to his present condition. His belief that one can live a happy and free life if one is free from the burdens of the past gets strengthened when he comes in contact with Allison.

Will's entry into Allison's greenhouse marks his entry into the real world of which death is the reality. He gives up his search for God and gets exposed to the world in which he lives through the love of Allison. As he knows more and more about this world in Allison's company he goes on brooding over the reality of life. His thoughts about death remind him of his father who himself "gave in to death" (SC.273). Throughout the novel Will is obviously seen haunted by the memories of the Georgia event but now at the end of the novel, in the company of Allison he is no more troubled by the past memories; on the contrary through these memories he comes to the reality of his life and the reality of the world. He feels that the past is the reality of his life. Huey S. Guagliardio has rightly pointed out that "An episode in Will's past, which for many years had been blotted out by amnesia, seems to hold the key to his recovery." He has already experienced death in life. Now he knows that one can not be away from death, the sign of the past, but at the same time he aspires to live in the present. This is the fate of man that he experiences side by side both death and life in this age of science and technology.

III LANCELOT: A VICTIM OF PRIDE

Percy's fourth novel Lancelot is an extended monologue with a first person narrator. The narrative technique that Percy has used in this novel is indicative of the nature of its protagonist, Lancelot Andrews Lamar, a person with, what Percy calls, "the autonomous self." In his non-fiction entitled Lost in
The Cosmos Percy explains the qualities of an autonomous self which very well suit the character of Lancelot. He writes:

"The self sees itself as a sovereign and individual consciousness, liberated by education from the traditional bonds of religion, by democracy from the strictures of class, by technology from the drudgery of poverty, and by self knowledge from the tyranny of unconscious - and therefore free to pursue its own destiny without God."*

Lancelot is an educated person, a lawyer, living in a most democratic country, America, and has good knowledge about the advanced technology in biology. He is well aware of his existence in the present condition. Thus, according to Percy's explanations, he fits to be an autonomous self. Lancelot's being a man of autonomous self is very well marked by his extraordinary behaviour which raises him above all characters, though in a negative sense, to be the protagonist of the novel.

According to Percy one of the reasons of man's being in the predicament is the impact of science and technology on his consciousness. In Lancelot Percy very well depicts this impact on its protagonist, Lancelot, after whose name the novel is entitled. Glenn H. Utter authoritatively states that "Percy's novel, Lancelot, is a specific example of an individual trapped within a technological society."25 Belle Isle, the main platform, where the action of this novel moves ahead, is itself an island in a sea of technology surrounded by

Note: All subsequent references to this edition will be abbreviated as "LC." with page numbers.
"Ethyl pipery, Dowtowers, Kaiserstacks," and at night, gas flares "as'if giant hunters still stalked the old swamp."

The protagonist in this novel is so obsessed by the knowledge of science and modern technology that he treats even the human beings as objects to be studied scientifically, and human relations and human behaviour to be analysed technologically:

"Lance, a self proclaimed scientist of the human heart, regards Margot not as a woman as she reminds him just before she dies - but as an object to be studied."26

Loncelot uses professional expertise, his Negro servant, Elgin, for collecting information on Márgot's adultery for his scientific research and verifies the same by the logic of scientific method.

In the very beginning of the novel the author introduces the protagonist as a mad person imprisoned for aberrant behaviour. In fact Percy presents him as a victim of pride of intellect who prefers to go according to his own knowledge about science. Charles Fieldelson remarks: "Binx Bolling and Lancelot Lamar are both literary examples of the 'mind engaged in the crucial act of knowledge.'"27 Robert Coles, in his critical appraisal of Percy's novels finds the character of Lancelot akin to Tennyson's Arthurian knight, Lancelot, who is "brought down by pride, the sin of sins" in his epic Idylls.28 Gary M. Ciuba points out that "He continuously applies the methods and reasoning of science to areas like sex and the sacred which by his own admission are ineffable. And he is continuously frustrated."29 Coles further states that Lancelot,

"like his predecessors in other novels, found it hard to reconcile the obligations of an honorable person with a self-centeredness that demanded its own satisfactions. *Pride* is the old fashioned Biblical word for that self-centeredness."\(^{30}\)

Percy's Lancelot speaks with such a confidence and authority as if he has solutions to all the problems in life. As a matter of fact he lives an illusory life far away from reality. His overenthusiasm to live on objective level according to the norms of science creates impression among the readers of the novel that Lancelot is a mad person.

Lancelot's monologue begins as soon as Percival enters his cell. He begins his one sided conversation in such a tone and with such an assurance as if he knows everything about Percival's past, his personality, likings and dislikings.

"I understand. You like my little view .... I feel certain that I know you and know you well"(L.3).

"In this way Lance is able to reassert his much threatened sovereignty and assume some power over his listener."\(^{31}\) Though his exposure to this world in the prison is limited only to "a patch of sky" and whatever few things he can see through the window of the cell yet he boasts that by the experience of "that narrow world" he can provide Percival with some new information about this world. Lancelot opens his conversation only with Percival because he is the type of person "who does not want to talk" and in him he sees "a certain kinship of spirit"(L.5). Thus with an understanding that Percival is not going to challenge his sovereign self he chooses him as a witness to the presentation of his intellectual qualities. He goes on talking on behalf of himself and also on behalf of Percival taking it for granted that whatever he talks is true to Percival's will.
Like most of Percy's protagonists Lancelot is also a victim of the past. He has to undergo immense mental suffering for the immoral deeds committed by his family members - his father, mother and second wife Margot - in past. But his suffering gets a boost when he treats those immoral past deeds, intellectually analysing them, purely on scientific ground without giving spiritual touch to them. Similar to Grand Inquisitor in Brothers Karamazov Lancelot seeks "a materialistic solution to a spiritual problem."32 Percival, his boyhood friend and a priest psychiatrist at present, stands as an image of the past for Lancelot. By looking at him Lancelot recollects not only Percival's past but also his own past. He sees himself in Percival:

"But when I saw you yesterday, it was like seeing myself" (L. 5).

He realizes that his name is "Lancelot Andrews Lamar" only after he looks at Percival. He remembers their school days and the life both the families lived. Through Lancelot's narration of the past of these families Percy skilfully illustrates how irony of fate affects not only the life of an individual but also the life of the whole family. Lancelot and Percival, both were close friends when they were in school. Lancelot that time was on "the peak of his life in college and prominent on campus" but now he turns into a psychic patient in hospital-cum-prison; whereas Percival who that time seemed happy in whore houses, "drank too much" an "obscure, almost unknown," is now a prestigious and an honourable person in the society (L. 14). Lancelot's narration of the gradual change in their personalities and in the status of their families obviously indicates that fate does not favour all all the times.

The most important event, what he calls "a catastrophic event," that Lancelot remembers after his coming in contact with Percival is the deceitful
nature of his second wife Margot. He recollects how by chance he had discovered his wife's infidelity. The minute accuracy and the exactness in his description indicates the strong hold of the incident over his mind. He narrates:

"My discovery occurred purely by accident. At exactly 5.01 P.M. the Ethyl whistle had just stopped blowing" (L.19).

Lancelot treats his discovery of Margot's adultery through the letter 'O' as a mysterious happening like an astronomer's accidental discovery of a comet by observing a slight change in the small dot on computer screen.

The tiny but catastrophic event, the chance happening, changes Lancelot's whole attitude of looking at himself and at the world. Now he comes to the reality of his self and regrets for the false life that he and his parents lived in the past.

"Lancelot's past was split into two major segments by the letter 'O' his daughter's blood type and unmistakable evidence of his wife's unfaithfulness. Before the discovery, he had been living in a dream-world of his own making; he had been sunk in the patterns of his ruined Louisiana aristocratic ennui. After he detects Margot's infidelity, Lancelot comes alive."  

The letter 'O' enables him to come to the reality of the surrounding world in which he lives. He penetrates into the American society and realizes how contrasting is the scientific development from outside and the spiritual depression from inside. By his objective observation of the society it becomes obvious for him that the condition of New Orleans is not different from the condition of man living in New Orleans. He remarks:
"Whenever I think of New Orleans away from New Orleans, I think of rotting fish on the side walk and good times inside" (L.22).

It is not only with New Orleans but the condition of all big cities like Birmingham in America is:

"neither damned nor saved but eased rather, existing in a kind of comfortable Catholic limbo somewhere between the outer circle of hell, where sexual sinners don't have it all that bad, and the inner circle of purgatory, where things are even better" (L.23).

Lancelot is now conscious of the drastic change that has been taking place in the present world.

Actually the change that has taken place in his own life since the discovery of Margot's infidelity is more drastic and speedy. Lancelot who once enjoyed the prestige of being a "president of the students body, ..... Rhodes scholar, Golden Glover, holder of the record of the Longest Punt Return in the entire U.S.A." who drank well, ate well and loved Margot at present finds himself akin to a mirror image of a strange person "mostly silhouette..... a reversed negative. ..... Big headed smart-boy ..... a long distance runner who has conquered polio. ..... a smart sissy rich boy who has devoted his life to getting over it" (L.63-64). This mirror image of Lance reveals the miserable condition of man in a technologically developed society. It is but ironical that in this age of technology man has been reduced to silhouette. The big head of the image indicates the intellectual development of man of today, whereas the "hollow" meagre body suggests the weakness of his soul. The mirror image thus symbolizes intellectual elevation and spiritual depression of man in this age. The position of the knees of the figure "slightly bent" suggests man's submission to
the forces of science. He looks like a patient just recovered from "polio." He has a ghostly appearance looking like "a reversed negative" without any emotions or feelings.

Lancelot, like Will Barrett, is a victim not of his own crime but the crime of his wife, a lusty woman, and the crime of his father, a corrupt man. It is again ironical that the persons who are a party to the crimes are safe from punishment and they enjoy their lives but Lancelot who is not personally involved in the crimes suffers in consequence of others' crimes. This is the fate of today's man that he has to suffer for the misdeeds of others.

Lancelot's suffering gets enhanced due to his pretentious and futile efforts to present himself as a man free from the past. By his interpretation of Margot's adultery at length on the basis of his knowledge of science he tries to show himself as a modern man who does not have faith in the traditional concepts of sin and evil. But on the other hand his continuous search to find out whether Margot has really deceived him and whether he is the real father of Siobhan, reduces his affection towards his daughter. Though he pretends to be a modern man of science he acts like a traditional. He being a modernist thinks that sex is a natural instinct and there is nothing wrong in any woman's keeping physical relations with any man but the elders unnecessarily treat the act as "a gigantic hoax." Lance sticks to this view as long as it is not concerned to his self, his family. But when he discovers that his wife keeps extra marital relations with Hollywood actors he does not tolerate the idea. It shows the doubleness of his mind that he is objectively modern and subjectively traditional.

Lancelot wants to be sure about Margot's illicit relations: "what she had done and was doing now" (L.43). He appoints Elgin, an obedient and innocent Negro servant of straightforward nature to spy on Margot. Lancelot
does not reveal the purpose of his plan to Elgin. He being a member of an aristocratic family does not want his wife's adultery to be made public. He very cleverly exploits Elgin for this job so that nobody would suspect him for spying on Margot. But ironically enough Elgin's report proves to be an another blow on his ego. The information that he receives from Elgin is very shocking. It reveals not only Margot's illicit relations with Jacob but contrary to his expectations it also reveals his lovable daughter, Miss. Lucy's illicit relations with Troy Dana, a Hollywood actor. Elgin's narration of the report, his description of the cross movements of the actors from one room to another, suggests the movement of "ten billion cells" in Lancelot's body when he is listening to Elgin's report. Walker Percy skillfully illustrates in the character of Lancelot the sufferings of a modern snob.

Lancelot in his obsession with Margot's adultery wants to be more particular and accurate in his knowledge of the act. He is not fully satisfied by Elgin's report of Margot. "Simple observation has proved insufficient to verify infidelity. From the Ellulian perspective, the only way open when technology fails is to rely upon improved technology."34 Lancelot now desires to witness himself on screen the act of Margot's adultery. And to fulfil this bestial desire he makes an advanced plan again with the help of Elgin to capture the illicit activities of Margot in a video film.

Lancelot very cunningly deceives the innocent Negro servant in getting him involved in the immoral act again. He knows that the innocent and obedient Negro servant can easily be fooled by an intellectual like him. He fails to understand that in trying to see Margot's evil act he is neglecting his own evil act of deceiving an innocent person. Gary M. Ciuba has rightly said that "Elgin, Lancelot's personal cinematographer and soundman, is reduced to his ancestral
status as slave, and the movie company become real life-actors in Lancelot's mad drama.\textsuperscript{35} He engages Elgin for his plan with a bait that if Elgin helps him he is going to make a movie. To be successful in his plan he uses the most recent cameras and "the voice activated sound tape recorder" which "only goes on when there is a noise. ..... Only when he or she turned over"(L.145). After making all such technical arrangements for secret shooting he very enthusiastically waits for the actors to come to Belle Isle. The hurricane outside effectively symbolizes the hurricane in the mind of Lancelot.

Like in Percy's other novels in \textit{Lancelot} also the impact of movies on the characters is obvious. Lancelot is surprised to see the change that has taken place in his wife, Margot, due to her exposure to the film industry. She is proud of imitating the famous Hollywood actors and actresses in her day to day life even in very minor activities like the "way of disposing of her mucus"(L.166).

\begin{quote}
  "She was as quick to pick up the bad manners of the film folk as the good manners of the gentry, yet she did it good humoredly as if these transformations might be necessary but were not to be taken so seriously"(L.166).
\end{quote}

As a result though she was a Texan little belle now she looks like "June Allyson" from Washington Heights. The movie world brings around materialistic as well as spiritual change in Margot. Now she does not give first preference to sex but she believes that there is something more important than sex:

\begin{quote}
  "Believe it or not, I've found something more important than the almighty penis" (L.174).
\end{quote}
Margot is thus very much moved by the illusory life of the film actors and actresses.

Lancelot's witnessing the shooting of hurricane scene strengthens his belief that the world in which he lives is as illusory as the movie world. Assigning Elgin the work of spying on the Hollywood actors and then asking him to be "a technological eavesdropper" suggests that he himself is living an illusory life. Though Elgin has technically failed in taking the video film he tries to get some meaning out of the broken images. He himself interprets the broken images and the half-broken sentences with confidence. Lancelot's these efforts indicate nothing but his act to find out reality in probability. What he guesses he takes as real. He is under the impression that he has captured sin, the evil act, that is, Margot's infidelity, in the video tape. While witnessing the failed video film he looks at everything objectively.

Lancelot's cunning nature becomes obvious again when he, instead of engaging Elgin in film making, tries to get rid of him forever to save the honour of his family by offering him a bait of $ 75,000. He plans to send him to a distant place under the pretense to provide him the facility to complete his higher education at M.I.T., get him married with Ethel Shapiro, his classmate, and "buy a house in Woodale"(L.198). But in reality he sends him out for the doubt that he must have watched the video film and he may spread the news of Margot's adultery which would bring dishonour to his family. He pretends to be liberal in providing big donation for the welfare of Negroes. Glenn H. Utter points out how Lancelot's this act is inhuman and ironical. He states:

"It is humanism that is to help man to cope with the inhuman aspects of contemporary society. However the irony of contemporary humanism is that in the
name of humanity, the individual is encouraged to become less human.\textsuperscript{36}

Percy very effectively depicts this inhumanness of humans in his other two novels Love in the Ruins and The Thanatos Syndrome which are mainly concerned with science and technology.

Lance, no doubt succeeds in hiding the reality of his own life and the life of his family from others but he cannot hide it from his own self. In the heart of his hearts he feels guilty for deceiving others and at the same time he has strong feeling that he has been deceived by his wife, Margot. Lancelot's realization of this reality causes him immense mental torture and ultimately he chooses again a wrong path to come out of it. He thinks that violence is the only solution to come out of suffering. "The secret of life is violence and rape," he remarks(L.224). Simone Vautier rightly states: "...... violence always looms in Lancelot's discourse and in fact keeps mounting."\textsuperscript{37}

Lance wants to cross the limits of human beings in becoming violent. He takes two pills offered to him by Raine which, in a dream state, place him in the category of beast losing the human emotions. Lance kills Janos Jacoby, Margot's lover, cutting his throat by a bowie knife. He does not find anything serious in killing Jacoby. For him it was just "steel molecules entering skin molecules, artery molecules, blood cells"(L.254). Thus Lance engineers the death of his wife's lover and, as a result of the gas explosion, the deaths of Raine, and Dana who have spoiled the life of Lancelot's daughter, Lucy. He sets on fire Belle Isle, the old mansion. Even after these violent deeds he does not feel bad as if he did such acts "ten thousand times before"(L.246). Thus Lancelot's knowledge of science and his extra brilliance leads him to the destruction of others lives and inconsequence his own life. He is put in jail for the deadly crimes.
IV  TOM MORE: A VICTIM OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Walker Percy builds up his third novel *Love in the Ruins: The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End of the World* with the background of moral, social and political turmoil in America. It opens with the scenes of chaos and ruins everywhere. The narrator of the novel, Tom More, who is also the protagonist of the novel, states that these are the "Dead Latter Days of the old violent beloved U.S.A. and of the Christ-forgetting, Christ-haunted death-dealing Western world" where an utter catastrophe is likely to take place any time.* The outlook is so bad that the wolves howl in the streets of Cleveland: "like Rome during the Black Plague"(LR.17). Buzzards circle New Orleans seeking carrion. Vines sprout up through cracks in the interstates, Parking lots lie full of mouldering cars. It seems that "God has at last removed his blessings from the U.S.A." and everything has stopped working: "the blessing or the luck is over, the machinery clanks, the chain catches hold, and the cars jerk forward"(LR.3-4).

Thus Percy envisions America on the verge of disaster. He portrays his country as a wasteland of Christendom where the dreams of brotherhood and man serving God have completely disappeared from the minds of people. "Principalities and powers are everywhere victorious. Wickedness flourishes in high places"(LR.5). An angry person goes mad and an abstracted one gets "sundered from himself and roams the world like Ishmael"(LR.5). Atrocities occur more in number everywhere. The madmen slaughter the whole families in bed for no reason. People have turned against each other; "race against race,

right against left, believer against heathen, San Francisco against Los Angeles, Chicago against Cicero"(LR.17). Garry M. Ciuba justifies the superiority of Percy's skill in portraying the disastrous life of Americans in his third novel *Love in the Ruins* as compared to in his previous novels *The Moviegoer* and *The Last Gentleman*:

"The Moviegoer portrayed an age in which an exhausted humanism and devitalized scientific objectivity produced a silent and secret despair. While *The Last Gentleman* hinted that the ominous disquiet of its predecessor was already flaring into violence. But although both novels sensed the possibility of disaster in the everyday life of America neither envisioned the imminent destruction of the nation as does Percy's 1971 novel *Love in the Ruins.*"*38*

In this chaotic situation with ruins all around Tom More, the protagonist of this novel, appears as a Messiah to rescue his nation from the forthcoming destruction. He being a scientist believes in the revival of the national utopia through the development of science. He takes pride in the scientific approach which he hopes will enable him not only to diagnose but also to cure the nationwide malady, to "weld the broken self whole" of modern man (LR.36).

"Tom More - self-proclaimed genius, confident of his ability to solve the problem of the fallen nature of human kind, drunk as a lord during much of the novel, filled with pride, determined to have all three of the girls he has stowed away in the Howard Johnson's motel - believes that his invention, More's Qualitative Quantitative Ontological Lapsometer (MOQUOL), can measure the degree to which a person's soul fails to coincide with itself and thus save modern human-kind from itself."*39*
Jac Tharpe remarks that "Tom is mainly a mad scientist, who is a bad Catholic in part because of his extremely humanistic pride as the inventor of a machine to cure all ills of the spirit, a task that God has assigned himself." This messiah of God seems to be revolting against God for he takes pride in finding out scientific remedy to a spiritual problem. He falls a victim to his scientific invention with an ambition to win Nobel Prize as Garry M. Ciuba states: "Despite his professed concern for the salvation of the world; his real goal is his own glory." Percy himself in an interview opines: "Dr. More was a diagnostician. He knew something was wrong but he fell victim to pride, was seduced by the devil... The big mistake was in him, that he could believe he could treat a spiritual disease with a scientific device however sophisticated."

According to Tom More a catastrophe is going to occur within next two hours. And what he is bothered about in this situation is not the catastrophe but his article on lapsometer to be published in Brain to have wide publicity of his scientific device before the occurrence of the catastrophe. His main aim in getting the article published is not to provide technical information to the public to rescue themselves from suffering but to create a sensation in the world of science to put him in the line of those scientists who wish to win Nobel Prize. He boasts about the significance of his article to the doctors in having diagnosis and treatment of the maladies of their patients.

"My article, it is true, is an extremely important one perhaps even epochal in its significance. With it, my little invention in hand, any doctor can probe the very secrets of the soul, diagnose the maladies that poison the wellsprings of man's hope. It could save the world or destroy it and in the next two hours will very likely do one or the other for as any doctor knows, the more effective a treatment is, the more dangerous it is in the wrong hands" (L.R. 7).
In trying to save America and the whole Western world from utter destruction Tom More lifts up himself from the position of a human being to the status of an angel without realizing the dangers of man's being an angel. Percy warns that the great danger of man's being an angel is of his falling a prey to total abstraction. In the name of peace and human welfare man may go to any extreme, he may "kill anybody who gets in his way, torture, execute, wipe out entire population all with the best possible motives and best possible intentions, in fact in the name of peace and freedom, etcetera" (LR.328). Thus there is every possibility that man, in his trying to be an angel, may become a beast.

Tom more tries to be an angel but at the same time he can not keep himself away from being a beast. He says:

"I believe in God and the whole business but I love women best, music and science next, whisky next, God fourth and my fellowman hardly at all" (LR.6).

Tom more falls in a whirl. He is unable to keep balance between the angelic and the bestial instincts in him. He takes pride in being an angel but on certain occasions he behaves like a beast. His self in Kierkegaard's words, is broken into two - the genius and the apostle. "..... the phenomenon that Percy calls the 'cartesian split' constitutes the philosophical crux of Love in the Ruins and forms the controlling metaphor or Tom More's vision of experience."43 He is aware of the tension between body and mind but as a scientist, a physician psychiatrist, he is proud of his ability in bringing harmony between the two. He comes forward as the only genius with great potential for the scientific research and is sure of his capabilities in setting right the ruined America. Art Immelmann, the devil incarnated, nourishes further the false feelings of a genius and an apostle in Tom and compels him to act like a beast.
Percy's illustration of Tom's character with minute details of his life discloses what type of person he is and how he undergoes inner suffering in consequence of his broken self. His self introduction in the first section of the novel creates curiosity to know more and more about him.

"Who am I? you well might wonder. Let me give a little dossier. I am a physician, a not very successful psychiatrist; an alcoholic, a shaky middle-aged man subject to depression and elations and morning terrors, but a genius nevertheless who sees into the hidden causes of things and erects simple hypotheses to account for the glut of everyday events; a bad Catholic; a widower and cuckold whose wife ran off with a heathen Englishman and died on the island of Cozumel, where she hoped to begin a new life and see things afresh"(LR.11).

Tom's this self introduction reveals that though Tom More is a physician psychiatrist older in age compared to Binx Bolling and Will Barrett but as a man of this century he is "torn by the traumas and ironies of life." Though Percy provides Tom his residence in Paradise Estates, a parody of heaven on the earth, he is not happy at all. His unhappiness, as he says, "is not the fault of paradise" but it is a matter of his bad luck (LR.20). His daughter, Samantha, dies; his wife runs away with a heathen Englishman, and he falls a prey to depression and morning terror. It is a great irony, Tom himself realizes, that he, a physician psychiatrist, is not so happy as his patients are.

Tom More believes that the main problem of the twentieth century man is his broken self, separation of mind from body. And if once this problem of man is solved then his life will become as happy as the life of other creatures on the earth. He compares man with other creatures on the basis of the difference between the two layers of mind. According to him the layer-I
coinsides with the layer-II in other animals whereas in man it does not happen. The inner self of man does not coinside with the outer self:

"If you measure the pineal activity of a monkey - or any subhuman animal - with my lapsometer you will invariably record identical readings at layers-I and II. Its self, that is to say, coinsides with itself. Only in man do you find a discrepancy; the layer I, the outer social self, ticking over say, at a sprightly 5.4 mmv, while Layer II just lies there, barely alive at 0.7 mmv, or even zero! - a nought, a gap, an aching wound. Only in man does the self miss itself; fallfrom itself (hence lapsometer) (LR.36).

Tom More, with the help of the scientific device, lapsometer, is able to diagnose the problem of mind-body split, the difference between the Layer I and the Layer II, in a particular individual. But he is not content with only this much. He wants to make the scientific device more perfect to find out a solution to the problem. He dreams to make man whole and intact, fit to live in paradise, bringing him back his original fortune. He is sure of its possibility provided he succeeds in minimizing to the maximum extent the difference in the readings of the Layer-I and II.

"Suppose I could hit on the right dosage and weld the broken self whole, what if man could reenter paradise, so to speak, and live there both as man and spirit, whole and intact man spirit, as solid flesh as a speckled trout, a dappled thing, yet aware of itself as a self"(LR.36).

The scope of Tom More's scientific device is enormous. It diagnoses as well as treats not only the physical but also the spiritual ills of human beings. The name of the device "More's Qualitative Quantitative Ontological Lapsometer" itself is indicative of the vastness of its nature of
applicability and utility. Here Tom More seems to be ignoring Marcel's principle that "The individual's sense of disease and metaphysical uneasiness cannot be treated with the objective empirical methods of science." It is because the study of Being by many other beings can differ from each other for all are living and they differ in nature from each other. Therefore the result of such study can never be static as it is in the case of a scientific study. The investigator can not be separated from the thing to be investigated. It is impossible to follow the empirical method to understand Being because the study of Being is not a scientific problem but a mystery to understand.

To prove the feasibility of the device Tom More successfully tests it on some of his patients. The instrument clearly shows great discrepancy between the Layer-I and II of a patient's mind. Now Tom is sure that with the help of the lapsometer he "can actually register the knotheadedness of the knotheads, the mutly objectivity of the scientists, and the mad spasms of the liberals" (LR.52). Tom is overjoyed by his success in inventing the instrument and in making it practicable on the patients. He is so much proud and confident of the device that he hopes to set right the whole U.S.A. with the help of it.

"But wait. It is still not too late. I can save you, America! I know something! I know what is wrong! I hit on something, made a breakthrough, came on a discovery! I can save the terrible God-blessed Americans from themselves! With my invention!" (LR.58).

Tom has high respect for and is proud of the newly invented device, lapsometer, which he calls by different worthy names as "the stethoscope of the spirit" (LR.62), "a lovely device," "a good camera," "an EEG without wires, with a stereotactic device for triangulating," "a lucky piece" (LR.84). It is
"the first caliper of the soul" (LR.191). He believes that the lapsometer is able to "fathom the deep abscess in the soul of Western man" (LR.153). He can measure the index of life, life in death and death in life" (LR.190). Though Tom's lapsometer is so magnificent but still he is not fully satisfied with it. He wants that with the help of the device he should be able to make the dying alive and the living dead.

No doubt Tom succeeds in testing the scientific device on individual cases but he fails in testing it randomly on a large number of patients through the agency of Art Immelmann. For Percy Tom's failure is sure because he studies human beings as nonliving objects and his ontological pursuits with lapsometer Jack the sense of wonder. Mary Deems Holland rightly remarks: "Enraptured by the lapsometer, Tom More lacks the metaphysician's awe when confronted by the mystery of Being." 46 Tom lives in an illusory world. In order to assure his existence in the real world he engages himself either in scientific invention or in sex. But by his first act he rises above the real self to be an angel and by the second act he falls lower than the real self to be a beast. A real self is somewhere between an angel and a beast. Tom does not find even a single real person in this world. All, including himself, are either angels or beasts and all need to be cured.

Like Percy's other protagonists Tom also comes to the reality of this world and the reality of his own self on the occasion of catastrophic events. His attempt to commit suicide on Christmas Eve, six months before the action of the novel begins, is a catastrophic event in his life because it brings Tom to himself and to the real world around him. "I came to myself, saw myself as itself and the world for what it is, and began to love life" (LR.97). The sight of
blood on his wrists drags the illusory world out from his mind and lands him in the world of immanence. He feels the joy of living a real life.

After the suicide attempt when Tom stays in the Acute Ward of the Fedville Hospital he feels actually in the world of immanence for there he is least involved in the lapsometer. His contact with other patients and hospital employees pulls him in that world. He remembers the ironical change that has taken place in him while he is in the hospital.

"Sane outside, I can't make head or tail of people. Mad inside, we signaled each other like auctioneers... I listened and watched. Outside there is not time to listen." (L.R. 105).

Till the end of this novel Tom, in fact, lives in a behaviourists paradise where everything has got a name, everything is conditioned, and good and bad are clearly distinguished from each other. In such conditions life does not remain a mystery and human beings are treated as machines and death remains a raw fact. It is only after his confession to Father Smith his longing for lapsometer gets weakened. Father Smith reminds him of other more important things in the world than the invention of lapsometer. He advises him to be social and more available to others; that he should divert his energy more outward than inward.

Father Smith's advice ultimately drags Tom out of the illusory world; now his attention is diverted from his own wound to the sufferings of others. Now he understands that his lapsometer can not be an omnipotent device to treat all the ills of human beings. It "does not work on blacks, it does not pick up their fallen natures as it does whites." They remain a mystery to More and his words read more like a question than word."47 He finally realizes that a physician
scientist can diagnose and cure only a diseased body but if the dis-ease goes beyond that which can be empirically known then it requires only a spiritual treatment to recover:

"Percy's message here at the end-after revealing the short-comings of many utopian schemes - is not that man must live without hope for himself or for the future, but that he should live according to his fate as fallen creature."  

Walker Percy carries forward the same theme of victimization in his last novel *The Thanatos Syndrome* with the same protagonist Tom More who has the roots of his present suffering in his past life depicted in Percy's previous novel *Love in the Ruins*. It has been Percy's view in all of his novels that the great scientific inventions are highly acclaimed in the beginning with the hope that they will be used for the welfare of humanity. But, as time passes, to the utter dissatisfaction of the inventor scientists the inventions are used less for the welfare and more for the annihilation of humanity by those inconsiderate persons in whose hands fall these inventions. Percy has shown a glimpse of this fact in *Love in the Ruins*. Tom's lapsometer creates havoc in the American society when it falls in the wrong hands of Art Immelmann. The same theme of misuse of scientific inventions Percy has continued in *The Thanatos Syndrome*.

Tom More's suffering in this novel indicates the fate of a modern scientist. He falls a victim to his own past invention published in the form of an article which is popularly known as: "More's Paradoxical Sodium Radiation Syndrome." The article was first published in the "Journal of the Medical Association" and then was upheld by many renowned newspapers like *Time*, *News Week* and *New York Daily News* when Tom was just a medical student at Tulane University. His invention deals with the effect of rise in the level of
Heavy Sodium and Chloride in the blood. He notices their effects on human beings as:

"Some of the patients got better and some of the psychiatrists got worse. Indeed many of our most disturbed patients, the suicidal, the manic, the naked, the catatonic, in short the mad, were found one morning sitting fully clothed and in their right minds. A number of residents and staff physicians on the other hand developed acute symptoms out of the blue"(L.R.26).

In *The Thanatos Syndrome* Tom More's same invention again falls in the wrong hands which in consequence creates a chaotic situation in the society of Feliciana Parish, the place of action of this novel.

Percy opens *The Thanatos Syndrome* with the reappearance of Tom More, the protagonist of *Love in the Ruins*, after a gap of two years. To acknowledge this gap of two years in Tom's life Percy keeps his readers waiting for sixteen years as *The Thanatos Syndrome* was published in 1987 after the publication of *Love in the Ruins* in 1971. In the first part of the novel we learn that during last two years Tom, the psychiatrist, was detained in prison for the crime of selling "one hundred prescriptions of Desoxyn tablets and two hundred prescriptions of Dalmane capsules at one dollar per dose... at the Union 76 truck stop of Interstate-12 near Hammond, Louisiana."* Now he is released from jail on parole and is on probationary period for one year under the supervision of Dr. Bob Comeaux and Dr. Max Gotlieb.

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Note: All subsequent references to this edition will be abbreviated as "TS." with page numbers.*
The social and political background that Percy provides 'Tom in this novel, after his release from jail, is not as bad as it was in Love in the Ruins. But yet the condition in Feliciana is not healthy enough for Tom to live a peaceful life. It is a place of malcontents "dissenters from the dissent" where deserters from the confederate army, smugglers, criminals and all kinds of refugees hold up together. The title of the novel itself is indicative of the ironic situation that death prevails everywhere in this century which is supposed to be the most humanitarian century in the history:

"Never in the history of the world have there been so many civilized tenderhearted souls as have lived in this century."

But:

"More people have been killed in this century by tenderhearted souls than by cruel barbarians in all other centuries put together" (TS 361).

In this novel Percy presents dystopia, a distorted, grotesque vision of the so called American dream.

By the end of Love in the Ruins Percy created an impression that Tom More would settle down with some improvement in his behaviour and with his second marriage with a good lady Ellen. But in the beginning of The Thanatos Syndrome he asserts that there happens to be ups and downs in the life of man and Tom can not be an exception to this. The first blow to Tom More of his fate was the sentence of imprisonment for two years for reselling the drugs which were misused by the truck owners. Unfortunately the social service proved illegal and fatal to him.
Even after Tom is released from jail on parole he does not give up his medical search. His curiosity about the drastic change in the lives of his old patients drags him in the continuous search. But now, unlike in *Love in the Ruins*, Tom More's search is not for self-aggrandisement but for the welfare of the whole humanity.

He suspects of something going wrong in Feliciana when he observes other patients after the case study of his first two patients Mickey LaFaye and Donna S. He recalls that two years earlier when his second patient Donna first came to him for medical treatment she was a fat girl with a fine sense of humour but having some psychiatric problems for which she was referred to Tom "by more successful physicians who'd finally thrown up their hands"(TS.14). That time she felt deceived by the whole world, her father, mother, and even by God:

"She couldn't stand her mother or father or herself or God-or me. For one thing, she had been sexually molested by her father, then blamed by her mother for doing the very thing her mother had told her to do: Be nice."(TS.14).

Donna had been a victim of sexual anxiety of her father and vanity of her mother. It was her problem that she could not live with double standards to please both her father and mother. The only alternative left to her was to go on eating more and more "To make herself ugly for boys so nobody but Daddy would want her"(TS.15). Understanding her problem Tom had accepted her as his patient and, with physical and mental exercises, had succeeded in arousing in her the hope of romantic love that "a certain someone she would meet by chance...."(TS.15). Tom had succeeded in bringing suitable change in her to
realize her true self without using chemicals but by just providing her with enough moral strength.

After two years what change Tom finds in her to his surprise is that she has made Tom himself the object of her romantic love. Her eroticism is shocking to Tom. Apart from her being more seductive what frightens him more is her unselfconsciousness about the sexual gestures with him. After keen observation of Mickey and Donna he comes to a conclusion that "there is something missing, not merely the old terrors, but a sense in each of her-her what ? her self ?"(TS.21). Tom gets this clue by their use of broken language, which he relates to the suppression of critical function in man. He desires to study some more cases of such type to come to a clear hypothesis.

To the utter dissatisfaction of Tom he notices that during last two years, like his other patients, a drastic change has taken place also in his most loving wife, Ellen. He is awestruck to see how she is totally changed in her behaviour. She has shifted to a different type of life which she disliked two years before. Tom does not understand how Ellen, a Presbyterian nurse with motherly affection who always gave a helping hand and encouragement to Tom during the adverse periods of his life in Love in the Ruins, has now turned into a materialist and a voluptuous woman distracted from what is going on around her. Ellen was very much attached to her children and her husband, all the while she used to be in their service. But now she has hired a woman to look after her children and is away from home most of the time. She once hated Tom for being an alcoholic but now she herself is addicted to alcohol. Now she has willingly given up the spiritual way of life running after a new friend Van Dorn to satisfy her sexual desire.
Percy carries from his previous novel *Lancelot* the theme of illicit relations of protagonist's wife with other persons. Both, Lancelot and Tom, undergo the inner torture of suspicion. In *The Thanatos Syndrome* the cause of suspicion is the abuse of scientific invention by others. Whereas in *Lancelot* it is the protagonist's own pride of scientific knowledge.

Ellen's odd behaviour creates suspicion in Tom's mind about her chastity. It is but natural for a husband who has been cuckolded by his first wife and after his second marriage who lives in prison for two years away from his home to have a doubt about his wife's remaining faithful to him:

"The Van Dorn connection is stickier yet. The chances are that no married man in prison ...... can entirely escape the thought of his coming out a cuckold. Given the history of his first marriage if nothing else, we may assume that Tom More must have spent a good deal of his time at Fort Pelham [the prison] reflecting upon that possibility. And, once out, he sees and hears little to reassure him."}

Tom's suspicion gets strengthened when he receives supporting clues in this regard. Ellen's going out with Van Dorn to play bridge strikes Tom. He feels humiliated when his patient Donna mentions him first time that she saw her with Van Dorn several times in the store. A husband tolerates the torture of unchastity of his wife so long as it remains a secret to others. But it gets momentum as soon as he learns that her unchastity has become a public issue. So when Donna starts talking about Ellen's close friendship with Van Dorn he suddenly stops her:

"Donna, I'm sure you didn't come here to tell me you saw my second wife at the store"(TS.18).

The drastic change in Ellen's behaviour puzzles Tom. He does not understand how once a religious woman is now addicted to drinking turned so
voluptuous. She leans over Tom More and "waits for me to undress her, smiling and cooperative, standing when standing is required, sitting, lifting herself" (TS.51). A humanitarian Ellen has now turned into a beast. "Ellen is in bed but is, to my surprise, not lying on her side as she used to be but is on all fours" (TS.52). Tom is much alert to listen to Ellen's broken sentences with a hope to study the change in her nature. He suspects Van Dorn and decides to accompany him on a fishing trip with an intention to find out just what kind of influence he exerts on Ellen. He compares Van Dorn with a demon on the earth who has seduced his wife for some selfish purpose:

"What Tom despises most in Van Dorn's treatment of Ellen, perhaps, is the implication that he seduced her, not out of any kind of love, but simply to use her in his experiments." 53

Tom wishes to punish Van Dorn severely for the inhuman crime he has committed. But at present he is helplessly burning within waiting to prove the criminality of Van Dorn.

Tom is deprived of his wife as well as of his children who are still under an impression that their father is an alcoholic. They are unaware of the change in Tom during the two years of his prison life. It causes him despair and keeps him waiting for the grace of God to have recognition of the change in him at least by his own kinsmen. This is the fate of a prisoner as well as of a hospital patient who recovers and is discharged from hospital after his long and successful fight with death. Percy, himself being a victim of such situation in 1940s, has similar experience. "Such a patient sees the old world in a new way, as a fresh, transformed place where the ordinary becomes full of meaning." 51
Percy successfully inserts his own experiences here and there in the lives of his protagonists to strengthen their characters.

One of the causes of Tom's suffering is his reluctance to make a choice. He does not fix what way of life he has to choose, on which line he must move forward to achieve his goal. In this regard he was quite comfortable at Fort Pelham in prison because there he did not need to exert on making a choice as he was "caught between the passionate liberals and conservatives" and he had nothing else to do but just "to listen than to argue"(TS.34). But now he is free and so he has to make his own choice.

Tom on certain occasions likes to give Lucy the place of Ellen as she has been all the while moving with Van Dorn to attend bridge tournaments. But he does not succeed in being one with her as he can not totally give up the memories of Ellen which enable him often to differentiate her nature from Lucy. Inspite of her being a close and helpful to Tom he can not decide till the end of the novel what to do of her. But in the last part of the novel when Lucy's ex-husband, Buddy Dupre, returns to Lucy with a political ambition to be the governor of Louisiana making Lucy the first lady of the state she, being a lady of materialistic attitude, holds up her husband's ambition. Tom thanks God for not getting into another trouble by marrying Lucy for now he understands that though, to some extent Lucy acts like Ellen, she likes to live a life of abstraction which is quite opposite to Tom's principles. If he had married Lucy then his condition would have been "in the end seeing no way out but to tie a sugar kettle on his head and jump into the river"(TS.348). He gives a sigh of relief for luckily escaping the devastation of his life. "what a relief all around," he remarks (TS.348).
Tom is unable to make quick decisions in the flux of time. After Tom is released from prison and is kept on parole under the supervision of Bob Comeaux and Max Gottlieb who, considering his accomplishment "in the field of cortical scanning for which he received national recognition," want "not .... to lose Dr. More's services" (TS.28). They are ready to offer Tom an attractive job of a senior consultant at Fedville. The matter is disclosed to Tom in the fifth section of the first part of the novel. It is upto Tom to make a decision.

Again Tom is unable to make a decision whether to join the job offered to him by Bob Comeaux and Max Gottlieb or reinstate his private practice of a physician. He knows that his physician's license is in the hands of Comeaux as he is on parole and he can not start his private practice unless the license is released to him taking off the charges against him by the State Medical Board. His position is like a nut in a cracker. If he doesn't act as per Comeaux's wish there is possibility of losing the license and if he acts as per Comeaux's wish then he will be violating his conscience and deviating from his goal.

As the action of the novel moves forward Tom suspects that the roots of drastic change in his patient's behaviour can be found in Comeaux's plan. So he is not in hurry to take important decisions as he used to be in Love in the Ruins. "Two years in the clink have taught me a thing or two. I don't have to be in a demonic hurry as I used to be"(TS.67). At the end after thorough study he comes to a proper decision that though Comeaux and himself have the similar goal to achieve but what Comeaux follows is the negative way. He wants to improve the quality of life of American people by killing the handicapped babies and unwanted old persons through the schemes pedeuthanasia and ger euthanasia; whereas Tom chooses to take all the handicapped babies and unwanted old persons to St. Margaret's hospice for physical and spiritual treatment to improve
the quality of their lives. Comeaux realizes that though both of them have a common goal but "The only difference between us is that you're in good taste and I'm not." (TS. 347). Finally Tom comes to a conclusion: "but I'd rather do my old-fashioned one-on-one therapy with depressed and terrified people" (TS. 366). Thus one can imagine under what mental tension Tom must have been living through the whole action of the novel till he comes to the final decision by the end of the novel. But it is, however, true that his suffering in The Thanatos Syndrome as compared to his suffering in Love in the Ruins minimizes with the growth of his maturity as a scientist. Here he suffers not because of his or others mistakes but because of the misuse of his inventions by others.

Thus this study of Percy's protagonists reveals that the theme of victimization is prominent in all the novels of Percy. The first two protagonists Binx Bolling and Will Barrett are the victims of the change in the cultural outlook in South where man is becoming more and more money conscious, self centered having attraction for the luxuries and physical satisfactions. The other two protagonists Lancelot, and Tom More are the victims of recent scientific and technological developments. They are so much moved by science that they take it above all-God, nature and even above themselves. As a result Percy's protagonists get abstracted in this world by the cultural and scientific revolutions in America. They suffer because they are lost in the fantasies of the new world. They recover at the end of the novels by realizing the reality of the changing world in which they are fated to live.

Notes:

Chapter II


9. Ibid., P. 3.


15. Ibid., P. 22.


46. Ibid., p. 69.


50. Ibid., p. 243.