CHAPTER III

THE MAKING OF PERCY'S PROTAGONISTS

The previous chapter is based on the argument that the protagonists of Percy's novels are the sufferers and they all undergo mental suffering though they belong to well to do middle class families and are educated persons. Suffering, for Percy, is the reality of life. No living person, rich or poor, white or black, can escape suffering; and to escape it means to submit to death. As a matter of fact the growth of Percy's protagonists is seen in realization of their selves through suffering. In fact Percy's protagonists suffer because they are obsessed by material pursuits. In this age of science and technology they are easily tempted by material life as it provides them leisure and luxury. Accumulation of wealth and luxurious items for aesthetic pleasures is the main aim of their lives in the beginning. The development of Percy's protagonists, as Jay Tolson rightly remarks,

"often follows the Kierkegaardian progression from the aesthetic stage to the ethical stage and then on to the religious stage - or at least to the brink of this last stage... We see such characters as Binx Bolling, Will Barrett, Tom More all beginning as pleasure seekers, dabblers, spectators, men who live for the moment and believe in nothing."

Percy's protagonists get easily moved by false family pride. They fall in trouble by imitating their forefathers irrespective of the time in which they live. They are proud of their intellectual capacities in solving their problems. But at the end of every novel Percy's protagonists realize the reality of their
lives. Thus in this sense the development of Percy's protagonists is from abstraction to reality:

"Abstraction is but one way to lose one's self. Money, sex, alcohol, Reader's Digest platitudes, status - seeking, pomposity, everydayness - all are symptoms pointing to the failure of the individual. All lead to despair of the most virulent sort that which is so successfully covered up one is hardly aware of it."  

Though Percy's protagonists do not commit suicide; all of them actually live a life in death. Karl Heinz Westarp rightly remarks that "The shadows of death loom large in the lives and fictions of Walker Percy." Though the actual span of action in Percy's novels is short his protagonists mentally move far back in their past and far ahead in their future to give meaning to the short span of present life which is more real. Thus Percy extends the limits of time in the minds of his protagonists to portray their mental growth. It seems that Percy is not interested in the length of life of his protagonists, he is rather interested in the quality of life they live in this century of death.

I BINX BOLLING

The development of Binx Bolling, the protagonist of The Moviegoer, is portrayed mainly on intellectual and spiritual levels as the time span of the novel consists only of eight days. "The entire action of the novel is sandwiched between two Wednesdays, the last week of carnivals in New Orleans." So there is hardly enough scope to show his physical development in the novel. However Binx's narration of the past events takes the readers as back as to his childhood when he was just "eight years old." Near the end of the novel Binx discloses that he has completed thirty years of his "dark pilgrimage
on this earth" and now he is going to enter "the thirty first year" of his age (M.228).

The mental and spiritual development of Binx Bolling is elaborately analysed by Martin Luchei in his book entitled *The Sovereign Wayfarer; Walker Percy's Diagnosis of Malaise*. The dialectic process that Luchei explains in this book is purely philosophical.

"The dialectic begins with a phase of *thesis* antedating the book's action and involving the inheritance Binx receives from his forebears, which he has rejected as meaningless for him in the *antithesis* stage, his present exile in Gentilly, a condition that remains pleasantly noncommitted until the possibility of the search reawakens after years of dormancy and his recognition propels him into *synthesis* phase, scarcely under way at the novels end, in which he makes an existential leap into a future constructed on different premises."5

The dialectic process in Binx's character can very well be explained on the line of Kierkegaardian stages in the progression of human existence, that is aesthetic, ethical, and religious. Janet Hobbs, in his essay entitled "Binx Bolling and the Stages on Life's Way," analyses the development of Binx's character on the basis of the Kierkegaardian stages:

"What I do want to point out in this essay is that Kierkegaard's three stages form a matrix in which Percy conceives character and event; for Percy presents the central conflicts of each novel in terms of the protagonist's struggle to rise above the aesthetic to the ethical; and to pass through the ethical to the religious mode of existence."6

Binx Bolling, in the beginning, lives an aesthetic life as he is born and brought up in the material world of modern age. At his early age Aunt
Emily warns him about the difficulties one has to face while living in this material world and she advises him to be bold like a soldier. Aunt Emily being an experienced lady is well aware of the deceiving nature of the material world "which come crashing down around my ears. The things we hold dear are reviled and spat upon"(M.54). She warns him of the forthcoming danger, by carefully disclosing him the news of his brother Scotty's death. "Scotty is dead," she says, "Now it's all up to you. It's going to be difficult for you but I know you are going to act like a soldier"(M.4). Binx does not understand the importance of this advice at his early age as he is totally abstracted by the material world around him.

Binx introduces himself to the readers of the novel; what type of person he is, what he likes and dislikes. He is, as he tells us, "a stock and bond broker" who lives "on Elysian Fields, the main thoroughfare of Faubourg Marigny" as a tenant to Schexnaydre(M.9). He further explains:

"I am a model tenant and a model citizen and take pleasure in doing all that is expected of me. My wallet is full of identity cards, library cards, credit cards. Last year I purchased a flat olive-drab strongbox, very smooth and heavily built with double walls for fire protection, in which I placed my birth certificates, college diploma, honorable discharge, G.I. insurance, a few stock certificates and my inheritance: a deed to ten acres of a defunct duck club down in St. Bernard Parish, the only relic of my father's many enthusiasms"(M.6-7).

Binx goes on adding the names of several luxurious and material articles to the list of his belongings inorder to draw our attention to the material world in which he lives. He owns not only things but also girls for his physical pleasure. "Naturally I would like to say that I had made conquests of these splendid girls,
my secretaries, casting them off one after the other like old gloves\(^{(M.8)}\). Thus Binx takes pride in accumulating more and more material items in his possession. But things do not last forever. After a certain time he is tired of riding everyday in the same "new dodge sedan, a Red Ram Six" car, which turns into "a regular incubator of malaise" though with perfect comfort\(^{(M.121)}\). His cheeks ache from smile. Here Percy points out how persistent happiness can also be the cause of man's misery.

The first and the most important event in Binx's life which can be marked as a turning point in his life is the dream of the Korean War. He recollects in his dream an accident that he suffered from in the war:

"My shoulder didn't hurt but it was pressed hard against the ground as if somebody sat on me. Six inches from my nose a dung beetle was scratching around under the leaves. As I watched, there awoke in me an immense curiosity. I was on to something" \(^{(M.10-11).}\)

This dream changes Binx's whole attitude to life. Everything, "Wallet, notebook,....pencil, keys, handkerchief.... They looked both unfamiliar and at the same time full of clues"\(^{(M.11)}\). Binx feels all these things around him as fresh and new to him as if he never saw them before. The dream puts him on to search. Now he realizes that whatever life he lived and experienced before the dream was not authentic. It was false and far removed from reality.

The movies, too, put Binx on to search; they take him out of everydayness; but it is purely temporary. Whatever changes he witnesses in a hero's life in a movie become a part of his routine life; but a new experience of yesterday changes into an old thing today and so the charm of yesterday's
newness is lost today. His search invariably ends in despair. In order to get out of despair he must constantly be on search for something new.

To be constantly on search Binx undertakes a journey. This gives him a chance to observe people and places closely. When Binx travels from Gentilly to Chicago by train his search becomes more active as his camera-eye takes snap shots of innumerable persons: "As the train rocks along on its unique voyage through space time, thousands of tiny thing-events bombard us like cosmic particles" (M.190). He glances at a person sitting next to him who looks like Gary Merrill, an actor. He has a newspaper in his hands. Binx observes that he is interested in reading the paper for either advertisements of nightclubs with the picture of a dancer with oiled body, or matters relating to marital life, or destructive nuclear weapons. Binx's observations help us in understanding the time and place in which actions are situated. It is obvious that the 'intersubjectivity' of Marcel or the Buberian 'I - thou' paradigm, the cornerstone of a concrete ontology, is central to Percy's perceptions.

Binx makes futile efforts in the beginning to free himself from the material possessions in order to assimilate his self with other selves. But his success in this respect is just momentary and again he falls a victim to the same material possessions. Binx is disconnected from the everydayness of the material world and enters the reality of his and others lives when he meets an accident, a catastrophic event in his life.

"The world is lost to you, the world and the people in it, and there remains only you and the world and you no more able to be in the world than Banquo's ghost" (M.120).
Thus, ironically, accident for Binx proves to be the happy and lucky event, "I mean good luck," in his life. "Yet how, you might wonder, can even a minor accident be considered good luck?" (M.120).

Indeed, Percy believes that 'good' and 'bad' are spun together and one cannot be separated from the other. Binx realizes the combination of 'good' and 'bad' not only in man but also in nature. At the beach he witnesses the union of the two opposite poles, good and bad, beautiful and ugly, and happiness and sadness. There he finds "mudholes and salt marsh" as well as grass "cleared by rivulet of clear water in which swim blue crabs and cat eye snails" and the rolling surf, "sleazy backwater," "great blue ocean," and the green water in the middle with "old sad music comes into the major" (M.130). He also catches there the natural beauty of Sharon while she wades out from sea water "leaving her shirt and pant at the beach," her hands on her head "thighs as sunk, turning slowly and sweeping the water before her," she looks so beautiful that Binx's "throat catches with the sadness of her beauty" (M.130).

So far Binx is absorbed in a vertical search "viewing life from the perspective of universe - a scientific investigation emanating from his reading." In his vertical search he picks up a single individual from American society, observes him thoroughly and points out the general facts in his life. His this search is purely scientific. He is well aware that this type of search can not reveal the whole truth of man's life as a scientist "is no more aware of the mystery which surrounds him than a fish is aware of the water it swims in" (M.52). Now Binx realizes that to be aware of the mystery of life it is not enough to observe the life of man only on the surface level but it is necessary to peep into the subsurface level of man to find out a more general formula, "the
new key, the secret leverage point" by which he can join the whole humanity together. Binx's search from this point onward becomes horizontal.

The development of Binx's character becomes more obvious in the shift from his physical love with Sharon and other secretaries to the romantic love with Kate. He realizes that his love for his secretaries has been superficial, while his love for Kate is the real and springs from his heart. Binx loves Sharon, the third secretary, as he loved his previous two secretaries Marcia and Linda, and cast "them off one after the other like old gloves" (M.8). Their love had the smell of material world as it was full of hidden falsehoods. Sharon's love for Binx is due to her desire to have a ride in Binx's little car MG "sitting thigh to thigh and knee to knee" (M.89). For Binx "It is great joy to be with Sharon and to make money at it and to seem to pay no attention to her" (M.95). His love for Sharon dwindles with decrease in his income from her: "If ever my business should suffer because of my admiration for Sharon, then my admiration for Sharon would suffer too" (M.102). Their love does not last longer as it originates for fulfilling their material aims. It subsides as their aims get fulfilled.

Binx's love for Sharon ends where his love for Kate begins. Aunt Emily assigns Binx the duty to look after Kate who suffers from nervous breakdown. Emily tells Binx that "the child doesn't laugh" and his main duty is "to hold the fort till Sam arrives;" to take her care so that nothing uneven would happen. After taking over her charge he finds her spirits lighted in his company; now "She no longer feels she is coming near the brink of an abyss" (M.81).

Whenever Binx is in contact with Kate or thinks of Kate he is disconnected from the material world; "the storm breaks" and "the malaise lets up" (M.107). Even a phone call in connection with Kate shakes him "like a leaf." Binx is, in fact, unaware even of Kate's true nature though he is in her company
during her illness. But one day when both of them are on a train journey to Chicago he comes to know her real nature. She tells Binx how she dislikes the pretentious and false life of the people in this world. She does not want either to live such a life or to marry a snobbish person Merle who always goes on giving a "congratulatory look." She likes Binx but does not want to live a prisoner's life by marrying him.

Thus by realizing Kate's inner self Binx becomes aware of her real beauty of which "Everyone said that Kate was lovely Queen"(M.24). He finds in her a sound combination of the inner and the outer beauty.

"Balancing there, her oval face aglow in the dark vestibule, hair combed flat on her head and down into the collar of her suit, she looks like a college girl. She drinks pressing fingers to her throat. 'Lord how beautiful'"(M.195).

Binx is wonderstruck by Kate's beauty. They decide to live together.

Kate finds no alternative except to live with Binx because, as she says:

"I am frightened when I am alone and I am frightened when I am with people. The only time when I am not frightened is when I am with you. You'll have to with me a great deal"(M.234).

In this way Binx and Kate are united together, they get married. "In June Kate and I were married"(M.236). The two selves, 'I' and 'thou' in Marcelian terms, get assimilated. Binx acknowledges Kate's acceptance of life in this world when she shows "an extravagant womanish sort of whim...... a doubling of duplication," a pretentious life when she does not visit Lonnie, Binx's half brother, during his illness but behaves as others behave after his death; makes a false show of sorrow for the dead(M.238). When they settle with a married life
their domestic life seems to degenerate. They lapse into the mundane. Kate tells Binx:

"I'll be up here all day with Lonnie and the children. Will you go down town for me and pick up some governments at the office? Your mother has decided to keep them at home. She thinks that if war comes, her desk is safer than the vault" (M.241).

In this way Binx and Kate are routined to live in a world that is decidedly desublimated.

As the action of the novel, *The Moviegoer*, is sandwiched between the Sundays the development of the main characters of the novel, Binx and Kate, is packed between two deaths, one of Binx's elder brother Scott, and the other of Binx's half brother Lonnie Smith. The first death occurs when Binx was a child of eight years old not knowing how to live in this world; whereas the second death occurs when he completes thirty years of his age and appears as a grown up person having good knowledge about the material world. Thus the growth of Binx's character, from his childhood to a mature person is very well revealed by the change in his behaviour on the occasions of the deaths of his two brothers.

**II WILL BARRETT**

Like Binx Bolling the development of the character of Williston Bibb Barrett, the protagonist of Percy's more ambitious novel *The Last Gentleman*, also takes place on mental and spiritual levels. But unlike Binx Bolling, Will is given more space to move. He takes an extensive journey from New York through the Deep South to the Southwest. Percy symbolizes Will's journey as a journey back to home. His journey in space is paralleled with his involvement in the past. The nearer he travels back to home the more he gets
involved into the past. It is but ironical that by going backward in space and time he moves forward spiritually. His spiritual progress becomes obvious to the readers with the narration of the catastrophes that Will faces: the suicide of his father, his chance seeing of Kitty in the Central Park and his love-making with her, his visit to Vaught's family and his attendance at the deathbed baptism of Jamie Vaught. Each and every catastrophic incident that Will comes across brings him closer to the reality of his self. Gary M. Ciuba is right in making a statement that "these various episodes show how Will continuously becomes aware of himself and others through the grace of catastrophe...."

Percy presents Will as a handsome but physically and mentally a handicapped person. He is deaf in the right ear, he suffers from amnesia, has the spells of \textit{deja vus}, and lapses into fugue states. Unlike romantic heroes, ironically enough, the qualities of his being a handicapped person add to his stature as a protagonist of the novel. Physical suffering and more important than that the psychological suffering is the peculiar quality of Percy's heroes. Will is an ordinary person who cannot gain a specific identity in the American society for he suffers from "nervous condition" and "spells of amnesia."

Will goes to Princeton University where his father and grandfather and all other male forebears were sent to complete their college education. He lives in the same room where his father and grandfather had lived. But one afternoon he suffers from a severe attack of \textit{deja vu} and regrets for sharing the same room his father and grandfather had shared. In that room he feels himself "lying in a ditch in Wyoming or sitting in a downtown park in Toledo"(LG.14). He feels so much pressed down by the memories of his family past that for him "walking around in old New Jersey was like walking on Saturn, where the force of gravity is eight times that of earth"(LG.15). Will develops an earnest desire to
be free from the bonds of his family past and enjoy the life like other students at Princeton. But he being the last gentleman in the line of the Barrett family can not do that. As a result he falls in a dilemma and suffers. He wants to be a man true to his conscience and at the same time he longs to follow the old family traditions. He falls a victim to the false pride of his family traditions. He gets suffocated by the memories of his family past. This nasty experience compels him to give up his education and leave the Princeton University.

Will's act of leaving Princeton University and going to New York is an indication of his preliminary attempt to do away with the family past and try to come to his real self. In real sense it is a revolt against his father, "who hoped to arouse in him a desire to complete his education and particularly to awaken a fondness for the law...." Instead of becoming a lawyer like his father he chooses to be "a clerk in the family law firm" (LG.15). After the death of his father he tries to be free from the haunting past memories of his family. He gives up the old traditional family affairs and plans to begin with something new. He sells the law library to the members of the firm, redistributes the rooms in the house among the family members to avoid quarrels within the family, joins the United States Army and takes a number of electronic courses; but just after two years he is discharged from the Army for his being a patient of amnesia.

A major part of his life is wasted in managing his psychological and financial affairs. He consults a psychiatrist "for fifty five minutes a day, five days a week, for the following five years, at an appropriate cost of $18,000"(LG.17). The living costs are too high and the resources too meagre; so he goes in search of a job and succeeds in getting it as a maintenance engineer, "a kind of janitor." He improves his qualification necessary for the job by completing a short course in "Temperature and Humidification Control" at Long
Island University, joins his duties as "a humidification engineer at Macy's" and earns $172 per week. But he falls short of funds after the amount of inheritance is totally exhausted. So he has to find out a new source of income by getting an extra work of a companion to "precocious Jewish lads."

Thus in the first part of the novel Percy depicts how Will, like Binx, is lost in the material world. Martin Luschei rightly states: "Percy's starting point in the novel is the consumer's paradise of contemporary America, which more than satisfies the officially defined 'needs' of most people but produces a menacing fallout of malaise as well." Will's problem becomes acute for his being an inheritor of an aristocratic family in the South. He is repeatedly told he has been brought up according to the aristocratic code of the Old South. In consequence of that he develops faith in the traditional view of life that upholds personal honour and integrity of the family when the outside world is full of pain and sorrow.

In the beginning Will is so much blinded by his family traditions that he does not know how to live in the present. Inspite of a lengthy psychic treatment he fails to adjust fully with any single group of persons. It is only during the moments of catastrophes he comes to his senses. The first catastrophe that occurs in Will's life is his relationship with an Ohioan brunette named Carol Schwarz whom he meets "at a ski lodge near Bear Mountain"(LG.20). He attracts the girl by imitating the behaviour of Ohioans and their utterances of certain words. He comes so close to her that "he lay with his head on her thigh and she leaned over him and said: 'I'm people liker and I think you're my kind of people'"(LG.21). As soon as Will comes to his self, memories of glorious past interfere in his physical relations with an ordinary Ohioan girl:
"He muttered to himself: `Barrett you poor fellow, you must be very bad off, worse than you imagined, to have gotten things so mixed up. Here you are lying in a brier-patch when you could be lounging with young people like yourself, people against whom no objection can be raised, your head pillowed in the lap of some handsome girl..... What is wrong with that? What is the matter with you, you poor fellow?'" (LG.21).

This incidence is a remarkable stage in the development of Will. "Though science taught that good environments were better than bad environments, it appeared to him that the opposite was the case" (LG.22). Now he believes that during bad environments one turns inward; and only by turning inward one can come to one's real self. Gary M Ciuba points out that "Will thrives on misfortune. His imagination of disaster makes him wonder, `do I not also live by catastrophe?'" Mary K. Sweeny mentions: "Will's growth progresses as a result of catastrophes and his ensuing concern with the plight of others." His visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art is a catastrophic incident in Will's life. The objective minded Will who has lost his own identity in this world can not understand the painting until a workman repairing a skylight overhead comes crashing down and is buried in debries. He comes to himself and understands the paintings only through the painful suffering of the workman whom he gives a helping hand to come out of the accident.

"It was at this moment that the engineer happened to look under his arm and catch sight of the Velazquez. It was glowing like a jewel" (LG.27).

Will's behaviour clearly indicates the Cartesian split. He poses to be the last gentleman, a last link in the chain of the Southern aristocratic family of Barretts. But at the same time he experiences how torturing it is to follow the
past family traditions in the present condition because very often he is tempted by the natural instincts, the material world, and science. The family traditions necessitate him to be "chaste in an age when chastity seems to be a dead issue." Will falls in a dilemma like Hamlet: Whether to be a gentleman or a fronicator. Being a victim of this dilemma his condition becomes more ironical than that of his father who was "killed by his own irony and sadness and by the strain of living out an ordinary day in perfect dance of honor" (LG.9-10).

Will like Percy's other protagonists tries to be in touch with the real world in which he lives. He feels that to be unchaste is the only way to regain the reality of life and to be a gentleman is necessary to maintain his family prestige. "So Will is in the doublebind, for to him gentleman and fornicator are mutually exclusive terms." Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr. interrogates the intensity of suffering of a modern man who has fallen a victim to such dilemma: "How does Southern man who carries the knowledge of the old Stoic tradition, while also seeing its insufficiencies live in the modern world, which seems so empty and lacking in values?" In order to overcome this dilemma Will goes in search of the truth of life and while on search he comes in contact with several persons whose lives provide him clues for understanding the truth of his own life.

Will encounters different people while on his quest and the life-styles of these different people present him the different ways to come out of the dilemma. "As Will telescopes outside himself he is drawn into the problems of others allowing these currents to carry him into fresh discoveries for himself along the way." Kitty, Sutter, and Jamie, the members of the Vaught family are the major figures whose company moulds Will's view of life.
Will goes to the Central Park and waits for a sign which he hopes will reveal the truth of his life. He desires to photograph a peregrine but while waiting for the bird accidentally he catches sight of "a Handsome Woman and her beautiful young friend" (LG.41).

"Here like a coin is flipped from eagle to human head, the writer flips with natural grace from search for the hawk to beautiful girl."  

The sight of a young girl in the park motivates him. "The park bench marks the place of catastrophe, where Will receives a private answer to the same question that disturbed Binx's sleep."  

The young girl's absence from the Park for some days makes him uneasy until one day he follows the "Handsome Woman" and finds Kitty in the hospital where Jamie, Kitty's young brother, is undergoing treatment for "mylogenous leukemia." "Again a pang of love pierced his heart," and "Having fallen in love, of course he might not look at her" (LG.51).

Will is not interested in the outward appearance of Kitty because he knows very well that in big cities like New York each person is "so deprived of his surface as to be all but invisible to other" (LG.61). Therefore he wants to penetrate into her heart to dig out the sort of girl she is. They come very close to each other; but his passion is ironically rationalized:

"He did not propose country matters. He did not propose to press against her in an elevator. What he wanted was both more and less. He loved her. His heart melted. She was his sweet heart, his certain someone. He wanted to hold her charms in his arms. He wanted to go into a proper house and shower her with kisses in the old style" (LG.68).

Will thinks that love making, "rassling around in elevators and automobiles and other similar monkey business," has become a common thing in the modern
society in which he lives (LG.85). Though Will is fascinated by a time in which
honour deprived man of sexual encounters with a lady before marriage, he
knows that sexual encounter is an indication of moral insecurity; but moral
insecurity is not the outcome only of sexual insecurity.

Will is aware that the sexual code and the moral code had a
consistency for his ancestors. But in the twentieth century both the codes have
become ambiguous. It was possible for his father to distinguish between a whore
and a lady. When Will was just sixteen years old his father had suggested to
him: "Go to whores if you have to, but always remember the difference. Don't
treat a lady like a whore or a whore like a lady" (LG.97). Will tries to live upto
the ideals of his father but fails miserably. He takes Kitty as a Southern belle but
then finds her a whore; or he expects her to act according to his passions and
then finds in her too much of a lady. He does not look at her as Kitty but a
specie created by the masculine imagination.

Will, cast adrift in this situation, goes in search of somebody who
would take him to the right shore. In the beginning when he finds Kitty he
expresses his love for her and desires "to hold her charms in his arms" but then
he fails to make a proper decision about the way of making love with her,
whether he should love her as a gentleman or a fornicator. His joining the
Vaught family and his intimacy with Jamie who is very close to death in his
illness brings Will back to the Southern tradition that affects his love for Kitty.
Now he prefers the company of Rita who looks after Jamie. He wants to court
Kitty "henceforth in the old style" and kiss her, "lie over against her" keeping a
distance, an angle of "about twenty degrees past the vertical" (LG.159). Kitty
realizes the change that has taken place in Will and "The next day they went
their separate ways as before" (LG.161). But Will fails to understand whether
there is something wrong with him or with the world. He asks himself: "But what am I.... neither Christian nor pagan nor proper lusty gentleman......?"(LG.172).

It is only after he goes through Sutter's notebook and attends to the baptism ceremony of Jamie he gets clues about the way of living a life. He talks to Kitty for two hours on phone and settles the matter between them. He discloses the final decision to Sutter: "Kitty and I are getting married"(LG.367). Now he does not bother about Kitty's chastity, whether she is a lady or a whore, but is ready to accept her as she is. Sutter is a major influence on Will's life. Sutter, in his notebook, severely criticizes the American society. "He sees America as a hot bed of hypocrisy, a place where people give lip service to decency and generosity while engaging in all types of lewdness."18 Robert Phillip in his review of The Last Gentleman states that "through the device of Sutter's journal, Percy manages to say many pithy things about the way we live now. Sutter's journal serves to remind us that... the novel is essentially a novel of despair."19 Criticizing the whole modern American society Sutter declares that he is the only sincere American. After going through the notebook Will gets wonderstruck by the harsh realities in Sutter's notebook which had "the effect of loosening his synapses, like a bar turning slowly in his brain"(LG.296). It makes him feel free from the past and conscious of his duty. It charges him with Jamie's salvation and develops his confidence in Sutter as a person fit to lead him on the proper way of life. This confidence forces Will to stick up to Sutter keeping himself away from Kitty.

One day when Will wakes up after twenty hours long sleep he catches the sight of his own name in Sutter's notebook. He reads that his trouble lies in his being a psychologically disordered person in search of an expert
psychiatrist which characterizes him as a "self-defeating" person. Further he learns that his trouble is not due to any physical disorder but due to the condition in which he lives. After going through the information about himself he realizes that his "problem is how to live from one ordinary minute to the next on a Wednesday afternoon," whether to be a transcendent or an immanent (LG.340). Now he realizes what sort of man he is.

Even though Sutter tells Will that the notebook is of no importance and all the information in it is either false or irrelevant its effect on Will becomes obvious when he gets his memory back and knows where he is and what he has to do. Being conscious of the work assigned to him by Val Vaught he travels all the while to find out Jamie and take his charge during the last hours of Jamie's life. Jamie's illness is of the sort that brings Will to his real self.

The last section of Sutter's notebook discusses the importance of death in assigning authenticity to the life of a person—"for the certain availability of death is the very condition of recovering oneself" (LG.357). But in the modern age death has been banished from life and what remains with man is only suicide. After witnessing the heart blockage incident of Jamie, Will's memory is totally recovered. "I remember everything now," he tells to Dr. Vaught. This major change in Will is an indication of his progress in his understanding of the world and a recognition of the concrete things in life. But still he can not make a proper decision in selecting "the best cause for a man" (LG.364). The only firm decision he has taken so far is that of his marriage with Kitty. It is because now he thinks: "It is better to make love to one's wife than to monkey around with a lot of women." Inspite of his learning from Sutter's notebook of life in this world he leaves the selection of the proper way
of his life to Dr. Sutter Vaught. But Dr. Sutter flatly refuses to help Will in this regard. He says:

"There is one thing I've never been able to get the straight of, and that is what it is you want of me. I suspect it is one of two things. You either want me to tell you to fornicate or not to fornicate, but for the life of me I can't tell which it is" (LG.366).

Sutter advises him to be with Jamie during the last moments of his life. Sutter knows that Will will be bold and wise enough to make a proper decision in selecting the way he wants to live after witnessing the last moments in the life of Jamie. Sutter makes his decision for himself to come out of the dilemma that he was facing like Will. His carrying a pistol with him is a clear indication to Will that he is going to follow the same path laid down by Will's father, Ed Barrett. Will gets startled at the sight of the pistol because it reminds him of his father's suicide, an incident that revives his consciousness of the past. It makes him feel of his own death, and Marcel very well explains how the thought of one's own death affects an individual.

"The thought of our own death, of the only future event we can acknowledge as certain, can exercise a fascination over us in a way that, somehow invades our whole field of experience extinguishing all our joys."

Will rejects to join Sutter in his last journey because he accepts the present condition in which he lives rather than to commit suicide.

From this moment onward Will shows the signs of further improvement. Now he develops a hope for future which prolongs his life as Marcel states: "The soul lives by hope alone; hope is perhaps the very stuff of which our souls are made..." He feels that to live life with other people among
the named objects can be an alternative to death. On this ground he decides how his father was wrong in taking the decision of suicide. Thus he feels completely liberated from the burdens of the past. It is in his relationship with Sutter that Will succeeds in crossing the "zone of nought," his despair, by establishing what Marcel calls intersubjective relationship with Sutter. At the end of the novel, Will appears to be a Christian who is not carried away by Christianity but is ready to bear the border of his existence in this world. At the end of the novel Will decides to love and be loved by others.

Percy carries out the character of the same protagonist Will Barrett to his fifth and more successful novel *The Second Coming*, a sequel to *The Last Gentleman*. Before Percy started writing this novel he had never thought that the latest novel would come out as a sequel to his previous novel as he himself reveals in an interview:

"After hundred pages or so I realized it was Will Barrett, at least with a couple of changes I was able to make it Will Barrett very easily. It couldn't have been anybody else, so I became aware it was Will Barrett.""22

Thus Will Barrett of *The Last Gentleman* reappears in *The Second Coming* but with slight changes. In a sense it is his second coming after a gap of twenty years. In this new novel Will is not a young humidification engineer but now he is a lawyer of middle age who has inherited a great fortune from his wife Marion Peabody. Like Will of *The Last Gentleman* he is also a sufferer but what he suffers from at present is quite obverse of amnesia. In this novel he faces the problems due to "total recall, the intrusion on his consciousness of incidents from his past that makes it impossible for him to live in the present.""23
Will's problem becomes obvious as soon as he enters the novel as a very much depressed person who desires to shoot himself to escape from the miseries of life. But the sight of other people compels Will to suspend the idea of suicide. His observation of such persons in the society creates confusion in his mind. He asks himself:

"Why was it that it was he not they who had decided to shoot himself? How did they manage to deceive themselves and even appear to live normally, work as usual, play golf, tell jokes, argue politics?" (SC.4).

Will does not understand how other people deceive themselves believing that everything is quite alright when nothing is well. He gets puzzled as it happens in The Last Gentleman. He does not know whether he is wrong or there is something wrong with the world. Actually the inner conflict focuses on his appearance as "a mad man in a mad world."  

The reason why Will is depressed in this world is his obsession with the past which is buried deep in his psyche. His frequently arriving at the hunting trip to Georgia Swamp through different signs and symbols convinces him to feel that he is also made of the same metal his father was made, and brings him closer to the idea of death. The idea that he is fated to commit suicide grasps his mind. Marcel's observation that "the contamination of the future by the past is one of the sources of fatalism" seems applicable to Will's condition whose present is contaminated by his past. The memory of his father's suicide and the miseries of the present compel him to think of his own death.

In fact, Will Barrett has been preoccupied with death right from his childhood. His being a witness to the death of his father at his early age, then to the death of Jamie Vaught when he is grown up, and recently to the death of his
wife Marion Peabody when he is of middle age refresh his memories of death that compel him to brood over his own death as if he is fated to die. Throughout the novel he is haunted by the memories of his father's suicide as Hamlet is haunted by the ghost of his father. Whenever he remembers and deals with his father he addresses him as an "old mole," an epithet used by Hamlet for his father's ghost. He develops a great anxiety for death.

Will's consciousness of the particular signs and symbols adumbrate his preoccupation with the idea of death. One of Percy's critics has stated that "the singular force of this novel...... springs from his Proustian evocation of guilt, despair, and death anxiety, as mediated by the enigmatic signs by which memory speaks." Will's preoccupation with the death of his father is a consequence of the way he interprets the symbols that he comes across in his day-to-day life. Percy himself has observed that it is man's fate that we "must know one thing through the mirror of another"(MB.82). In each and every sign Will sees the happenings of his past life:

"...... his entire life lay before him, beginning, middle, and end, as plain as the mural of Jack Nicklaus blasting out of the sand trap"(SC.79).

Apart from signs and symbols the actual conditions of living in the contemporary society make him feel how the present life is akin to death. He becomes aware how "this century is the century of the Love of Death" in which "men love death because real death is better than the living death"(SC.271). Will's attitude about this century is similar to that of Binx Bolling who attacks this modern age as the "century of merde, the great shithouse of scientific humanism"(M.228).
The novel opens with Will's obsession with the idea of death which according to Howland "places him squarely in the existential tradition." He is totally depressed and loses control over his body as well as his mind. He falls down in the bunker while playing golf and then the idea occurs to him "that he might shoot himself" (SC.4). He thinks that suicide is "one way to cure the great suck of self" (SC.14). But then he holds himself back thinking that if he commits suicide then it may not be possible for him to "Find out why things have come to such a pass and man so sucked down into himself that it takes a gunshot to knock him out of the suck" (SC.14). Will desires to find out a solution to the common miseries of man so that his life does not go a waste like the life of his father. Therefore he tries to keep himself away from the death dealing affair of his father:

"So I went away, as far as I could get from you, knowing only that if I could turn 180 degrees away from you and your death dealing there would be something different out there, different from death, may be even a kind of life. And there was" (SC.71).

Having successfully drawn himself away from the memories of his father he could marry Marion Peabody and live a happy and luxurious life "making money like everyone else" (SC.72). But now he feels that even married life with Marion is just like a "long night's dream." His marriage with Marion who had been a patient of polio, provided him the best opportunity to be "of use" to the needy and to remain constantly in close contact with the sufferings of human beings in this world. Moreover, as Mary Deems Howland has rightly remarked, "Will's life with Marion did allow him to forget about his father." Nonetheless, Marion had a peculiar fascination for death. She always kept herself close to death by attending funerals of the old people who died "like
flies." His realization of Marion's consciousness of death acts as a stimulus to recall his own father's love of death. Now he understands how his father had lived "a life in death" which is actually worse than death.

Will further wants to know whether really there exists God in this world to rescue man from the miseries of life. He devices a plan by which God will either rescue him from starvation or let him die. He plans to go to Lost Cove cave in search of a sign or a proof to comprehend the existence of God. In a letter to Sutter Vaught he writes that if he fails to return from the cave it will be because of his death either at the hands of God which will prove God's existence or handiessness of God, an indication of God's nonexistence in this world: "the cause of my death will be either his nonexistence or his refusal to manifest himself."(SC.193). Will is firm on his decision and now he does not require anybody's assistance to take decisions about his life.

Will's letter to Sutter Vaught who acted as a father figure to him in *The Last Gentleman* marks a drastic change that has taken place in him with his growing age. When he was young he required Sutter's suggestion to take decisions about him. But now he is competent enough to make his own decisions and find out his position in this world. Now he understands how cunning man is in this century who "while professing a love of peace and freedom of life, secretly..... loved war and thralldom and death and loved them to a degree that.... in these last days behaved like creatures possessed by demons"(SC.197).

Will's entry into the Lost Cove cave symbolizes his obsession with death. He leaves the world of the living and joins his father, the "old mole," "down here under the earth"(SC.215). There in the cave he is engrossed by the memories of his father.
"The voice of the father is insistent in Will’s mind. It speaks for all those who are obsessed by the death wish in this violent century, a wish symbolized in the novel by the death’s head of the German World War II insignia, under which six million deaths were rationalized as the ‘final solution’.29"

He remembers how his father used to be happy when "fifty million people were killed" in war and how he used to be unhappy when peace came after the war (SC.218). He recollects the funerals of his wife Marion, and his father and the dying tiger in the cave who "was too tired even to unlock his legs and let himself lie down" (SC.221). Though he does not wish to commit suicide like his father he longs for death at the hands of God and experiences living death in the cave while in search to prove the existence of God.

Will is shaken out of his obsession because of severe tooth ache. The tooth ache breaks his relation with the past and immediately he comes to the present. Now God, Jews, suicide, tiger and death are not the important things for him to think about; what is important is his own life. So to save himself, to get relief from the tooth ache, he strives to come out of the cave, the mouth of death, as soon as possible. "Let me out here," he says and while making hard efforts to come out of the cave he falls into a greenhouse and suffers from the fracture of bones, bleeding seriously with "a few scrapes and many bruises on his hips and arms and head" (SC.223). Will’s stay in the Lost Cove cave symbolizes his intimacy with death whereas his exit from the cave, his fall into the greenhouse, symbolizes his reentry into the world of life, the world of reality. For Crowley the cave "seems like a womb" where Will "had to turn his head sideways like a baby getting through a pelvis" taking rebirth into this world.30

Allison Huger, the owner of the greenhouse, takes every care of Will like a real mother of a new born babe. It is but Will’s fate that by
accidentally falling into the greenhouse he comes in contact with Allie who takes it as her prime duty to raise the fallen things and give life to the almost dead. Before Will enters the greenhouse the only company Allie had to feel her existence in this world was that of her dog. Now Will's appearance in the greenhouse provides her an opportunity to be a fellow of another creature. By taking care of Will, Allie gets spiritual satisfaction of helping somebody to come to life and at the same time she develops affinity with Will.

Gradually Will and Allie become fellow-creatures realizing the fact that they both need each other. Their relationship grows from reciprocal need. Allie being a patient of amnesia can not remember anything so "He would rember for her if she forgot. She would hoist him if he fell"(SC.253). Allie takes pleasure in helping Will to come to life. While nursing him she falls in his love. She gains an innumerable strength in the company of Will. Ordinarilly she is a miser but now she is ready to offer any sort of sacrifice for his sake. One day when Will goes out to get some water he falls down on the path shivering because of the wet clothes, she provides him warmth of her body to protect him from cold:

"... her warm body curled around his lard-cold muscle straps and bones, spoonnesting him, her knees coming up behind him until he was shivering less and, signaling a turn, he nestled her, encircled her as if he were her cold dead planet and she his sun's warmth"(SC.255-56).

She clings to his body in such a manner as if she has found the essence of her life in it. She succeeds at last in hoisting him up again.

In the company of Allison Will is dragged away not only from the memory of death but also from the materialistic way of life which he had
accepted while in the company of Marion. They love each other not for the sake of property or money. She is least bothered whether he owns "sixty million" or "sixty cents". Both of them know that love is more valuable than money. Will, it seems, has now realized the truth of life. His motto is to serve the humanity: "Take care of people who need taking care of" (SC.265). He desires to be a good father by giving a helping hand to his young daughter Leslie. He also wants to help Allison by being a faithful legal guardian to her.

Now in the company of Allie Will realizes what a real life is, and how one has to struggle for existence if one has to live in this world. The choice is not only between life and death but it is between two types of lives. There is the greenhouse which symbolizes the type of life that Allie lived and there is the greener which symbolizes the life that his father lived. Though now Will is aware of the dilemma yet he is unable to make a proper choice. When he is in the company of Allie he tilts towards the real life; but when he goes away from her he falls a victim to the memories of the past, that is the death dealing affair of his father. Mary Deems Howland has rightly remarked.

"The novel, then becomes the story of Will Barrett's choice between despair and hope, death and life, the past and the future -- represented by his dead father and Allie Huger, respectively."[3]

Will, any how, learns by this time that the real enemy of man in this century is death "Not the death of dying, but the living death" (SC.271). He knows that in this century man lives death and so he loves death "because the real death is better than the living death" (SC.271). Neither Christ nor Christianity is going to save humanity for "The old churches are houses of death" (SC.272). Will realizes the importance of death in man's life. For him life
becomes meaningful only because there is death; and so life without death will be intolerable as "peace without war is intolerable" (SC.271).

At this juncture Will is well aware of death and all its names. "To know many names of death is also to know there is life" (SC.274). The recurring images of death force Will to realize that his fate can not be separated from that of his father's. So he thinks of returning to the Georgia Swamp to follow the action of his father. He starts his journey towards the Georgia Swamp to meet his death; but while on the way an extraordinary thing happens. Among several images that he comes across one particular image in the landscape reminds him of lovely Allie:

"His eye travelled along the ridge and came to a notch where in the darkness of the pine and spruce there grew a single gold poplar which caught the sun like a yellow haired girl coming out of a dark forest. Once again his heart was flooded with sweetness but a sweetness of a different sort, a sharp sweet urgency, a need to act, to run and catch. He was losing something. Something of his as solid and heavy and sweet as a pot of honey in his lap was being taken away" (SC.297)

This image reminds Will of his concern for Allie and he becomes aware that his journey towards Georgia is improper. Will's coming across this image saves him from the obsession of his father's suicidal image. It symbolizes the victory of life over death.

Even after his return to Allie he is not yet totally released from the idea of death; it continues to exert its deadly influence on Will till the last chapter of the novel. The reason why he is unable to forget easily this particular past incident is his profound sense of guilt for his failure in preventing his father from committing suicide and his inability in not sharing the death with his father.
He comes to the final decision which forces him to make the right choice between life and death; between the love for Other and the love for one's own self.

The motel room scene in which Will at last succeeds in taking the final decision regarding his choice between life and death marks the climax of his life:

"He rose and dressed in the dark, walked out to Mercedes, unlocked the trunk, took out the leather case containing the Greener and the holster containing the Luger. It was a cold starry night. The mists of summer and fall had all blown away. He walked down the high way holding the Greener like a businessman with a briefcase. When he reached the overlook the Holiday Inn looked over, he did not even pause but swung the case like discus, the throw turning him around and heading him back. He did not hear the Greener hit bottom. As an afterthought, he pitched the Luger back over his shoulder and went away without listening"(p.338).

Thus by throwing away the guns he takes leave of the haunting ghost of his "death dealing" father. He decides to completely do away with his past as if now it seems he is well aware of the principle propagated by Kierkegaard which Percy has selected as an epigraph to The Last Gentleman: "If a man can not forget, he will never amount to much"(LG.1). This action of discarding the Greener, the emblem of death, forever disconnects Will from his past enabling him to turn to Allie and start his new life with her.

Unlike the ending of Percy's other novel's the ending of this novel is on the firm ground. The readers of Percy's novels do not know what exact way of life Binx-Bolling, or Will of The Last Gentleman has chosen at the end of the
novel. But one is sure about the way that Will of The Second Coming has chosen. Percy himself in an interview makes a remark in this connection:

"I really surprised myself because I'd never done it before. This man actually figured out what to do with his life. He figured out a way to live, to love and to work."32

III LANCELOT

The development of Lancelot, the protagonist of Percy's fourth novel entitled after the name of its protagonist, could be assessed through his own description of three stages of his life. He tells his boyhood friend Percival that the three stages of his life can roughly be marked by the three distinct periods in his life: The first period consists of happy go lucky school life and his life with Lucy Cobb, his first wife; then follows the second period of his life with Margot, his second wife; and the last period begins with his discovery of Margot's adultery, a catastrophic event in Lancelot's life. Lancelot's philosophy of history, what he calls "a sexual theory of history," can very well be applied to the three stages of life of an individual.

"First there was a Romantic period when one 'fell in love'. Next follows a sexual period such as we live in now where men and women co-habit as indiscriminately as in a baboon colony - or in a soap opera. Next follows catastrophe of some sort. I can feel it in my bones. Perhaps it has already happened"(L.35-36).

Lance makes open his past life to his boyhood friend Percival when they meet after a long period of twenty years. They meet at the prison-cum-hospital, a "Center for Aberrant Behavior" where he has been imprisoned for behaving aberrantly. He confesses that he belongs to an
honourable family the members of which "were gregarious, politically active, and violent"(L.15). While in school he had become popular and successful both in academics and in athletics. He was smart at mathematics in making calculations. He was bookish and could easily find out a book of Percival's interest. He used to ride down the river on a fraternity-sorority party sometimes and dive into the river to experience rotation and to feel free from alienation. He ate, drank, and went to whorehouses along with his boyfriend Harry. Thus Lance lived a happy go lucky life in his adolescence. The rotten world all around him did not bother him at all as if he was not a part of it.

When Lance grew up into a mature person he married Lucy Cobb, a Georgian girl whom he took to be a virgin according to Southern principles. Now he thinks that his life with Lucy was a dream.

"Lucy I loved too, but Lucy was a dream a slim brown dancer in a bell jar spinning round and round in the 'Limelight' music of old gone Carolina long ago"(L.119).

Lance now relates the memories of his life with Lucy with great pleasure. He lived with her the happiest life in the mansion Belle Isle and became father of two children. But his happiness did not last longer. Lucy died at an early age keeping Lance behind in loneliness. Her tragic death aroused a strange curiosity in him to know how she grew pale, thin, weak, and died in a few months. Her death revealed to him the falleness of his condition and his loneliness.

After Lucy's death Lance lives at Belle Isle with his mother practising law. He involves himself without much sacrifice in the noble act of protecting civil rights. He lives a moderately happy life by engaging himself in drinking, reading Ramond Chandler, listening to Beethoven and watching
regularly the latest TV news cast. He himself does not know how time passed away. He summarizes his condition of the period in his own words as:

"Do you know what happened to me during the past twenty years? A gradual, ever so gradual slipping away of my life into a kind of dream state in which finally I could not be sure that anything was happening at all. Perhaps nothing happened" (L.57).

Lance loses his sense of time during this period. It happens because his self immerses into the 'other'. He forgets his own self by being one with the other selves. This dreamlike condition illustrates the ideal realm of Lance's world. He is still away from the real world that he lives in.

A year after the death of his mother Margot engulfs Lance's life. Her appearance and her speech create in him an image of a Southern belle. He is wonderstruck to see the "lovely curve and depth of thigh and ass" of the half-naked Margot as if these are the things not to be hidden from others (L.76). In her he finds the miraculous combination of both, the ideal and the real. He is further exposed to her reality when she falls on his body "sweet and heavy" and, to assure their privacy, they shut themselves in a room locking the door "turning an eight inch iron key and driving a dead bolt home with a clack" (L.80).

Lance and Margot are attracted towards each other because of money and sex, thinking that they are the only beings in the present material world to enjoy life:

"What she was thinking was: I have ten million dollars and you don't; you have a great house and I don't; you have a name and I don't; but you don't have me" (L.78).
Margot is a poor but a practical Texan girl. She knows how to preserve, restore and transform the antique things as well as the males like Lance into usable goods for her benefit.

Lance's shift from Lucy Cobb, his first wife, to Margot, his second wife, indicates his shift from Romantic love to sexual love. His love for Lucy had a spiritual touch, it burst out from the heart of his hearts. Whereas his love for Margot is overt, and pornographic; it arouses only his sexual instincts. His plain and innocent description of Lucy's movements on the tennis court totally free of pornographic overtones, clearly indicates his romantic love for Lucy:

"What I see even now when I think of her is the way she picked up the ball, or rather did not pick it up but toed it onto her racket in a cunning little turning in of her white-shod foot. No, not thin was she but slim, because her joints, ankle, wrist, elbow did not show bone but were simple articulation"(L.83).

On the other hand his love for Margot is rooted in some "curious reasons." He wants to grab her and hug her skinny bones. He sees her half naked. Margot exposes how Lance in her company has turned into a sexy man:

"......She infallibly knew where the vector of desire converged, the warm of cottoned-off place between her legs, the sheer negativity and want and lack where the well-fitted cotton dipped and went away"(L.81).

The difference between Lance's love for Lucy and Margot becomes obvious from what he desires from these two ladies. He wants "Margot's sweet Texas ass and ...... Lucy's opaque Georgian eyes"(L.85).
Lance's love for Margot is born out of a sheer physical desire for possession. He himself says that in the early days of his marriage with Margot he was consumed with erotic love. Lewis A. Lawson is right in making a bold statement in this regard. He states: "Lance now views the genital as the only connection to escape in an everyday world; the 'real thing', as another of Percy's sufferers, Kate Cutrer, in *The Moviegoer*, calls it."³³ In fact Lance reduces Margot only to a sexual organ and he lives with her only by sexual delights. He states: "She was like a feast. She was a feast. I wanted to eat her. I ate her" (L.171). But ironically he fails to understand that Margot, too, is interested in the material advantages of marrying him. She tells: "Sex...... it's not all that important .... I have found something more important than the almighty penis"(L.174). The more important thing for her is to preserve her right to live in Belle Isle.

As Lance's love for Margot is restricted to the realm of *having* so also is Margot's love for Lance. Both are abstracted by the material desires, physical satisfaction and pomposity of life. Her main interest lies in Belle Isle, the aristocratic old mansion, owned by Lance. She likes to restore the aristocratic grandeur of the old mansion so she fills her hours "pouring over old sketches, enlisting historians, imparting Carrara marble carvers" (L.120). And after her main aim is fulfilled she desires to have a child but not to be a mother. She gives birth to a girl Siobhan. But she leaves the child with her father to be nurtured and goes off to study acting with the Hollywood actors in order to develop her career as an actress. Thus they are both, "caught up in their separate worlds of Having, Lance and Margot failed to enter each other's worlds, except in bed"³⁴.
Lance's realization of Margot's adultery marks the third stage of his life. Lance comes across, by chance, the alphabet 'O' as blood type of his daughter Siobhan on her application form for her school camp. The letter 'O' gets Lancelot on his nerves because it obviously does not tally with his own blood type. It proves him Margot's adultery and shocks him with an impetus to join his past with his present. It gives meaning to his dreamlike vacant past and makes him realize his true present, his real self which he has been avoiding for last few years. Now by observing his face closely in the mirror he can see very strange and unexpected marks on his face which he had never seen for last many years. The "razor track" on the cheek, the "capillaries," "blackheaded" nose, eyes like a "broken vessel" with "a blood spot," "grains in the lashes," "dandruff flaked" hair roots, cracked lips, dirty fingernails and chin with the patches of missed beard by razor indicate how his body has been abused, atleast, from outside by time (L.65). The externally abused body very well symbolizes the acuteness of internal abuse. Though it is easy to heal external damages the internal wounds require more efforts and a firm devotion to be cured.

The crucial incident of Margot's adultery again reminds Lance of the catastrophic event that had happened with him when his mother had sent him to bring some pocket money from his father's sock drawer. There by accident he realized that though his father was a crook he always pretended to be a gentleman. Consequently he loses his faith in his father with an understanding that corruption hides at the heart of honour. He also loses his faith in his mother with a belief that the whole womanhood of U.S.A. has been spoiled in the twentieth century. He feels that women are mostly the deceivers and they play mischief with their poor husbands as Margot did. Lance narrates the materialistic nature of twentieth century American women in his own words:
"Did you know that the South and for all I know the entire U.S.A. is full of demonic women who, driven by as yet unnamed furies, are desperately restoring and preserving places, buildings? Women married to fond indulgent easygoing, somewhat lapsed men like me, who would as soon do one thing as another as long as they can go fishing, hunting, drinking a bit, horse around, watch the Dolphins and Jack Nicklaus on TV" (L. 121).

Lancelot's discovery of Margot's adultery does not arouse only dread in him but also a curious sense of expectancy; a secret sweetness. In a way it opens up broad vistas of dishonour, corruption, faithlessness and sexual sin in the world in which he lives. He gets relieved of the burden of honour and feels free of moral bondage to live in the mundane world. Now he knows that the only precaution one has to take while being immoral is just to pretend that he is a gentleman.

Now Lance seems interested only in the dark, the evil, or the sinful part of man's life which is intentionally kept hidden from others. As a matter of fact he comes forth as "more an evil seeker than a holy seer."35 His approach to fathom the secret of life or God, the ultimate truth, is one way and that too a negative one. He hopes to comprehend God through evil, and witness sin as the climax of his search for God. "By seeking out sin he hopes to discover its ultimate opposite, God."36 The justification he provides in this regard is: By understanding evil he may understand its exact opposite, the Deity, this age of niceness has forgotten. Mary K. Sweeney rightly states:

"Lancelot Andrews Lamar's search, a form of despair, is a completely negative one. Born of the cipher 'O', it is a nothing and, like antimatter, spawns a terrible violence. This search details another of Percy's paradoxes: Lamar is searching
for evil in the negative hope of finding good. God.

Lancelot believes that good consists in evil. With his discovery of Margot's infidelity he attempts to understand the meaning of evil and sin. He begins to investigate into the meaning of human sexuality, particularly by reflecting on his wife's infidelity. He thinks that by actually seeing her in the act of committing adultery he will see sin. Though Lance is a man of scientific attitude who takes adultery just as molecules rubbing against molecules yet he wants to find something extraordinary out of it. He feels that if sexual love provides the greatest joy then it should also provide the greatest unhappiness. His quest is to know how and why does a sexual act put man in utter unhappiness?

Percy treats the sexual act as an unique act which can not be categorized or listed in human needs like food, shelter or air. It is a unique experience that can not be expressed in words. If the sexual act and the pleasure gained from the act is unspeakable then the sexual offense is also unspeakable and it can not be communicated to others in words. Language falls short to express the intensity of sexual pleasure and the sexual offense. John F. Desmond rightly states that adultery is "rooted in the mystery of individual human personality whose absolute spiritual uniqueness in the order of being can not be objectively categorized." Thus, for Percy, the sexual act is a great mystery the meaning of which can neither be grasped nor explained by ordinary human beings. The other alternative is to think about love. "But what is love?" He asks(L.81). "Love. Hm. The older I get, the less I know about such large subjects" (L.89). He loves Margot only in the sense that he wants her all the time in his possession.
Love is a vague term for Lancelot. He states that it is easy to speak of love but persons can love each other only when something dreadful happens. The true "love is impossible now if it was. The only way it will ever be possible again is if the world should end"(L.56). Love for Lance is only a creative force, *eros*, possessing a woman. He remarks:

"There is no joy on this earth like falling in love with a woman...... And there is no pain on this earth like seeing the same woman look at another man the way she once looked at you"(L.122).

Lance desires to start the "Third Revolution" to raise the moral code of conduct particularly in case of sexual indulgence of women and the corrupt nature of men. The main objective of his revolution is to establish a clearcut distinction between ladies and whores; and between gentlemen and fornicators. He wants to know precisely whether a woman is a lady or a whore and respond to her accordingly. The main condition is that they should be faithful to their instincts and should not hide anything from others. A whore must show herself as a whore and a lady must come forward as a lady. Lance always wanted Margot to be either a whore or a lady; but against his expectations she chose to be a whore and pretended to be a lady. This revealed him her deceiving nature.

Lancelot's new world provides a complete mad model of interrelations of individuals with others. It is full of hatred and violence. In this world each person is perverted, crazy and preoccupied with lust. He hopes in this situation he will be able to see God only through violence and destruction, only through the evil acts. He feels that he can start a new life only after destroying the old one. He kills Jacoby and sets Belle Isle, the old mansion, on
fire making Raine and Dana burn with it for their being responsible to spoil his daughter, Lucy's life. The destruction of the old mansion and the death of his immediate enemies relieve him of the burden of the past to begin a new life in a new world.

While in prison for the crimes he committed he goes in search of a new companion to live with in a new world. Ultimately he falls in love with a girl, Anna. Though he has not yet seen her, he has heard that she has been "gang raped by some sailors in the quarter, forced to commit unnatural acts many times, then beaten up and thrown on to the batture"(L.12). She is terribly shocked by the act. She has not uttered a single word to anybody since the horrible incident of rape. She is force-fed and prefers to live an isolated life. Lancelot feels that Anna, after the total destruction of her past, is a proper companion for him to start a new life in a new world. He knows:

"She is the first woman of the new order. For she has, so to speak, endured the worst of the age and survived it; undergone the ultimate violation and come out of it not only intact but somehow purged, innocent. Who else might the new Virgin be but a gangraped social worker"(L.159).

Lance plans to marry Anna and protect her. He feels relieved of the rotten world by establishing contact with Anna. Few days before he leaves prison he expresses his wish to Anna to be her life-companion because he feels, it is the need of the time that they need each other if they want to live in future. The news of the death of Anna's father further brings her closer to Lance. He plans to start his new life in Virginia, a place where people had started the first and the second revolutions. But to Lance's astonishment he finds that everything does not go according to his wish. When it is time for him to leave prison he
realizes that "she's not going with me after all. I'm going alone" because she realizes that her views of life are different from his own. She insists that "there are more important things in this world" than sex (L.251). She has a broader view of life and so she does not want to accompany Lance only to have sexual relations with him. She bids him good-bye when he leaves prison.

Anna's refusal to accompany Lance to live a new life in a new world is an obvious indication of Lance's failure in his quest for the "Third Revolution." His discoveries that man "is a thinking reed and a walking genital" or a woman "is the only creature on earth in perpetual heat" have proved false (L.223). His belief that "man's happiness lies in practising violence upon women and that women's happiness lies in submitting to it" is null and void. Though by the end of the novel Lance fails in his search to find the meaning of life through evil, Percy succeeds in presenting through Lancelot a profound analysis of the roots of sexual malaise in the twentieth century.

By the end of the novel Lance comes to his self; he becomes a "legally sane" person fit to be released from prison. He realizes that his quest was misdirected. So far he had taken sin as an objective occurrence, which he tried to recognize it in others, particularly in his wife, Margot, and her lover Jacoby. Actually sin is a subjective occurrence, to be recognized in one's own acts. His continuous application of the methods of science to areas like sex, the meaning of which cannot be expressed in words, reveal the same blunder he committed. Gary M Ciuba remarks: "Lancelot fails because he has abandoned the office of seer to become a scientist. But the scientific approach with its emphasis on objectivity and certainty can not record the mysterious areas of life such as sin."39 As a result he misses the sinfulness of his own acts without being aware of the true knowledge of sin for evil.
"Like a twentieth century Ethan Brand he is so much obsessed with ferreting out sin that he is ignorant of his own sin. In the worst form of intellectual pride, Lancelot commits that unpardonable sin of turning people into objects." 

Lance's narration of his life history to his boy-friend Percival, a priest psychiatrist in prison, without providing him any chance to enter the conversation till the end of novel is an indication of his being a man of autonomous self; but by the end of novel his establishing a true contact with Percival by allowing him to participate directly in the conversation marks a positive change that has taken in him due to this realization of the reality of life. He himself remarks how he has been changing while he is conversing with Percival. He also observes the change in Percival. "I have a feeling that while I was talking and changing. You were listening and changing"(L.254). So far the conversation was just a monologue but Percival's utterances of the words "yes" at the end of the novel turn the monologue into a conversation symbolizing the socialization process of Lancelot. At the end, it seems, the priest intends to tell Lance that it is only through love and the grace of God man can be redeemed from evil or sin. Love and grace of God are the means to be social, to be one with the other.

IV TOM MORE

Tom More, the protagonist of Walker Percy's third novel Love in the Ruins is an educated person, a physician psychiatrist from a middle class family. "He is older than Percy's first two protagonists, and torn by the traumas and ironies of life." Like other protagonists of Percy his development is also revealed in his shift from the materialistic to the spiritual way of life; or from the
world of abstraction to the world of reality. Lewis J. Taylor finds out similarities between Percy and Kierkegaard in respect of the technique of development of their fictional characters:

"Both Percy and Kierkegaard are centrally concerned with one vital question.... How can one make the necessary movements that can take him from unauthentic to authentic existence? It is by means of his fictional beings that he portrays the movements to selfhood, as he understands the way in which these take place...."

Tom More, like Will Barrett, is well aware of his distant family history and is proud of his being a Kinsman to great persons like Sir Thomas More, a great social reformist who belonged to rare breed of Anglo Saxon Catholics.

"Our family's only claim to singularity, if not distinction, is that we are one of that rare breed, Anglo Saxon Catholics who were Catholic from the beginning and stayed Catholic .... Sir Thomas More, in fact, is a collateral ancestor. Our name any how is More"(LR.22).

Tom More is well aware that his way of life is totally different from that of Sir Thomas More. Yet he tries to form a family link with Sir Thomas More and pretends to be a man of noble race. He himself states how he is different from Sir Thomas More who loved his friend and foe equally and believed in the way of spiritual life. Whereas "My life is a longing, longing for women, for the Nobel Prize, for the hot bosky bite of bourbon whisky and other great heart-wrenching longings that have no name"(LR.23). Tom More is well aware of the right and wrong paths of living a life. He knows that Sir Thomas More was right in his approach and he is on the wrong track. But he justifies that the
difference between him and his ancestor is in accordance with the difference of
time. Tom More knows that in this age man is known not by his morals but by
his possessions. So today everybody is crazy to have more and more things
under his control for his physical satisfaction. Everybody has become
self-centered bothering a least for others.

Tom More's abstraction by the materialistic way of life becomes
obvious through the narration of his earlier life with Doris, an "ex-episcopal girl
from Virginia" and an inheritor of forty thousand shares of R.J. Reynolds stock.
"My wife and I lived a good life," he remarks(L.R. 24). During this period of
twenty years he is totally engulfed in "her yellow hair," "her royal
green-linen-clad self, fragrant and golden fleshed," looking like "long thighed
Mercury, god of morning"(L.R.65). He lives in a "beautiful house," has a nice
breakfast, and watches sexual programmes on TV. His wife gives birth to a
beautiful girl child who is named as "Samantha in the expectation that this dark
gracile pagan name would some how inform the child"(L.R.12).

After the birth of Samantha Tom More forgets everybody and is
totally involved in his own self "caring nought for my fellow Catholics but only
for myself and Samantha"(L.R.13). His heart leaps with joy when Samantha
accompanies him to mass. He sings and cuts the fool while returning home with
her. Tom More's description of his wife as an "Apple Queen of the Apple
Blossom Festival in Winchester" and the location of his beautiful house in
Paradise Estates surrounded by green hills with notches in the tree lines and the
loaves of new houses looking like sugar lumps and the red light of TV
transmitter which appears "like a ruby and a diamond in the plum velvet sky"
give an impression that his abode is in paradise(L.R.13).
This abstracted heavenly life of Tom More does not last long. It totally disappears with the sad demise of his beloved daughter Samantha who dies a miserable death because of neuroblastoma and then after two years with his wife's running away with a heathen Englishman. He falls a "prey to bouts of depression and morning terror"(LR.20). He shakes like a leaf at the breakfast table, begins to drink Vodka and develops an anxiety for liberty like most of the conservatives and the liberals who are the victims of the time they live in. The catastrophic incidents in his life and his observation of the miserable patients in the hospital ultimately bring him to a conclusion that unhappiness is also a part of human life.

Doris leaves Tom More because their married life has no fascination for her after Samantha's death. It is just "like a burnt out star which collapses into itself, gives no light and is heavy, heavy"(LR.66). She finds her life barren with Tom More after the death of Samantha because she does not receive spiritual love from Tom. He tries to be with her and love her truly but she accuses him for Samantha's death. She believes that Alistair, the Englishman, is a true searcher, a pilgrim, because "for two years he took up a begging bowl and wandered the by ways with a disciple of Ramkrishna, the greatest fakir of our time."

Doris wants to be his follower leaving Tom behind, a bad Catholic who wants only Doris's body "But not the real me"(LR.71). She leaves Tom. Thus this double catastrophe of Samantha's death and Doris's desertion brings a drastic change in his life. "After that, Doris went spiritual and I became coarse and disorderly. She took the high road and I took the low"(LR.72). He falls a victim to gin fizzes, morning terror and attacks of seizure. He is unhappy though himself a physician. But this unhappiness then diverts Tom from sex to science reviving his achievements at the early age.
At the age of twenty six when Tom More was "encephalographer-in-residence at Tulane University," New Orleans, he had stumbled onto an extraordinary medical discovery about which he wrote an article for *The Journal of the American Medical Association* which was again republished in *Time, News Week*, and other papers and gave wide publicity to Tom More's scientific discovery. As a matter of fact this wide publicity abstracted Tom More from the reality of his capabilities as a physician. He soared so high that with just one success he put himself in the rank of the great scientists like Einstein.

"When I was a young man, the question of the time was: where are the Catholic Einsteins, Salks, Oppenheimer's? And the answer came, at least from my family: well here comes one, namely me." (LR.23).

He treats himself a doctor superior to other doctors with a proudly remark: "How many doctors achieve fame in their twenties" (LR.24). He has, to his credit, the discovery of a lapsometer.

Tom More believes that his lapsometer can locate the problems which are deeply embedded in human nature and also can provide a concrete solution to the spiritual problems by uniting the broken self whole and intact. He thinks that he can be both a physician and a metaphysician. He hopes that he can study human being as a scientific problem and find solutions to all philosophical questions with the help of lapsometer. Tom does not believe in the mystery of Being. "Enraptured by the lapsometer, Tom More lacks the metaphysician's awe when confronted by the mystery of Being." He is of the firm belief that with the help of his lapsometer he can heal the fissure in the human being.
Tom firmly believes that the modern man is dominated by the spirit of abstraction what he calls "Angelism" which means the bifurcation of self from itself. It happens also with the scientists because they spend most of their time among abstractions keeping themselves away from the reality, the immanent world. One way to come out of abstractions is to get involved in sex which again is a sign of beast.

"Angelism is an excessive admiration for the ability to be objective; bestialism is an excessive regard for one's physical needs and desires."\textsuperscript{44}

Though angelism and bestialism are the two opposite tendencies but now-a-days these are seen simultaneously in one man. Tom himself is not an exception to this as he being a victim of angelism-bestialism exhibits both the tendencies.

"In his desire to perfect his lapsometer and win the Nobel Prize, he is all angelism; in his pursuit of Lola Rhoades and Moira Schaffner, he is all bestialism."\textsuperscript{45}

Tom is either extremely angelic or extremely bestial in his treatment of others. "I believe in God and the whole business but I love women best......" (L.R.6). He has invented an instrument to cure the psychic disorders of his fellow colleagues but at the same time he lusting after Lola, Moira and Ellen who stay beside his room in Howard Johnson's motel. Tom's liking for the three girls in the motel is an indication of his attraction towards the material life, to have physical pleasure. He is attracted towards them because of their beauty and wealth. When he is away from women he finds solace only in the field of science. Thus he is exalted either by sex or by science. As a scientist he feels sure of curing the miseries of twentieth century man and measure the abstract
things like dreams with the help of his lapsometer which, in practice, is an impossible task for any human being.

Tom shifts from money and sex to the world of science with an intention to make use of Lola's father Dr. George Dusty who is a "president elect of the American Christian Proctological Society and could be useful when I apply for N.I.M.H. funds. Dusty is highly regarded, both in knothead and Left Circles" (L.R. 78). He wants to give wide publicity to his scientific article and get financial assistance for the manufacture of lapsometer on a large scale with the help of Dusty. Tom is obsessed by lapsometer. He takes help of Art Immelmann, an incarnation of devil, to develop and to have widespread distribution of lapsometer all over America. Tome More is blinded so much by lapsometer that he is unable to recognize the deceiving nature of Art Immelmann.

The turning point or the period of Tom's decline as a physician scientist begins with his fellow physicians' criticism of lapsometer. He is overwhelmed by the instrument so much that it is impossible for him to come to reality unless he abandons the lapsometer. In such situations Percy's protagonists come to reality only through catastrophes. Tom's hold over lapsometer is relaxed to some extent through the most catastrophic event in his life, that is, his suicide attempt.

"For if More's experience has taught him anything it is that accidents and catastrophe-phes have the effects of confirming the wonder of existence and enabling us to come to ourselves! An unexpected recovery of self occurs when More tries to escape his depression through suicide." 46
He cuts his own wrists but is saved by Max Gottlieb, who brings him to the Fedville Hospital and gets his wrists bandaged to stop excessive bleeding. The sight of blood makes Tom realize his true self.

"One morning - was it Christmas morning after listening to Perry Como! my wrists were cut and bleeding. Seeing the blood, I came to myself, saw myself as itself and the world for what it is, and began to love life" (LR 97).

Tom More's stay in the Acute ward of the Fedville Hospital as a patient after his suicide attempt is the period of his living a life in the immanent world. During this period he comes in contact with several other patients. He understands them, becomes one with them by carefully watching and listening to them. The reality of their lives and their suffering reveals to him the reality of the present world. "In the Acute Ward More has an insight about the creation, God, and our true status in the world as incarnated beings." But the most significant event in his life is his encounter with Ellen Ogletorpe, a nurse in Fedville Hospital where Tom was admitted after his attempted suicide.

It is in Ellen Ogletorpe's company that Tom More seems ultimately released from the hold of materialism. Her selfless and affectionate service to Tom in the hospital convinces him about the existence of God:

"Dear God, I can see it now, why can't I see it other times, that it is you I love in the beauty of the world and in all the lovely girls and dear good friends, and it is pilgrims we are, wayfarers on a journey, and not pigs, nor angels" (LR.109).

Her love for Tom More does not spring from physical attraction; it is based on her humanitarian concern. She is a beautiful Georgia Presbyterian girl strict in her duties. "Her principles allow her a kind of chaste wantonness" (LR.155). She
drops the medical tablets in Tom's mouth, smooths his eyebrows, cleanses his
toddy glass and takes every care of Tom with motherly affection:

"In chaotic times Ellen performs the essential
function of protecting, serving as center preserving.
She tends to the disheveled doctor at times almost
like a mother, buttoning his collar tab, slicking his
eyebrows telling him to tuck in his shirt, as if
summoning Tom out of the ruins to a new sense of
personal order."38

Ellen does not believe in God but in God's business, that is in
working hard on a right path with unselfish motive in being chaste and honest.
She helps Tom not only in his physical recovery but also provides him moral
strength to fulfil the aim of his life, to make his lapso meter fully effective. Percy
assigns Ellen the job similar to that of Allison in The Second Coming.

Tom's relationship with Ellen triggers off memories of his
daughter, Samantha's death. He realizes that "Her death has become a way of
finding himself; he recovers the 'self' through participating in the 'ordeal' of her
dying."49 Or as Martin Luschei rightly remarks "The memory of Samantha pulls
Tom out of his abstracted orbit and gives him access to his own inwardness,
where he is whole and intact."50 Now he wants to live a concrete life with some
meaning to it. He understands that the materialistic way of life, momentary
physical satisfactions, can not bring ultimate satisfaction to man. It is only
through submission of one's self to other selves or to God that life can become
meaningful. So he submits himself to God and utters a spontaneous prayer that
banishes his personal devil, the ego of his self, the misunderstanding of his being
the foremost scientist of his age. The prayer proves efficacious and he is freed
of Art Immelmann, the devil, to live a new peaceful life with Ellen Oglethorpe.
They both get married, have two children, Meg and Tom Jr. and live a real life.
This is first time in the eleven years of his past life he goes for confession before Father Smith. But still he does not confess that he is guilty of the sin he committed but he confesses his ingratitude in not being sorry for the sin. He is sorry "for not being sorry" (LR.398). Though there is some change in his attitude towards life but he still longs for physical pleasures. Father Smith counsels Tom More that apart from longing for one's own pleasures there are more important things to occupy his attention. He advises him to be more available to others.

"Meanwhile, forgive me but there are other things we must think about like doing our jobs, you being a better doctor, I being a better priest, showing a bit of ordinary kindness to people particularly in our own families........ doing what we can for our poor unhappy country -things, which, please forgive me, sometimes seem more important than dwelling on a few middle-aged day-dreams"(LR.399).

Father Smith's this advice works on Tom More to further divert his attention from the wound of his self to the welfare of others.

Once self-centered Tom More now commits himself to a larger community. He participates the election campaigns with a motive to join the politically divided American Society. He makes sincere efforts to unite blacks and whites, liberals and the democrats, poor and rich, and brings the Catholics together with the Protestants. Now Tom is sure that some of the problems can be solved if the whole human community is made the focus of our activities. He is no more pessimistic now. He is a happy man participating enthusiastically in the celebrations of Christmas Day. He drinks, dances and sings "old Sintara songs and the Salve Regina, cutting the fool like David before the ark" (LR.402). He
enjoys life, but in real sense. He does not become eccentric or he is not
overwhelmed by joy. He does not imagine himself to be in heaven but here on
the earth living a life not either of God or of beast but of man. He takes his wife
Ellen to bed to have "a long winters nap," and enjoys sex "not under a bush or in
a car or on the floor or any such humbug" like a beast but "at home in bed where
all good folk belong"(L.R.403). At last Tom More is at home living a real life.

*The Thanatos Syndrome*, Percy's last novel, is a sequel to *Love in
the Ruins* in the sense it confirms the intellectual growth of the protagonist, Tom
More. The Tom of *The Thanatos Syndrome* unlike the Tom of *Love in the Ruins*
is not an unexperienced physician scientist to be easily moved or abstracted by
everyday surroundings or his own achievements. He can not be misguided by
cunning persons like Art Immelmann. As a man and a physician now he has vast
experience of this world; he does not take hasty decisions but tests everything
with pros and cons. He acts on Father Rinaldo Smith's advice and strives for
public welfare rather than for selfaggrandizement and is cautious about the
therapy to be used so that there should not be any side effects. Now he is aware
of the fact that: "Any action undertaken in the name of principle or an
abstraction is dangerous. The ethical conclusion is to treat all human beings
with reference to their individuality, not their similarity."

Percy has developed Tom More's character in *The
Thanatos Syndrome* on two different levels. On the superficial level it has been
observed how Tom turns out as a man of high intellect:

"As the doctor/detective/counterspy hero goes
about simultaneously, and for the most part through
the same procedures solving the mystery of what his
patient's cases have in common and getting the
goods on his evil opponents, necessarily putting
himself in extreme jeopardy, himself operating a
step outside the law from time to time, what suspense there is does not involve questions even about the identity of the male factors, not to speak of who will win."

Tom, like all Percy protagonists, appears as a searcher and he succeeds in searching out the secret misdeeds of Comeaux and his consortium to fulfil their ambitions at the cost of the lives of innocent youngsters and helpless oldsters. Tom's development on spiritual level is acknowledged by his understanding of Father Smith and his understanding of life as a mystery. He gradually develops the abilities to distinguish right from wrong. In the beginning of the novel he does not know the reality behind Father Smith's odd behaviour but as he is exposed more and more to Father Smith's experience of this world he is illuminated by the knowledge of truth. His past experiences also guide him to the ultimate truth.

After an imprisonment of two years at Fort Pelham Tom More enters The Thantos Syndrome as a wise person as if he has learnt much about this world. In prison he has nourished the ability to connect the smaller happenings in the lives of others to find out a common social malady. Tom is now aware of the change that has taken place within him during the last two years of his prison life. He says now "I don't have to plumb the depths of 'modern man' as I used to think I had to. Nor worry about 'the human condition' and such like. My scale is smaller"(TS.67). Though this time Tom is not overambitious about his skills as he was in Love in the Ruins but still he is not totally free from ambition. He is not a great searcher now but he does not totally give up his search. Now his search is limited to the periphery of human life; it does not pierce deep into the human psyche. He observes the strange behaviour
of his rivals, Bob Comeaux and Van Dorn, and his patients to find out the cause of the change in their behaviour.

One day Tom gets a hint from his cousin Lucy Lipscomb that "Bob C. and Van Dorn are up to something. It concerns you"(TS.66). Now he becomes sure that something is being cooked against him and his patients. So far by his observations of the patients he comes to know that all his patients, including his wife Ellen, suffer from the loss of selfawareness. They look happy but their lives have become barren. He compares himself and the prisoners in Fort Pelham with the patients and the citizens of Feliciana Parish who are free. He realizes that there was thrill in the lives of prisoners whereas the free people outside have "all turned into chickens"(TS.90). He does not understand whether he has changed or the people outside have changed.

Tom's first visit to Father Smith provides him hints about the general condition of the American society and the tendency of American people, how they try to live a life of double standard, how they deceive others and kill the innocents under the guise of national welfare. Father Smith's explanation of the massacre of Jews by Nazis is quite peculiar. It seems to prove "that the origins of the Holocaust are a myth"(TS.127). Father Smith gives clearcut warning to Tom that he should not be moved by the abstract sense of one's being decent, generous, and humanitarian. In this world there is every possibility of his being deceived by the hypocrites. He puts his message in short that tenderness always leads to the gas chamber. "Tenderness is the first disguise of the murderer"(TS.128). If a lover of mankind and a theorist of mankind amalgamate in one person then the person is most likely to turn a Hitler or a Stalin and the result will be the deaths of millions for the welfare of the
humanity. Thus Father Smith warns Tom how dangerous it is to live in this world full of horror, irony and cunningness everywhere.

Percy indirectly warns his readers of the danger of living in the present American Society which consists mostly of gnostics who believe that there is a flaw in God's creation and it needs to be improved. The modern gnostics believe that the improvement of the flaw is possible by undertaking socio-scientific programmes on large scale or by introducing some new drugs. By the end of this century the programmes like euthanasia for handicapped children and elderly persons who do not wish to live longer have become a fact and nobody bothers about the individual deaths as it turns just to be a statistical phenomenon to count the numbers living or dead. Realizing this fact Father Smith warns Tom of the intensity of danger from Comeaux's ped euthanasia and gereuthanasia programmes.

Lucy provides a supporting hand to Tom in his search. Both of them, after working together for twenty-four hours at the computer, come to find that the odd behavior of Tom's patients may be due to Heavy Sodium poisoning. Tom and Lucy are now curious to know whether the hypothesis, Tom has arrived at, is true. They check the plasma level of heavy sodium as they check blood sugar in all of his patients on computer and to their great surprise they find that the heavy sodium level of all the patients having water supply from the intake near Grand Mer has considerably gone up whereas it is normal with Tom, and Lucy and other patients.

The thorough observation of the geographical and weather maps, a satellite view of Feliciana Parish and the adjoining Parishes drag Tom to a conclusion "that the drinking water from here is contaminated by heavy-sodium ions." (TS.169). Now the next step is to find out whether the contamination of
drinking water of Ratliff intake is accidental or intentional. He learns from Virgil who has detail knowledge of pipe lines in the Grand Mer and Ratliff intake area that the contamination of water at Ratliff pumping center is intentional and has some secret motive. He learns from Lucy that Comeaux has secretly named it as Blue Boy project.

Tom takes out every detail of the Blue Boy project from Comeaux himself when he comes to Tom with an offer for a job as a senior consultant on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Advisory Committee for the Medical Uses of Isotopes (NRC's ACMUI). He tells Tom that the project has proved beneficial in improving the quality of life of people and in solving many current problems of the society. But Tom is aware of the fact that it is all Comeaux's pretension. Because what Comeaux is explaining is just one side of the story. He hides the increase in the rate of violence and adverse change in persons like Mickey LaFaye and St. Fancisville who turn into shooters, shooting the horses and persons in the post office. Comeaux also neglects the misuse of his experiments by Van Dorn at Belle Ame Academy.

Tom's second visit to Father Smith proves noteworthy in his understanding of what type of people Comeaux and Van Dorn are. Father Smith's confession of his visit to Germany and his footnote to the confession introduce Tom to the horrors of Nazism in Germany. He is introduced to Dr. Jager, a man of ironic nature who was not a Nazi but "who believed in the elimination of people who were useless, useless to anyone, to themselves, the state" (TS.246). The more interesting thing Father Smith explains to Tom is his being unaware of the horror of the cruel act at that time. "Only later was I horrified. We've got it wrong about horror. It doesn't come naturally but takes
some effort" (TS.254). He further clarifies that this fatal flaw of villainous' acts is not peculiar only with Germans.

Here Percy asserts that to be inhuman has become a common tendency of Americans in the later part of this century. Under the pretension of welfare of the society thousands of small and handicapped babes are openly and legally massacred or not allowed to enter this world from the womb:

"The Nazi dream of excellence is anatomized here to emphasize (admittedly, almost too clearly) the implications of Comeaux's brave new world and, more generally, to reveal what our civilization, even with the avowed best intentions, is necessarily coming to, if one does not make some effort to see clearly ahead."53

Father Smith's question to Tom is, in fact, a question asked by Percy to all Americans: "Do you think we're different from the Germans?" (TS.256). So now the question before Tom is: What to choose? Whether to join Comeaux's plan of social welfare through pedeuthanasia and gereuthanasia or to reveal his secret plan to the society in order to restore people to themselves.

Tom is continuously engaged in disclosing the mechanism of the Blue Boy project. Though the area is prohibited for visitors Tom, with the help of uncle Hugh Bob, and Virgil, trespasses the area to observe from near the Blue Boy project at Ratliff intake. He succeeds in witnessing the mechanism of automatic contamination of drinking water by sodium at Ratliff intake but is arrested for violating the law while on parole and is sent back to Alabama.

When Tom reaches Belle Ame along with uncle Hugh Bob and Virgil well prepared to rescue Virgil's son Claude Bon they first meet Mrs. Cheney, one of the staff members at Belle. Tom receives information from her that "eight glasses a day" of heavy sodium water is supplied to every child there.
Tom sends Virgil upstairs spying for the activities going on there. And to his surprise he sees plenty of advanced implements like 3-D tape, 3-D video camera and blue films full of pornography of boys dealing with girls, boys and grown ups and staff members with children and other staff members. The sodium dose is administered not only in order to gain material benefit, it has a sinister design. Young men and women and children are sexually abused at the centre.

To teach a lesson to Van Dorn and his companions at Belle Ame Tom takes them on line and turns the same experiment of heavy sodium on them all. He compels them, on the point of a gun, to drink sodium contaminated water and then watches how they turn into beasts.

"The prometheuses of the project are literally in their nakedness and driven back to animality when forced to do to themselves what they had done to others."54

He then calls the Sheriff to witness how these people have spoiled the children at Belle Ame Academy by providing them sodium water. The Sheriff issues orders to arrest and send them to Angola for prosecution.

One good result of Tom’s action against the illegal activities at Belle Ame is Ellen’s return to home. Because of Van Dorn’s arrest she is now "cut off from Van Dorn and heavy sodium, she got eliminated in Mixed Doubles and came limping home"(TS.334). Tom welcomes her back home though she is mentally and physically disabled due to heavy sodium doses. Thus with the restoration of life to Feliciana people Tom’s family life, too, is restored. Tom observes Ellen recovering slowly as she gets involved in household activities. Her liking for the material things is now shifting to the ordinary things. "No more Big Macs and Popeyes chicken" but "red beans and rice" are the things of
her interest (TS.336). Ellen can not talk as fluently as she used to be but Tom is optimistic for her recovery and now he does not want to part company with her at any cost.

The nature of Man is a mystery for Percy. It is difficult to understand man by his outward appearance however close he may be. As a matter of fact Tom can not guess all of a sudden the nature of Bob Comeaux and Van Dorn. It is only time which reveals what type of persons they are. The same thing happens in Tom's understanding of Father Smith. "Tom More knows that life is mysterious; it does not move forward in an orderly manner but rather by fits and starts, mostly fits." 35 Though Tom has very close relations with Father Smith and is confident of having detail knowledge about him; he gets puzzled at his strange behavior on the occasion of the reopening ceremony of St. Margaret's hospice.

"I who knew him best, could not make head or tail of what he was saying. To the others he appeared complete loony or... crazy as a betsy bug. To make matter worse, he also managed to offend everyone even those most disposed to help him and the hospice" (TS.357).

Thus the final message Percy tries to convey to his readers by the end of his last novel through the character of Father Smith and his relation with Tom More is: "Man is a mystery." And so one should not be abstracted by the outward appearance of a person because this century is well aware of the fact that "Tenderness leads to the gas chamber" (TS.360). It is the reality of this world that if there exists God, then there also exists Satan. "The Great Prince Satan, the Depriver is here" (TS.359). So the best way to live a happy life in this
mischievous world is to be true to one's own self rather than to be carried away by the abstractions, the false appearances.

At the end of the novel Tom comes to himself and realizes what choice he has to make, either to accept an offer for job at Fedville with an attractive salary or to start Private practice. "I must tell him either/or" (TS.366). And ultimately he chooses to continue his private practice as it enables him to have direct one to one relation with his patients. He does not want to be moved by money but he believes in his conscience. It is a point to be noted that almost all the characters of the novel, even Tom's patients, come to themselves by the end of the novel. Tom's patients Mickey LaFaye feels: "I think the stranger is trying to tell me something..... the stranger is part of myself"(TS.371). As she comes to herself she resumes her speech.

Percy believes that the consistency of speech is one of the signs of man's return to his true self. Mary Deems Howland has rightly remarked:

"Perhaps most significant, by the end of the novel language has been restored, even to Father Smith..... We see the rejuvenation of language in Father Smith's resumption of language ..... and in More's rededication to listening and to helping his patients speak the unspeakable so that they may come to know themselves."

Thus for Percy man's coming to himself is a sign of his perfection. In this sense Percy's novels generally end where his protagonists achieve a true self realization.

Notes :

Chapter III


5. Ibid., P. 65-66.


13. Ibid., P. 101.


16. Ibid., P. 32.


25. Quoted in Howland, Mary Deems, The Gift of the Other ...... P. 111.


28. Ibid., P. 110.


40. Ibid., P. 108.


47. Howland, Mary Deems, *The Gift of the Other*., P. 73.


54. Ibid., P. 185.


56. Ibid., P. 150.