CHAPTER IV

THE IRONIC VISION OF WALKER PERCY

"For many of us, there are always at least two stories in a Walker Percy novel. The story that we read, the verbal expression, delights and instructs us, because it satisfies our hunger for artifice and reveals new beauties and truths in our shared world. Yet there is another story -- a story that we intuit, and it haunts us, for it confronts us with the mystery of personality, the private world of Walker Percy."  

Percy's novels are two-fold or even multifold in their meaning as his protagonists are symbolical of the twentieth century man living in an age of science and technology. His novels have the depth of philosophy yet are interesting for a common reader due to his lucid style of writing. Percy's critics have found his novels as personal confessions of his own life. On many occasions Percy has admitted in his interviews that biographical elements intrude into his novels. His own life is full of mysterious experiences.

Though Percy makes use of his own experiences in narrating the mysterious lives of his protagonists he is equally cautious in keeping them away from himself. Binx, for instance, lives in the society of Gentilly but he is not of it. So also Percy is in his novels but he is not of them. What help Percy to keep himself away from his novels and make his novels interesting to read are the techniques he exploits in writing his novels and in shaping the characters of his protagonists. The first person narrative that Percy uses in four of his novels assigning the job of narration to the protagonists of the respective novels creates an impression that the story narrated is an outcome of the experiences of the
concerned protagonist, and the author of the novel is not at all related to the story. Percy's profound and profuse use of satire in his novels helps to reveal the ironies in the lives of his protagonists. Percy's use of contradictions, paradoxes and the different modes of irony focus on the ironic fate of Percy's protagonists. Percy's theory of language, and his use of words as symbols are the supporting assets to his view that human life is a mystery. A detailed study of the techniques that Percy uses in his novels would help us in understanding the various dimensions of irony and fate in his novels.

1 SATIRE

"Whatever may be Percy's character, he has a finely wrought ironic mind, a healthy approach to human antics through satire, and a good sense of humour."²

Satire is the most handy weapon of an ironist which enables him to bring forth the follies of man. Walker Percy's novels are abundant in satire. The writer and editor Alfred Kazin calls him "the satiric Dostoyevsky of the bayou;" and professor Brooks writes: "Percy's language is the kind of instrument that any good satirist must have at hand."³ Percy utilizes satire as a narrative technique to illuminate the ironic fate of his protagonists as Femi Euba has rightly remarked "... fate has to do with satire."⁴ Through the technique of satire Percy throws light on the social, economic and political conditions in which his protagonists live. Satire, in fact, is "an artistic literary expression which generally aims at amusement."⁵

Apart from making Percy's novels more interesting to read the main aim of satire in his novels is to reveal to the readers the nature of his protagonists and the predicament in which they live. Percy uses satire as a mode of presenting irony in the form of language as it is "ideally understood as
rhetorical art" by the satirists after World War II. Northrop Frye makes a very thin distinction between irony and satire: "The chief distinction between irony and satire is that satire is militant irony." A satirist sees the world as a battlefield where the battle between good and evil is waged continuously. Percy as a satirist witnesses the same battle and finds that in this world evil prevails over good. Dustin Griffin has pointed out that "The world has always supplied such an abundance of vice and folly that satirists need only open their eyes, look about, and begin to speak."

Traditionally satire is used to evolve moral judgement and improve custom, belief or tradition. But in modern sense it is a form of writing, prose or verse, to ridicule an individual, or society showing the foolishness of an idea, custom, or to criticise folly, stupidity, pride, and vice of an individual. It also exposes or denounces frailties or faults of mankind. A novelist, Percy believes, does not teach or attempt to improve morale of the society or of the readers. The job of a novelist, he thinks, is to present the reality before the readers and leave it to their judgement. A novelist, according to Percy, is an agent just to give a warning to the readers of the forthcoming dangers, like a canary in coal mines which "utters plaintive cries, and collapses," an indication for miners to come to surface to save their lives.(MB.101).

Percy considers himself a moralist. In a letter to Caroline Gordon he writes "My main problem as a fiction writer" is that "I do not consider myself a novelist but a moralist or propagandist." As a novelist he wants to perform the function of a prophet by writing "about the coming end in order to warn about present ills and so avert the end"(MB.101). Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr. remarks that "In coming to see the novelist's role as being similar to a prophet's Percy became more the religious writer and less the autobiographical and
Southern novelist. He now began to use the novel to a large extent, as an open assault on modernity rather than as an exploration of his own inner conflicts.  

In almost all of his novels Percy seems concerned with moral, political, religious and social deterioration everywhere in America. Till World War II the agrarian southern America was untouched by the evils of industrialization in the North. But after World War II the South also started experiencing the harsh realities of the North. Percy catches the same realities in his novels as Cleanth Brooks has rightly remarked that Percy is "our most acute commentator on the social life of the South particularly of the South during the last quarter of a century."  

Being a keen observer Percy takes pleasure in portraying the rottenness of the American society. In an interview he admits that he enjoys being on the attack. "The idea of being on the attack is very congenial to me because unless I can build up some steam, generate some polemical steam I have difficulty in writing. There has to be something on attack." Even before Percy turned to fiction he was a critic of American society. In one of his articles entitled "A Novel About the End of the World" he points out that "The subject of the post-modern novel is a man who has very nearly come to the end of the line"(MB.112). Percy's keen observation of post-modern American society lead him to conclude that scientific development has degraded man's condition:

"For what has happened is not merely the technological transformation of the world but something psychologically even more portentous. It is the absorption by the layman not of the scientific method but rather the magical aura of science, whose credentials he accepts for all sectors of reality. Thus in the lay cultures of a scientific society nothing is easier than to fall prey to a kind of seduction which sunders one's very self from itself into all transcending 'objective' consciousness and a
consumer-self with a list of needs to be satisfied"(MB.113).

Percy's first novel *The Moviegoer* has become popular among the readers for it gives an exact picture of the contemporary American society of Post-World-War II period. He depicts the society of New Orleans as a maze of cultural code. It is no longer possible in this society to relate oneself to a particular ethical system and it is not even necessary to do so. Multiple codes of behaviour co-exist everywhere because they have lost their ethical relevance. It is a society in which, Binx realizes, man becomes happy when others are unhappy, man is moved by wealth and women rather than by his conscience. Here human beings are treated as dead things to be cast off. "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).

Binx observes that the people of New Orleans are as good as dead because what they do, speak, and choose are not according to their conscience; they are either imitations of others or they show their hypocrisy. Even the highly educated persons belonging to the upper class of society show their meannindedness in their private life. They do not practise what they preach. He remarks "I have known a couple of believers, humanists and lady psychologists who come to my aunt's house. On This I Believe [a TV programme] they like everyone. But when it comes down to this or that particular person, I have noticed that they usually hate his guts"(M.109). He further notices that nowadays people continuously go on arguing on religion "about the mechanics of going to Mass," but when it is actually their turn to follow religion, "raising the subject provokes them the acutest embarrassment" (M.159). In such a situation church
has turned into a post-office where people get heavily to their feet on the occasion of communion.

Binx's narration of his visit to a tableau of Stone Age at the Field Museum in Chicago emphasises the loss of love and affection for each other even among the family members. After keen observation of the American society for thirty years Binx comes to a final conclusion about his understanding of American society. He concludes:

"... in the very century of merde, the great shithouse of scientific humanism where needs are satisfied, everyone becomes an anyone, a warm and creative person, and prospers like a dung beetle, and one hundred percent of people are humanists and ninety-eight percent believe in God, and men are dead, dead, dead and the malaise has settled like a fall-out and what people really fear is not that bomb will fall but that the bomb will not fall"(M.228).

The difference between appearance and reality pervades in all Percy's novels. His description of the houses in Gentilly indicate the same thing. Though these houses look pretty in sunlight, they give an impression of unhappiness at dawn:

"These houses look handsome in the sunlight; they please me with their pretty colors, their perfect lawns and their clean airy garages. But I have noticed that at this hour of dawn they are forlorn. A sadness settles over them like a fog from the lake"(M.84).

These are the fifty and sixty thousand dollar homes but these new houses look haunted. "Even the churches out here look haunted"(M.86). Thus from outside everything here looks pleasant but from inside it is totally rotten.
Percy's second novel criticises the old distinguished southern families which were almost doomed to vanish in making efforts to be true to the Stoic tradition of the aristocratic South. Such families find it difficult to stick up to the old traditions by living in the changed social condition. The family of Will Barrett represents such a southern family whose condition gradually starts degrading with its successive generations. Will's family becomes totally inactive in its original spirit by the time he appears on the scene. However when he grows up he makes futile and needless efforts to regain the past charm and elegance of his family. In portraying the character of Will Barrett Percy delineates gradual degeneration of the notions of honour and dignity in honourable southern families.

Percy's satire becomes obvious in the characterization of Will Barrett, the descendent of an honourable family. Though an engineer, he is himself a sick man who can not engineer his own life. He pretends to be a gentleman but longs to be a fornicator. As a matter of fact he falls in a miserable condition for he can not be either of them. "Will wishes to cleave to a concept of himself as a gentleman. Yet being the last gentleman ..... makes Will miserable because it necessitates his being chaste in an age when chastity seems to be a dead issue". Mr. Ed Barrett, Will Barrett's father, tells him how the aristocratic gentlemen have turned into fornicators and that the word "chastity" has almost disappeared from this world. Percy does not mind open sexuality of the Negroes. What is more serious for him in the present society of whites is to indulge in the act of sexuality and yet pretend to be a gentleman, to be a fornicator and a hypocrite. "..... they fornicate too and in public and expect them back yonder some how not to notice. Then they expect their women to be respected"(LG.96). This is very painful awareness that Will Barrett seems to arrive at.
Through passages from Sutter's notebook, too, Percy presents the harsh realities of American life. The Soap Opera, "where everyone is decent and also sad...." gives a clear picture of the present American society in the South (LG.280). This particular condition, according to the narrator of the novel, is a result of modern man's confusion about science and Jesus. Jamie's suffering and at last his death bring Barrett, with distress, to a conclusion that the condition of Americans is no far better than the condition of people in China and Bombay. "For the first time he saw how it might be possible for large number of people to die, as they die in China or Bombay, without anybody paying much attention" (LG.356).

In a novel like *Love in the Ruins: The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End of the World* (1971), too, Percy is concerned with "the end of the world." Percy chooses to set this novel in future for he believes that this particular genre enables the author to attack the ills in the present society. "It's a good way," says Percy referring to a futuristic novel, "to do satire. It gives you a chance to speak to the present society from a futuristic point of view. Then you can exaggerate present trends so that they become noticeable and more subject to satire."14 As a matter of fact Percy's satire in *Love in the Ruins* is wide ranging and relentless. He attacks all; liberals, conservatives, whites, blacks, Catholics, Protestants, Jews and many others. He challenges the traditionally established notions and attitudes towards life. Notions of "dignity," "honour," etc., he argues, are vague words and everybody is a castaway a sojourner passing through life to an eternal home.

The title of the novel, *Love in the Ruins*, itself is satirical as it indicates American dreams coming to ruins. Percy himself states "my novel, as I say, is satire and was written not really to prophecy, but to show how the
predictions can be avoided." The image of America that Percy presents in this novel is quite disturbing. The word "ruins" suggests America as a moral wasteland with dilapidated social, political and religious conditions. There are ruins everywhere, vines growing in nook and corner of the New York city where even negroes hesitate to live. The whole country has turned into a desert and few places here and there like Paradise Estates look like an oasis in the desert where there is some life. Wolves are seen in down town Cleveland, as they were in Rome during the Black plague.

A good portion of this novel deals with satire on the science community in general and the behaviourists in particular for their blind support to empirical methods at the expense of human sovereignty and dignity. Through Tom More, the protagonist of the novel and his invention of lapsometer, Percy portrays man's needless efforts in this modern world to reconcile mind and body and recapture a sense of authenticity and wholeness about his individual existence. Percy's investigation of the sundered self of man in this age of science and technology carries him into the diverse areas of science, religion and history. His portrayal of Love Clinic, a research center, and the Geriatrics Rehabilitation Center of Fedville, bring forth the dehumanising operations in the name of welfare of humanity.

Like Nathaniel Hawthorne Percy is of the firm belief that no scientist can conduct research on human soul without destroying it; and no invention or operation can change the human soul. To go against the sanctity of human heart is a sin for which man must suffer. It is quite obvious that More's suffering is a result of his tendency to transgress the ethical codes of life.

In Love in the Ruins Percy focuses on the implications of the scientific inventions on the religious life of people. The conversation between
Tom More and the Director of Fedville hospital makes clear how science has affected religion. The Director connects the invention of "lapsesometer" with man's first "lapse" or "fault" from the Garden of Eden.

"What do you call this thing, Doctor' the Director asks, exploring the device with his pencil. 'Lapsesometer.' I am unable to tear my eyes from his strong brown farmer's hands. 'The name interests me.' 'Yes sir?' 'It implies, I take it, a lapse or fall.' 'Yes', I say tonelessly. 'A fall perhaps from a state of innocence'" (LR.205).

Tom More himself clarifies in the beginning of the novel, the meaning of the scientific instrument: "only in man does the self miss itself, fall from itself (hence lapsometer)" (LR.36). It implies that Tom More's device is developed to measure the intensity of man's fall. Paradise Estates, where Tom more resides, indicates "a paradise indeed" as it is situated in the centre of the town "an oasis of concord in a troubled land"(LR.17). In reality it is an oasis in ruins. The description of this place is nothing but technological parody of Eden, an ironic symbol of human longing for prelapsarian happiness. Percy criticises modern man's belief that paradise can be regained by availing conveniences and comforts made available to man in this scientifically developed world.

*Love in the Ruins* is rich in biblical themes. Percy presents Tom More as an American Adam who falls a victim to the temptations of a satanic figure Art Immelmann. The pit, an amphitheater, represents the hell which actually is a place of action where ironically Tom More recovers his health, happiness, and religion in the slave quarters. With his lapsometer Tom appears like a new Christ, a new messiah to reconcile man with his sins. But ironically
what we witness at the end is the failure of the modern Christ in bringing happiness to the people.

*Love in the Ruins* with its major theme of 'love' is also a satire on the degraded concept of love. Percy points out how the concept of love as a spiritual experience disappears with the technological development in America and how physical love or lust, replaces it. Tom's narration of love making in Love Clinic is satirical too. "In 'Love,' as it is called, volunteers perform sexual acts singly, in couples, and in groups, beyond viewing mirrors in order that man might learn more about the human sexual response"(LR.14). Percy strongly criticises the scientific study of love which is purely subjective, individual based and an unaccountable human experience. He points out how love in the religious community of America has degenerated: priests leave the church to watch the vaginal console, where, Helga, the German scientist, and others study all the physiological aspects of romance. It is also an attack on the behaviourists' approach to study human beings merely as organisms in a science laboratory.

Sexual obscenity and immorality in the American society is made more vivid in the next novel *Lancelot*. Lancelot, the protagonist of the novel, represents the Stoic nobility whereas his childhood friend Dr. Percival personifies the Judeo-christian tradition. Through this conflict Percy discloses that the Americans today are reluctant to accept full implications of both the views. They are in a wavering condition in accepting either of the views as a way of life. The protagonists of Percy's previous novels, Binx Bolling, Will Barrett, and Tom More are the victims of the same conflict.

Through the character of Lancelot Percy satirises the modern man's dilemma. His condition is similar to that of a nut in a cracker. He cannot give up the old Stoic traditions in which he has grown up and at the same time he is
tempted by the present realities of life revealed to him by the development of science. When Lancelot discovers that his wife has "carnal relations with another man" (L. 15) he finds it rather difficult to swallow for the Stoic society in which he lives does not permit disloyalty of a woman to her husband. But on the other hand his knowledge of science tells him "why is it such an unspeakable thing for one creature to obtrude a small portion of its body into the body of another creature?" (L. 16). It is of course a trivial matter if it is seen simply as a material fact. But it is definitely a matter of serious concern. Infact, sexual immorality has converted the whole America into "a baboon colony" or "a soap opera" (L. 35).

The cause of moral degeneration in America, according to Percy, is not only the sexual perversion but the change in the overall outlook of man towards life and his relations with other men. In this age of science and technology Percy sees man becoming more and more selfcentered and emotionless. He is not afraid of horrors as the horrors have become a part of his daily life. So today man becomes uneasy if he does not see or listen to any horrible event taking place.

"Did you ever watch anybody pick up a newspaper and read the headline PLANE CRASH KILLS THREE HUNDRED? How horrible! says the reader. But look at him when he hands you the paper. Is he horrified? No, he is interested." (L. 21-22).

Percy unveils the hidden crookedness of the overtly honest and honourable persons in American society through the characters of Margot, and Maury. Margot in reality an adulterous woman, moves in New Orleans as a lady of high class society. She pretends to be a chaste and loyal woman to her husband. But her husband, Lancelot, only knows the reality of her character;
how she keeps secretly physical relations with the Hollywood film actors like Merlin and Janos Jacoby.

It is not only females who are corrupt and disloyal to their husbands but men are also equally corrupt and of deceiving nature. His own father, Maury, who is a respectable person in the society of New Orleans, a member of "an honorable family with an honorable name" does not escape the rottenness of the American society(L.41). Lancelot comes to know that an amount of ten thousand dollars hidden in the sock drawer has been earned by his father by taking kickbacks from the local agencies of the insurance company to enhance the insurance business in the state. The sight of the money shakes Lancelot's faith in his father and also in the so called honourable persons in the society. "At the sight of the money, a new world opened up for me. The old world fell to pieces" (L.42). In contrast to Whites, Percy points out, the Blacks are true to their nature; they are what they look like.

Percy severely despises the snobishness of the upper class people in American society. He believes that their fame in the society as honest and honourable persons is based on the false faith of lower class people. Their appearance is similar to that of polished wood hollow from within. Percy draws examples of Lancelot's family members, his father, mother and wife. "His father's dishonesty, his mother's likely adultery, and his wife's likely infidelity challenge his assumption of the general beneficence of mankind."16 He realises that, like his wife Margot, his mother also cuckolded her husband, Lancelot's father. "I honestly believe that his wife my mother, Lily, cuckolded him too?"(L.96). He comes to know that his mother had illicit relations with "Uncle Harry ... a distant cousin of hers"(L.96). The most funny aspect of this secret is that Lancelot's father himself allows his wife to go "joy riding" with Uncle Harry
in "Buick". Thus Percy discloses how honour and status of high class people are nothing but sham, all buggery.

Percy's criticism of social condition in America becomes very acute in this novel. He draws a very dark picture of man - woman relationship. He points out that the southerners belong neither to the South nor to the North; they are neither traditionalists nor modernists. A new southerner is "Billy Graham on Sunday and Richard Nixon the rest of the week"(L.230). The following passage clearly reveals dilapidated social condition in America:

"Washington, the country, is down the drain. Everyone knows it. The people have lost it to the politicians, bureaucrats, drunk congressmen, lying presidents, White House preachers, C.I.A., F.B.I., Mafia, Pentagon, pornographers, muggers, buggers, bribers, bribetakers, rich -crooked cowboys, sclerotic Southerners, rich crooked Yankees, dirty books, dirty movies, dirty plays, dirty talk shows, dirty soap operas, fags, lesbians, abortionists, Jesus shouters, anti-Jesus shouters, dying cities, dying schools, courses in how to fuck the school children"(L.220).

Lancelot does not understand how the whole human race has turned erotic and sexual. He thinks that man is not only, as Pascal told, "a thinking reed" but more than that he "is a thinking reed and a walking genital"(L.223). His study of American society reveals to him that sex is the main aim of man's life. According to the narrator of the novel out of millions of species on the earth the human female "is the only creature on earth in perpetual heat."(L.223). He comes to a conclusion that not only South but the entire U.S.A. is full of demonic women.

The Second Coming, Percy's fifth novel, explores his attack on Christendom and the miserable condition of man in the age of science and technology. It is Percy's belief that the accumulation of wealth and the modern
scientific amenities can not make man happy. A wealthy and materialistic person always feels that there is something missing in his life because he lacks in spiritual satisfaction. This has become a common problem of the upper middle class in American society. Life for them is almost like a dream without anything concrete in it. In such a condition they actually live death-in-life which compels them to find an exit to get rid of this unbearable life. The only solution left for them is suicide. Will Barrett, a representative of the same society, is almost on the brink of suicide but at the end his faith in Christianity drags him away from it. He thinks about suicide in the beginning with his father's guns around him, but later on he throws them, the heritage of death, in to a chasm. He opts for life rather than death and goes to the motel with Allison to make true love. Jac Tharpe rightly remarks that "This novel is yet another attack on Christendom, in the most religious town in the most religious state in the most religious section of the most religious country in the world."17

Percy juxtaposes the believers and unbelievers in Christendom. Some priests go according to the old religious values whereas others go according to the new values of life. Jac Curl, an Episcopal priest should have believed that "one's duty lay with God, church, The Book of Common Prayer, family, country and doing good works"(SC.158); but though he is an Episcopal he has no faith in God and chooses to live the life of a liar. On the other hand Father Weatherbee performs the evangelical and missionary work for many years and has weathered himself in the service of God for the welfare of others. The same struggle between the old values and the new values goes on in Will Barrett too. He desires to follow the path laid down by his father by committing suicide to achieve heavenly happiness escaping earthly worries. But his love for Allison drags him to endure earthly worries which, he thinks, are far more real than the
heavenly happiness; "he chooses life as the natural act in the natural world, where so many wonders are."\(^\text{18}\)

When life becomes unbearable for Will while he is in cave in search of God ironically enough he is dragged very close to death. But there he chooses life over death though he knows very well that life in this world is a living death.

"The name of this century is the century of the Love of Death. Death in the century is not the death people die but the death people live. Men love death because the real death is better than the living death. That's why men like wars of course" (SC.271).

Will Barrett's this statement is a clearcut indication of Percy's judgement of the type of life people live at present. It is his belief that to accept life in this world is just like to be a sheep walking "straight into the slaughter house" (SC.271).

Percy is of the opinion that nothing and nobody else but man himself is responsible for the creation of this notorious and intolerable condition on the earth. His last novel with the significant title *The Thanatos Syndrome* indicates the same horrifying condition that exists in America. Everywhere in America he finds death symptoms "As Dr. Freud might have said the age of thanatos had begun" (TS.86). In this novel Percy warns that "Here we are on the very brink of world war three, on the brink of destruction, and nobody gives it a second thought" (TS.113). Tom More, a middle aged protagonist of the novel, is well aware of the situation in which he lives. He is also well aware of the cunning nature of man of this century. He is cautious about others actions and does not want to get himself involved with them unless he is confirmed that there is no difference between their appearance and reality. His minute observation of the society around him reveals to him a very disgusting and shameful picture of
the so called learned society. What he observes is an indication of *utopia* turning into dystopia, the total destruction of the dream of American people.

*The Thanatos Syndrome* is Percy's open attack on the cruelty of science and technology on man under the guise of human welfare. The creation of a brave-new-perfect -world. The creation of a perfect man or society without committing crime is an unachievable dream for Percy. And therefore the efforts of the scientists in this direction prove to be a revolt against the law of nature provocating disorders in the society. Tom More's narration of the various types of patients in Feliciana Parish indicate the intensity of sickness of the American society. Almost all the patients under treatment mentioned in the novel are psychic patients. It seems, by providing a number of psychic cases, Percy tries to create an impression among the readers that psychic disturbance is a boon to man of the scientific and technological development in this century as the psychic disorder of the patients is the result of the scientific experiments undertaken by the scientists.

Percy puts on stake the loss of morality and mannerism in America in consequence of scientific development. It is Percy's notion that mannerism and morality in men are the essential requirements for a happy and prosperous society. Tom advises one of his patients, Chandra, to develop social skills. He says: "you have to have these skills to get ahead in your profession. You can't walk into a studio and talk to a programme director or producer, white or black, the way you talk to me" (TS.41). Tom expresses her the need of coaching to improve her manners if at all she wishes to prosper in future.

Percy exposes the degradation in the child-parent relationship, and the selfishness of all in this material world. People today are not conscious of
their duties but they are conscious only of their rights to gain earthly pleasures forgetting one's blood relationships with others.

"How strange it is that we love our children and can't stand them or they us. Love them? Yes, for true. Think of the worst things that could happen to you. It is that something should happen to your little son or daughter, he get hurt or killed or die of leukemia; that she be raped, kidnapped, get hooked on drugs. This is past bearing. Can't stand them, not in the very present but casting ahead of them and the very present, planning tomorrow, regretting yesterday, worrying about money and next year.

Conselors counsel parents: communicate! Communicate with your kids! communication is the key!"(TS.42).

Nowadays man has gone away from others and also from his own true self. It is only in catastrophes he reminds of his children, of his own self, of the nature around him.

" Here is the mystery: Why does it take two years of prison for a man to be able to sit still, listen, notice his children, watch the sunlight on the ceiling?" (TS.43).

Percy notes that morally rotten society of America does not spare the honest and sincere persons from getting rotten themselves. Ellen, Tom More's wife who was honest and faithful to him at the end of Love in the Ruins turns into a beast in The Thanatos Syndrome. Father Smith "A remarkable man" and "a gifted priest"(TS.110) who would "like nothing better than to help out" others becomes himself helpless in such a rotten society(TS.109). He can not do anything though he earnestly desires to stop the inhuman programmes of pedeuthanasia and gereuthanasia. He warns Tom how people were deceived by
Hitler, the great dictator of Germany, by explaining the fact that "Tenderness leads to the gas chamber" (TS.360).

Percy very well knows how the scientific projects originally undertaken by the scientists for the welfare of humanity later on prove to be a curse to the whole human race. He is well aware of the devastating consequences of atom bombs used in World War II. On the same line he tries to prove that Dr. Comeaux's efforts to improve the rotten society of America go futile because he is unaware of misuse of the same project by persons like Van Dorn to fulfill their selfish motives. The scientific inventions, if misused, prove more dangerous to humanity because they cause the destruction of humanness in humans. What Percy ultimately tries to convey is that the so called powerful and developed nations like America and Russia, though are proud of their scientific developments, have achieved only material development at the cost of losing peace and happiness of their country people. So, externally though they look pleasant and strong internally and spiritually they are so weak that in reality they can not enjoy the pleasures of the material life.

II IRRONY

Percy is a satirist no doubt. He satirizes American life from different perspectives. As a satirist or a moralist he illuminates the situational ironies of self betrayal or incongruities in the lives of his protagonists to depict their true nature. The reader of Percy's novels comes to know the absurdities in the lives of his protagonists and realizes the contrasts between what they are and what they want to be, their failure in standing true to their ideals, and coming true to their expectations. In fact, Percy's protagonists do not know what exactly is their predicament. His novels, therefore, are interesting to read because "there
is special pleasure in seeing someone serenely unaware of being in a predicament, especially when this predicament is the contrary of the situation he assumes himself to be in."

Percy's novels and his nonfiction writings, in a sense, seek to answer the questions raised by him in his essay entitled "The Delta Factor." He questions: "Why does man feel so sad in the twentieth century? Why does man feel so bad in the very age when, more than in any other age, he has succeeded in satisfying his needs and making over the world for his own use?" (MB.3). These are questions of vital importance to Percy. However, these are questions raised because of the peculiar problems of living in a modern society which is identified by the development of science and technology.

Percy compares science with a great tyrant who imposes miseries on his subjects. Percy believes that scientific and technological development can not make man permanently free of the miseries but it rather worsens the miseries of man as science reduces man to an object. If man is reduced to an object he loses the quality of being, the quality of mystery. As a matter of fact man does not exist as an individual, a separate entity, but simply as a part of the society. The urge to attain selfhood is reflected in a number of ways. One obvious way of self identification is his interest in movies, adds and photography: "That is why people in the modern age took photographs by the million: to prove despite their deepest suspicions to the contrary that they were not invisible" (MB.26). Man's this identification through the scientific media is but superficial as it can not present the inner mechanism of his mind which is always in progress. "So it is an imperfection of science ..... that it is essentially statistical in nature." One's understanding of a person in one flash of light is nothing but deceiving one's own self. In fact, the impact of science on the southern consciousness is much more
grave. "The overwhelming media influence of secular, unheroic America," writes William J. Dowie, "has penetrated and eroded the uniqueness of the South's consciousness."21

Binx Bolling, the protagonist of Percy's first novel *The Moviegoer*, lives in the society of Gentilly in New Orleans; he works as stock and bond broker, spends a good deal of time with friends and family relatives, he has no enemies; but still he does not feel himself as a member of the society. "Binx is in his society but not of it."22 Percy elaborately describes in the first few paragraphs of the novel the predicament in which he puts Binx Bolling. The gloomy March day, the burning swamps, and the ash coloured sky over Gentilly; all these descriptions of Binx's surrounding explain the unhealthy predicament in which Binx lives. This is the kind of state that creates despair. Percy's epigraph for *The Moviegoer* - "the specific character of despair is precisely this: It is unaware of being despair" - chosen from Kierkegaard explains the same fact(M.1). This, in reality, is the condition of man living in the later half of this century.

Binx Bolling is a representative of the twentieth century Americans, particularly in lower South. Movies and TV. programmes create an imaginary world for Binx to live in. He constantly attends to different movies and TV. programmes and gets himself spiritually involved in the movie world. He makes confession in the very beginning of the novel: "The fact is I am quite happy in movie, even a bad movie"(M.7). The life of Hollywood actors and actresses in movies attract him so much that he feels their lives as real and expects to follow the same. "Moviegoing provides patterns for behaviour, though it is of dubious value in doing so."23 On several occasions Binx says that he is posing as a particular movie star, particularly in his attempt to seduce Sharon. He utters the names of several film actors and pretends to act like them. But
ironically he never succeeds in acting or in living his life like them as he fails to attain the reality of their lives.

The movies and the lives of the actors and actresses in the movies drag Binx out of himself and the universe and let him watch the same from a distance. As a result Binx fails in his verticle search and gets absorbed in horizontal search. He does not bother for what happens to him; but he concentrates on what is happening outside around him. He is alienated from the immediate world by virtue of the practice of the scientific method which is more objective and empirical. It enables him to come to broader generalizations in understanding about the nature of things neglecting their specific qualities. "Thus science tempts its practitioners to reverse modes of apprehension, indeed finally to forget the specific existence of the things all the more to concentrate upon its objective qualities." Binx’s watching movies lands him in an empty world, in the desert. His objective relation with the movie world reduces him to a mechanical man. He chooses to live as a consumer of new products and sensory experiences never giving chance to his authentic self to step forward. Thus Percy makes his novel interesting by focusing on the incongruities in the life of Binx Bolling, the protagonist, and by illustrating the adverse effects of the electronic media on the fate of man who strives to hide the reality of his life by pretending to be what he is not.

Will Barrett, an engineer, having good knowledge about the principles of science, boasts: "But I am also an engineer in deeper sense: I shall engineer the future of my life according to the scientific principles and the self knowledge I have so arduously gained from five years of analysis" (LG.40). But in reality the engineer utterly fails to engineer his own life. He constantly falls a prey to fugue states, attacks of *deja vu* and amnesia. When he is sick he loses the
sense of time, sometimes going back and sometimes going ahead, the engineer losing control over himself.

Will is in search for a father figure who will help him in taking decision to choose the proper way of living in this world of confusion. He develops faith in Sutter Vaught who justifies pornography. There goes on tug-of-war in his mind whether to accept his father's notion of a gentleman or Sutter's ideas in his notebook. He realizes that the old notions of a gentleman have now changed. He feels that at present "being a gentleman has been reduced to maintaining the properties around women." As a gentleman Will chastises himself for behaving like "white trash" with women. He finds that love making is obligatory on the part of a gentleman in the present situation. Inspite of Will's attachment for the present notion of gentleman he is still fascinated by the old notion that his ancestors followed according to which honour keeps man away from sexual encounter with a lady before marriage.

What man is at this moment is not the same at the next moment. What Will Barrett decides in The Last Gentleman does not come true when he appears again in The Second Coming after a gap of twenty years. Will neither follows a gentleman's promise to marry Kitty nor he lives a peaceful and comfortable life as it is suggested he would live at the end of The Last Gentleman. Instead of Kitty he chooses a rich lady Marion and marries her to be the master of great fortune after her death. The irony is that he has wealth but not peace of mind. "There at any rate stands Will Barrett on the edge of a gorge in Old Carolina, a talented agreeable wealthy man living in as pleasant an environment as one can imagine and yet who is thinking of putting a bullet in his brain"(SC.14).
The major drive in shaping the character of Will Barrett in both the novels, *The Last Gentleman* and *The Second Coming*, is his family pride no doubt; yet the impact of the adversities of science and technology on him can not be neglected. Will Barrett, the protagonist of the novel, is most of the time obsessed by the memory of death of his ancestors, particularly of his father; but the main object that reminds Will of the death with a shock is the sound of a gun shot. Here Percy tries to point out the irony that the scientifically and technologically developed weapons like gun can be used not only for self-protection but also for self-destruction.

In the very first chapter of the novel Percy states that the scientific results, though accepted universally, are, in fact, proved false. "Though science taught that good environments were better than bad environments, it appeared to him that the opposite was the case"(LG.22). Will realizes that it is not the case only with him but with many other people around who feel better in hurricanes and sad when the sun is shining brightly on a summer day. The "scientifically minded" persons are "sufficiently detached" from themselves "to observe the behaviour" of others(LG.26). Charles Child Walcut points out this controversy as an evidence of a divided stream. He states "Novels, novelists, and critics consistently reflect this modern tension between science as god and science as devil, between progress and despair, between the hope of the future and the values of the past, between the two faces of human and physical nature." Will Barrett's German telescope having scientific and magical qualities which he bought for $1,900, wiping out his bank accounts, proves fatal to him for it drags him into the past spoiling his present.

It is Percy's notion that science has succeeded in keeping superficial relations of man to nature or man to man, but it has destroyed the
concrete spiritual relations of man to nature and man to man. This idea is made clear in Sutter's journal:

"Most of the observations in Sutter's journal center on the idea that in the modern age -- what he calls the age of science --- people have become abstracted. By this he means that while people may, through scientific theory, understand the workings of the universe, they fail to understand themselves. Sutter believes that most people have cut themselves off from immediate reality by abstracting themselves out of it and that only through sex can they reenter the realm of immanence."

In his journal Sutter states that in this age of science and technology "There remains only relation of skin to skin and hand under dress. Thus layman now believes that entire spectrum of relations between persons....... is based on 'real' substratum of genital sex." Science, according to Sutter, has created lewds and perfect pornographers who pretend to have faith in both, Christianity and modernity.

Walker Percy, an M.D. in Pathology, exploits his knowledge as a physician in shaping the ironic character of Lancelot. Percy presents more successfully the effects of advanced technology on the psyche of even an educated person like Lancelot. Movies, TV, and video play a vital role in moulding the life of Lancelot. In accordance with Percy's other protagonists Lancelot is also placed in such a predicament that he can not escape the adversities of modernism, the effects of northernization of the South. Lancelot is a representative of those who share an ironic fate of the society which is on the brink of change from traditional to modern way of life. Lancelot's irony of fate lies in his futile efforts in trying to pretend to be a traditionalist as well as a modernist. Like Will Barrett he can not give up either his past or present.
Being a modernist having technical knowledge in biology he treats aberrant sexual behaviour as "a trivial matter;" but when his own wife Margot commits adultery he is deeply shocked: "Isn't it unspeakable to me to imagine Margot lying under another man...? "(L.16). Through the character of Lancelot Percy elaborately exposes the duality of modern man. This exactly is the cause of his ironic fate. Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr. rightly points out:

"Lancelot is a powerful and compelling novel in which Percy traces once again, in much more violent terms than before, the dilemma he sees modern Southerners facing: how to live in the modern world after the collapse of the Stoic tradition."^{28}

The appearance of the alphabet 'O' indicating blood group of Lancelot's daughter, Siobhan, on her application to a horse camp in West Texas creates an ironic situation for him throughout the novel. His mind is polluted and he falls a prey to the puzzle whether Siobhan is his own or someone else's daughter. The problem is due to his knowledge about the genetic process, how a child is conceived in its mother's womb and how it shares the characters from its parents. He makes scientific calculations.

\[
X + A = 0 \\
X + B = 0
\]

The equations do not resolve. X does not have a value. My blood type and Siobhan's blood type did not compute"(L.29).

Ultimately he comes to a conclusion: "A fact then: Siobhan was fathered in Texas in July, 1968 and not by me"(L.33). As a modernist Lancelot has faith in science yet he believes that science can never be hundred percent correct. "Even science can make mistakes," he says(L.174). There is every possibility that
science can go wrong sometimes somewhere. So he does not have full confidence in his not being Siobhan's father just because of not finding correlation of his blood group with the blood group of Siobhan. His inability to come to the proper decision becomes the cause of his ironic fate.

Lancelot poses himself as a modernist yet he himself does not understand why it is not possible for him to give up the traditional notion of chastity. He states: "I wouldn't have minded Margot's kneeling before a Budha. Then why should I worry about a small matter like Margot taking a small part of Merlin's body into her body? As a physician, wouldn't you say that nothing more is involved than the touch of one membrane against another? Cells touching cells"(L.16-17). Thus, in his mind there is constant tug of war between the traditional norms of life and the new norms of life propagated by the development of science and technology. He can not easily give up the old ideas which require sacrifice of his self esteem and follow the new ideas to make himself free from the bonds of the past.

Lancelot's discovery of Margot's adultery puts him in a peculiar predicament which he is unable to come out of. It is Lancelot's opinion that Margot and the Hollywood actors have sinned by keeping illicit relations and they are liable to be punished. Lancelot's act of punishing the sinners is ironical in the sense he is unaware of the fact that from the point of view of Christianity he himself has committed sin by spying over others and exploiting Elgin, an innocent Negro servant, for the same selfish purpose. Moreover his act of setting the house on fire to give death punishment to those persons whom he does not like and spare those whom he likes is also an inhuman act.

Tom More's invention of the scientific instrument to diagnose and cure the malady of Western man puts him in ironical situation for he fails to
understand that no instrument can be superior to God. His invention of the instrument is an attempt to replace God as a physician saviour to self. He boasts that with the help of his scientific device he can cure the whole America now under the shadow of eclipse, suffering from social, political and religious maladies. "I can save you, America! I know something! I know what is working! ..I can save the terrible God-blessed Americans from themselves! With my invention!"(LR.58). Tom More's intention is to cure spiritual disease with the help of a scientific device. But after some days he finds himself in trouble because his invention creates a havoc in the society when it falls in the hands of Art Immelmann. The more funny thing of Tom's invention is that it can not cure his own self but it rather proves him as a mad scientist having extreme humanistic pride.

Father Rinaldo Smith, however, justifies Tom More's step in treating the Americans to drag them out of the present miserable condition with the help of his lapsometer. But Percy does not forget to warn again that Tom's this scientific instrument is also not less than "a two edged sword" which can be used for both, to cure as well as to worsen the present condition of man. It can have good effects on those who require curing their miseries and bad effects on those who do not need to be cured. The random application of any scientific instrument for curing personal disorders will be just like "exploding a cobalt bomb over New Orleans to treat cancer"(LR.211) without caring for the bad effects of cobalt radiation on those who do not suffer from cancer. "Percy himself sees the predicament of the individual man in a technological world, but instead of condemning technology he underscores man's use of it."29 Tom realizes that the damage done by a scientific invention, after it falls in wrong hands, is not less than civil war.
The location Percy provides for the mad scientist, Tom’More, is again ironical. He lives in Paradise Estates "an oasis of concord in a troubled land" (L.R.17), an indication of a heavenly place. But even after residing at such a place he suffers, shows malaise and dislocation, and lives in the company of happy and sane people. The swamp, residing place of Bantu guerrillas is on one side of Paradise Estates, and the town where Tom maintains his office and a residing place for conservatives, retired Air Force colonels, Navy commanders, policemen and patriotic chiropractors is on the other side of the Paradise Estates. Martin Luschei remarks: "Readers who know Percy will recognize Paradise Estates as a haven for the despair which is unaware of itself. This paradise is no melting pot but the mushy suburbia of modern society."

Tom More in *The Thanatos Syndrome* is cautious about the adverse effects of a scientific invention. All the while he is alert and very keen in relating the smallest changes in his patients to the experiments in the world of science. He being a physician psychiatrist is well aware of the adverse effects of a scientific experiment. As a narrator and a detective scientist he narrates the situational ironies in the lives of other scientist characters. He explains how Bob Comeaux's endeavour to transform the society in Feliciana Parish into a perfect society by adding heavy sodium to drinking water resulting in reduction of crimes, child abuse, teenage suicide and pregnancy, wife battering, depression, AIDS, anal intercourse, homosexuality, and pornography leads to an ironical situation. Tom More discloses the fact that Bob Comeaux is unaware of the misuse of scientific experiments and inventions if they fall in wrong hands. Bob Comeaux gets intoxicated by the Promethean power of science and behaves in such a manner as if a magic wand has come to his hand. But ironically enough his experiment on addition of sodium in drinking water for the people of
Feliciana Parish and for the students at Belle Amme Academy to make them all perfect human beings does not help to achieve perfection of man but it degrades man to beast. "So Comeaux and Van Dorn's dream of perfection condemns itself by the very excesses to which it leads." Percy links the experiments of Feliciana scientists to those of the Nazi eugenicists who inhumanly massacred human beings under the disguise of the welfare of their nation.

Percy depicts in his last novel *The Thanatos Syndrome* the post-modern age of science and technology as the age of thanatos. There are references to different wars like "Battle of Somme," "Battle of Verdun" and the killing of millions of people in the battles without discernible end, "As Dr. Freud might have said, the age of thanatos had began" (TS. 86). Percy gives a hint in this novel that in the present situation of this scientifically and technologically developed world we are on the very brink of destruction and nobody has any doubt about it. Through this novel Percy warns us about the forthcoming danger. He warns that the enemy of this civilized society, who has at the inner gate of his consciousness fascination for death, resides here in this society only. But the irony is that the society is not aware of this enemy because nobody can peep into the heart of hearts of any person. Thus according to Percy the Americans living in this so-called civilized era are the victims of this ironical situation; they are at the mouth of death but they are unaware of it.

### III CONTRASTS AND PARADOXES

As Percy's novels depict the life of modern man they are abundant in contrasts and paradoxes in man's life to display the ironic fate of man. Theodore Dreiser has rightly remarked that "without contrast there is no life."
Man's fate is ironic for it plays many tricks with man "and it seems that it is an account of this trickery that there are many contradictions about fate." According to Christian view man, made in the image of God, is basically good; but his goodness is tested at the hands of devil, the downgraded rebel angel. It, therefore, remains an unanswered question, who exactly decides man's fate: God or devil? Percy, through his novels, emphasises on the belief that man consists of both, good and evil; and they unitedly decide man's fate. Thus man's fate itself involves contradictions.

With the contradictory intermingled phases of good and evil man's fate becomes more complicated with the development of science and technology during the period of post World War II. Very few novelists of this century have depicted the reality of man's complicated fate in their novels. Walker Percy is one of them. He himself witnessed the ability of science in creating contradictory situations for man. For him "Every advance in science...... seemed to take it further from the concrete here-and-now in which we live," "the more science progressed and even as it benefitted man, the less it said about what it is like to be a man living in the world." In this age of science and technology Percy's American society lives a life of contradictions having no meaningful values and traditions:

"..... brotherhood is preached but does not exist, Christianity is accepted but is not believed; scientific objectivity flourishes while man remains an impatient question mark demanding an answer; music and the arts give pleasure without bringing satisfaction; the practical businessman fortifies himself with interesting hobbies against the emptiness of his security. In the hollow core of all this activity and purposefulness Percy places his three protagonists [Binx, Will and Tom] where they
Percy, as a skilled novelist, is well aware that this ironic fate of his protagonists can be illustrated well only through the devices of irony like contrast and paradox. Percy being an observer of the contemporary American society easily points out the contrasts between appearance and reality in the life of modern man. He displays the contrast between the time past and the time present through the sketches of his protagonists. He illustrates character vs. character, character vs. fate or God to draw the opposing forces together. He realizes the split between body and mind of today's man which causes him to be sometimes angelic and sometimes bestial. Percy knows the importance of transcendence but at the same time he also knows that man can not do away with the reality of immanence. He depicts the South vs. the North to bring forth the contrasting nature of America. Thus Percy presents morally, spiritually and geographically the contrasting life of Americans through his protagonists to reveal their ironic fate. Percy himself somewhere remarks that the same chaotic life of Americans fascinated him to take up to writing. "The pleasure of writing was the contrast between writing as a way of ordering life and the disorder of life itself."[36]

Apart from the contradictions in the life and predicament of modern man Percy also draws the paradoxes in the nature of man. He finds out that man is never happy in the existing situation. A thing of happiness today turns into a thing of worries tomorrow. He desires to be an angel but at the same time he does not want to give up bestial instincts; though he pretends to be living his life on ethical and religious grounds yet he longs for a luxurious and lusty materialistic life. He tries to be a modernist yet he can not give up the ancestral
trend of life and the heritage of the family past. Thus Percy illustrates many such paradoxes in the nature of his protagonists which obviously reveal their ironic fate in particular and of modern man in general.

Binx Bolling runs after his secretaries one after another to have physical satisfaction. The main aim of his life, in the beginning of the novel, is to have more and more money. But at the same time he poses as a gentleman to his aunt Emily who has faith only in the traditional way of life. These two characters, Binx Bolling, a sensualist and a materialist, and his aunt Emily Cutrer, a fierce spokesman for the aristocratic values of the old defeated South, by nature and by their attitude towards life, are quite in contrast to each other but yet they have a mysterious relationship.

A major part of *The Moviegoer* focuses on the relationship between the narrator, a young stock-broker Binx, and aunt Emily, his spiritual mentor. She is in fact a parody of William Alexander Percy, Walker Percy's spiritual father who provided Percy shelter and education after the death of his parents. Emily tries to develop in Binx the attachment towards traditional code of conduct and have faith in the old varieties and the eternal truths of the heart. She advises Binx to go on fighting though he has to suffer loss. Loss, according to her, is the proof of virtue and honour. But on the contrary Binx, though has high respect for Emily, does not understand why she has so much devotion to a goodness that has no ultimate basis. Aunt Emily counsels Binx after the death of his brother Scotty to bear his sorrow; she even does not mind if Binx follows his father to commit suicide to end the miseries of life in this rotten world. But Binx does not follow everything in to-to as Emily desires. He goes according to his will and accepts to live in the same world inspite of the miseries he has to undergo.
The past memories of Binx contradict with his present situation. Binx is a single minded person concerned with himself and with his personal response to the past or the present events in the lives of others. When Emily calls him for lunch he broods over and expresses that she is surely going to talk about his future or about her step-daughter Kate, whose fiancé is killed in a car accident. The death of Kate's fiancé triggers his memory to the death of his brother Scott when Binx was just eight years old. This past memory Binx further relates to a movie he saw a month before. It was a film about a man with amnesia who faced the problem of making a fresh start in life. But the film ends happily. Thus the movie explains Binx how one can live a happy life in the present situation; whereas the past memories tell him how one has to face death or suffering if one desires to live in this world. Binx frequently attends to different movies and tries to be a happy man but later on he realizes that the happiness he gains from movies is momentary, it is only superficial. He feels his present life empty, without meaning, as there is no adventure in it; whereas the past memories make him realize the concreteness, the reality of life.

Like Percy's other protagonists Percy depicts Binx as paradoxical in nature. He is not what he looks like. Binx, a man of the material world, a young stock-broker, also has a religious turn of mind. As he keeps relations with Sharon Kincaid, his secretary, to achieve worldliness, he also keeps relations with Kate who promotes honesty and faith in his life. He seems dissolved in and abstracted by the material world; but in reality he stands erect on the occasions of catastrophic events. Binx lives in the society but he does not belong to it. He is at once a typical insider and classic outsider. As an outsider he lives in his natal city, works in a family business, spends a good deal of time with friends and family relatives, and has no enemies. He has a fixed position in the society,
yet he feels himself a man without identity. According to him his alienation and ability to see his own life fresh from outside as a stranger is the most fortunate circumstance. He comes to himself not by being in the society but by being aware of the past memories. The best time becomes the worst time and the worst time changes into the best time for him.

Some of Percy's critics criticise *The Moviegoer* itself as a paradoxical novel in its technique. Overtly it seems that the book is mainly concerned with Binx, the protagonist and the narrator of the novel because throughout the novel the narrative moves around his interests and responses. But still the book has been widely recognised as a good informative book about New Orleans and about the South. It shows Percy's success in creating Binx as a model representative of the South born, grown, and living in the southern culture of post World War II.

Like Binx himself, his search is also paradoxical in nature. Right from the beginning of the novel Binx goes in search for clues to know God's existence in this world. He always carries a notebook with him to note down the sign of God as soon as he comes across it. But to his surprise what he finds out is that God no doubt exists in this world but He can not be described in words or be presented through signs. He notes down oneday at three O'clock in the morning that "it is impossible to rule God out. ...... the only sign is that all the signs in the world make no difference"(M.146). If all the signs do not make any difference then his going in search for the clues is meaningless. Thus the paradoxical nature of Binx makes him a complex and enigmatic figure in a complex novel. The complexity of Binx reveals the complexity of man's life in the present situation.
Percy, in his second novel, *The Last Gentleman* structures a series of foils and exemplifies the split between the body and the mind juxtaposing the southern way of life with the northern way of life in Will Barrett, the protagonist. The society in which he lives tempts him to be a beast and at the same time to be an angel as it consists of both the types of persons living a free life according to their will. His problem is that he can not live "easy and actual" life as the students at the university and the fraternity brothers live because all the while he is haunted by the ideals of the past. He is so proud of his family heritage that he does not want to give up the past for the sake of the present. He desires to be a gentleman and also strongly longs to be a fornicator. He is actually "killed by his own irony and sadness and by the strain of living out an ordinary day in a perfect dance of honor" (LG.9-10). Will Barrett is fascinated by Kitty's attachment to him, her invitation to dance with her. But during the entire period of the novel he neither takes her for dancing as a gentleman does, nor messes around her as a fornicator does.

Percy contradicts regional traits in the character of Will Barrett, a Mississippian, who has been dropped out of Princeton and then who moves to New York taking a job of a dehumidification engineer in Macy's. He enters a band of Ohioans, like a good chameleon, he quickly adopts their ways. He pretends to be a northerner by imitating their language traits, the utterances of certain words typical to the North region. What he tries helplessly is to hide his southerness from the Ohioans.

"He hadn't been in their company a week before he became one of them. He called a girl named Carol Kerrell, said *mear* for mirror, *tack* for talk, *ottomobile stumick*, and asked for *carmel* candy. The consonants snapped around in his throat like a guitar string. In April he went to Fort Lauderdale."
In short, he became an Ohioan and for several
weeks walked like a cat with his toes pointed 'in,
drank beer, forgot the old honorable quarrels of the
South, had not thought in his head nor a care in the
world"(LG.20).

Thus Will tries to give up the reality of his being a southerner and makes futile
efforts to appear himself as a northerner. He does not know that northern
"modernism and southern legacy are not comfortable bedfellows." He tries
even to kill his true feelings of love to be a northerner. He shows his love for
Carol, a northern girl, though "she was long of leg and deep of thigh" not so
beautiful as Kitty(LG.20). Percy makes obvious the conflict in Will's mind.
When he extricates himself from her clutches and throws himself out into a
brierpatch he feels sorry for acting falsely. He murmurs:

"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 brierpatch when
you could be launging with young people like
yourself, people against whom no objection can be
raised, your head pillowed in the lap of a handsome
girl..... What is the matter with you, you poor fellow
?"(LG.21).

The contradictions of the past and the present tenets of life become
obvious in Percy's illustration of Will Barrett's character. The tenets which
controlled Will's past life no longer seem meaningful to him in the present. Will
realizes this difference when he recalls the important past events in his life,
particularly the haunting incident, which he has been trying to forget until now.
His interpretation of his father's attempt to kill him before he committed suicide
was different that time from what it is now. That time he thought as his father
did: "that suicide is the only solution to the predicament man is forced to live
in." But now Barrett does not believe in that idea; paradoxically enough he realizes his present by getting into his past.

Misfortunes or the catastrophic events in Will's life carry him forward in realizing the reality of this world and of his life. Will's paradoxical awareness that "in the worst of times lies the best" is well manifested in the episode of the child who was lost in the storm. He simultaneously wants to be a modernist and yet tries to be a gentleman. He desires to live a luxurious life and at the same time shows attachment with his family past. He strives to make others' life comfortable but fails himself to adjust with the existing condition: "But things are in fact more complex. What with his lapses of memory, *deja vus* and little fits, the poor engineer is in reality not able to engineer much."39

In *The Second Coming* Percy contradicts the past against the present life of Will Barrett more emphatically. Now, after a gap of twenty years in his life Will interprets each and every object he sees or sound he hears from the point of view of his past experience. The sound of fence wire or gun shot mentally carry him to his distant past life. These sounds convey a different meaning to Will than they actually stand for in the present. The sight of a gun, a hawk, and an odd shaped cloud, "a whiff of rabbit tobbacco" all these objects help Will in realizing the present against the past. His present, in fact, is contaminated by the memories of the past.

Will finds himself in a paradoxical situation. He belongs to the upper middle class society living in a pleasant environment yet he desires to end his life by shooting a bullet into his head. It is astonishing that a man who lived a successful life with his wife in a lovely home and was surrounded by cheerful persons at home and outside during last twenty years now suddenly gets his mood inverted and looks like "Count Dracula." Now he is so sure that everything
can be settled only with the help of a gun. Throughout the novel Percy presents the contrasts between death and life. Will's memories of his father constantly drag him towards death but his conscience does not allow him to die. He is despair ed but yet he does not lose the hope of life. His past is quite in contrast with his future. His father represents the symbol of past, the symbol of death whereas Allison Huger represents the symbol of bright future, the symbol of happiness in life. Mary Deems Howland has rightly pointed out that "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."

Will enters the Lost Cove cave with a firm intention to find out whether or not God exists in this world. Will wants "to settle once and for all the question of God's existence"(SC.192). But surprisingly Will, a man of firm belief, gives up his search for God for a trivial reason of his toothache. While in cave he develops a terrible toothache which produces nausea and drives completely out of his head all secondary concerns such as the existence of God. The toothache draws all Will's attention to his body and it reminds him that he is not a spiritual being who can hold discourse with God but an incarnated being. He comes to himself and realizes his limitations as a human being. It is a great paradox that Will, valiantly with a firm intention, goes in search of God, but then retreats himself just because of severe toothache. The more funny aspect Percy draws of Will's fate is that he has to seek shelter in the green-house of Allison Huger, a schizophrenic girl who ultimately recovers Will from the fall.

Lancelot, Percy's another novel, presents the contrast between one character and the other character and between the past and the present life of the protagonist of the novel, Lancelot. Percy contradicts the character of Lucy,
Lancelot's first wife, with the character of Margot, Lancelot's second wife. Lucy's character throws light on the past life of Lancelot whereas Margot's character enlightens his present life. Lancelot's past life with Lucy was peaceful and happy whereas his present life with Margot is disturbed and violent as he falls a victim to her misdeeds. His romantic life with Lucy was just like a dream. What he wanted was "Just to dance with her, to hold that quick brown body in my arms not even close but lightly and away so I could see into her face and catch those brown eyes with me" (L.83). His life with Margot brings him to the reality of this world.

Even before Lancelot's marriage with Lucy he lived a happy life. In the very beginning he compares his past and present life with the life of his boyfriend Harry Percival, the priest psychiatrist, and brings out the contrasts and paradoxes in the lives of both of them. In the past when both of them were young, Harry's life curve was in declining position whereas in Lancelot's case it was in rising position. But in the present situation, ironically, the declining life curve of Harry turns up and the rising life curve of Lancelot turns down after his discovery of Margot's adultery. Lancelot himself states "It is a mystery which I ponder endlessly: that my life is divided into two parts. Before and after, before and after the moment I discovered that my wife had been rendered ecstatic, beside herself, by a man on top of her" (L.19).

Percy incorporates several paradoxes in Lancelot's confession. Percy's idea of presenting the truth of life through the mouth of a mad protagonist, Lancelot, itself is paradoxical in nature. Lancelot, though a mad person, pretends that his memory is stronger than his friend Harry Percival's. Percy's this novel is full of paradoxical allusions by Lancelot which reveal the reality of this world. Few are presented here as examples: "you seemed happy in
whore houses;" "A pleasant feast for the dead;" "In New Orleans I have noticed that people are happiest when they are going to funerals, making money, taking care of the dead, or putting on masks at Mardi Gras so nobody knows who they are"(L.9-10); "Your silence is the only conversation I can listen to;" "The standard boring story of our times"(L.85); "True people help each other in catastrophies. But they don't feel good because they help each other. They help each other because they feel good;" "Dishonor is sweeter and more mysterious than honor. It holds secret"(L.213).

Lancelot compares his discovery of Margot's adultery with the discovery of a comet by an astrologer and finds out the similarities between the two discoveries. The discovery of his wife's adultery, no doubt, shocks Lancelot, makes him angry and feel shame as it is a dreadful event; but paradoxically, apart from these feelings, it also creates "a curious sense of expectancy a secret sweetness at the core of the dread"(L.41). It lets him know the reality of his own life. Lancelot's discovery of his father's bribery, apart from shocking him, discloses him the reality of his father that he is "a crook" and not an honourable member of his family as people outside believe him to be. He comes to a conclusion that the "things are not so nice" as they look like(L.42). Lancelot's father was elected poet Laureate of Feliciana Parish by the Kiwanis Club but nobody except father himself knew that his wife cuckolded him.

Lancelot's appointment of Elgin, a Negro servant, to spy on a group of Hollywood film actors at Holiday Inn is paradoxical in many ways. It is Lancelot's plan to find out evil in the Hollywood actors by witnessing their illicit relations with Margot. But he does not know that the evil is in himself as he is exploiting an innocent Negro servant wrongly without disclosing him the true purpose of his plan and dismissing him from service for no fault of him after the
work of secret video-shooting is over. He realises this afterwards: "Then it was I discovered in myself what I had so often despised in others" (L. 181). William J. Dowie points out this irony in Lancelot's character.

"Percy has shown us the complexity of the difficulty in reestablishing moral responsibility through the irony of a hero who, though explicitly, concerned about moral irresponsibility is himself a victim of it. Lancelot Andrews, the preacher, can not practise what he preaches."  

Lancelot expects to catch Margot's infidelity in a video cassette but ironically and more surprisingly enough what he witnesses is the illicit relation of his daughter with the Hollywood actors. Then he realizes "How little we know our own children," when we try to know the world outside (L. 135). His plan to appoint Elgin to spy on Hollywood actors also fails as he suspects that Elgin might have witnessed the humbug at Holiday Inn which he wanted to keep a secret. The novel begins with Lancelot's plan to discover the secret of life but ultimately what he finds "is violence, and rape and its gospel is pornography" (L. 224). At the end he realises that he has discovered nothing at the heart of evil.

Percy's *Love in the Ruins* begins with the descriptions of ruins all around in contrast with Paradise Estates where Tom More, the protagonist, lives. The motels outside are ruined and are the habitats now of lovers, beggars and native denizens of the swamp; shopping centers are burnt, a young pine with tumor is broken out in hives, the vines have begun to sprout in earnest, the church is broken into three pieces, fallout of noxious particles is going to settle around within few hours and worsen the condition more affecting the psychology of individuals. In such a surrounding of ruins Paradise Estates with
low green hills and golf links looks like "an oasis of concord in a troubled land" (SC.17).

Tom More compares the time past with the time present and points out how adversely the time has changed. Tom's past life with his daughter Samantha and his wife Doris was full of joy and happiness. With them the world looked like a wonderful world of colour, he used to go to mass regularly, listened to the shouts of joy and songs of happiness. But in contrast to his past life his present life is unbearable for him. He states "these are bad times" (SC.5). Now he has stopped going to mass, eating Christ in communion, and has fallen into a disorderly life. He is deprived of his loving daughter and wife, and waits for a catastrophe to come which will destroy the whole world. He is addicted to alcohol, suffers from depression, elation and morning terrors. Anyhow he hopes to get rid of all the worries and start a new happy life again.

The society in which Tom More lives is also broken into small pieces each contrasting with the other. "Conservatives have begun to fall victim to unseasonable rages, delusions of conspiracies, high blood pressure, and large-bowel complaints," whereas "Liberals are more apt to contract sexual impotence, morning terror, and a feeling of abstraction of the self from itself" (LR.20). There is political polarization between knotheads (the old Republicans), and Lefts (the old Democrats). The towns are in contrast with the swamps where Negroes live to join the Bantus. The conservatives and the highly educated and high rank officials live in towns. All these contradictory situations create a chaotic atmosphere to justify the contradictory bifurcation of Tom More's body and mind, his self from the self of others.

Tom more, a physician psychiatrist, though himself a psychic patient, wants to relieve all the patients in America of their psychic troubles.
"How can you take care of unhappy patients if you are unhappier than they are? Physician heal thyself" is the message Percy persistently conveys in this novel(LR.215). It is paradoxical that on the one hand Tom More wants to relieve all his patients of the psychic trouble and also win the Nobel Prize for his invention. But on the other hand he wants to pursue Lola Rhodes and Moira Schaffner to have physical satisfaction. "My heart melts with love and my brain sings in the musical-erotic sulcus when I think of Lola and Moira"(LR.304). Thus at the same time he longs for both, spiritual and physical satisfactions but he fails to achieve fully both. Thus "there remains a tug of war between the two," the spiritual and the physical attractions(LR.118).

Tom More's lapsometer which he hopes to be a boon for the welfare of humanity turns out to be a curse when it falls in the wrong hands of Art Immelmann. One more paradoxical fact in Tom More's life is that he wants to save his country people with the help of the lapsometer but he tries to kill himself. He attempts suicide by slashing his wrists and drinking gin fizzes. He takes interest in being in the company of Lola and Moira and other girls handing over the responsibility of distribution of lapsometers to Art Immelmann; a man of destructive nature.

Percy extends the same theme of concealed destructive nature of man to his last novel The Thanatos Syndrome which Father Smith explains to Tom More in a single sentence "Tenderness leads to gas chamber." He explains Tom how man of this twentieth century is of deceptive nature whose appearance is totally different from the reality. The elaborate explanation of the so called humanitarian programmes like "gereuthanasia" and "pedeuthanasia" reveal the readers their paradoxical nature. These programmes are not actually what they are meant for. A large number of handicapped and unborn children and
unwanted old persons are ruthlessly killed under the guise of improvement of society. They disclose the deep cultural pathology the modern world is engulfed in. Father Smith who advises Tom More in Love in the Ruins to be a good husband, father, and doctor by remaining faithful to his duties; he himself, in The Thanatos Syndrome, shirks from his responsibilities of a priest. Instead of preaching and leading the ignorant persons on right path he abandons his hospice and retreats to a "one - hundred - foot-tall fire tower" to look out for fires, the fires of cultural pathology.

In both the novels, Love in the Ruins and The Thanatos Syndrome, Percy discloses the paradoxical nature of the scientific inventions. The scientist protagonist invents something for the welfare of society but someone uses the invention for inhuman purposes. Percy, throughout his last novel, depicts the contrasting nature of persons in the society through the characters, on the one side, like Tom More who try to find out something good, for the welfare of the society, through the worst of things and, on the other side, like Bob Cameaux and Van Dorn whose interest lies only in the gratification of their selves and who turn a good thing into a worst of things. Thus through the narration of such innumerable paradoxes and contrasts in the lives of protagonists Percy reveals the irony of man's fate.

IV LANGUAGE AS SYMBOL

"The complexity of human exchange has always fascinated Percy." As man is a mystery to Percy so language is also "an extremely mysterious phenomenon" to him(MB.150). Both man and language are so closely related to each other that the existence of one without the other is unimaginable. He believes that language is the main characteristic of man which
differentiates him from the other organisms. To be more accurate than and language are in co-existence; so if one has to study man then one should study language.

"The importance of study of language as opposed to a scientific study of space-time event like a solar eclipse or rat behaviour, is that as soon as one scratches the surface of the familiar and comes face to face with the nature of language, one also finds himself face to face with the nature of man" (MB.150).

It is Percy’s notion that a careful study of language certainly helps in understanding the image of human condition.

It is not only spoken words which are taken as symbols but silences and the vague sound of breathing and sighs on phone, too, convey some meanings to the listener.

"Telephone conversations would take place at all hours of night, conversations made up mostly of long silences during which I would rack my brain for something to say while on the other end you could hear little else but breathing and sighs. When these long telephone silences come, it is a sure sign that love is over" (M.9).

Movies and film making are prominent symbols in Percy’s The Moviegoer. Throughout the novel there is description of number of movies and theaters, actors, and actresses. Movies and movie actors are the important part of Binx’s consciousness because he thinks they treasure memorable moments in their lives; whereas his life is totally empty. The movie actors form different images in his mind, and he starts comparing himself with these actors, their romantic lives, and desires to live like them.
Binx compares not only himself but also others with the movie actors and actresses, and judges them by their similarities and differences with the actors and actresses. His friend Eddie wears a "Charles Boyer Pout," his fraternity brother Walter is like "Samuel Hinds," and Harry is like a scientist in a movie. Binx himself likes to live a life of William Holden, his favourite star. Holden's heightened life is a mystery for him and a thing of attraction. Binx tries to live like movie actors but all the times he fails. He succeeds only in keeping limited and superficial relations with his secretaries as the actors keep relations with the actresses in movies. Binx tries to weave movie life and life in New Orleans into one pattern but then he realizes the futility of his attempt to realize the exact meaning of the movie symbols.

Percy protagonists are able to communicate with others or grasp from others the knowledge about this world when they are mentally sound. But when they are mentally sick they fail to name things which results in the gap of their communication. Will Barrett suffers from nervous breakdown because of which he fails to name the things around him and so he lives a blank life.

"To be specific, he had now a nervous condition and suffered spells of amnesia and even between times and did not quite know what was what. Much of the time he was like a man who has just crawled out of a bombed building. Everything looked strange... like the sole survivor of a bombed building, he had no second hand opinions and he could see things afresh" (LG.11).

When Will recovers from nervous condition and the spells of amnesia he comes out as a fresh person into a new world and, like a scientist, starts naming different things objectively. When a boy, Will Barrett was unable to be one with
other groups of boys because of his failure in establishing communication with them.

While Will is at the Princeton University the room No. 203 reminds him of his grandfather and father who lived in the same room. In consequence upon the memory of his past he suffers from *deja vus* and is misdirected by his classmates' use of the words like "old buddy", "hack", and "go" in a distinctive way. The word "go" is used by his classmates as an ironic summons to the commentator of a football game in a sense to go ahead but Will takes it as an insulting expression for deviating him from the accepted way of talking.

Words or sentences do not always communicate what they seem to communicate. "why is it that bad news is not so bad and good news not so good and what with the bad news being good"(LG.90). Will is aware that his father used to be happy when he spoke of Pearl Harbour because it reminded him of the World War II. His father was very much fascinated by "war" because for him war clears and sweetens the air and brings distant families together. Unlike his father Will, within himself, fights against the voluptuousness of bad news with a hope that a day will come when bad will come out as bad and good as good.

Percy refers to the quality of symbolic words to transfer the opposite meaning to the listeners again in his another novel *The Second Coming*. When Allison opens a book entitled *Captain Blood* and starts reading it, she realizes that words are certainly rich in meaning. But when these words reach her from other people then something happens to her words and they are deprived of their real meaning. As a result the words convey her the opposite meaning of what they are meant to convey.
"People don't mean what they say. Words often mean their opposites.
If a person says to you: *I hate to tell you this,*
but she doesn't hate to tell you. She likes to tell you"(SC.82).

Along with words and sentences Percy also uses other things as signs and images to convey the required meanings. Human gestures, sounds, smells, clouds, birds recurrently appear in Percy's novels to fill the gap of spoken language in conveying the required meanings to the readers. By the opening sentence of *The Second Coming* Percy tries to convey through the physical movements of Will Barrett on the golf ground that physically and mentally he is not well. "The first sign that something had gone wrong manifested itself while he was playing golf"(SC.3). "A strange bird," "A cumulus cloud," and the sound of bullet remind Will of something important that had happened in the past as a result of which he falls in a bunker and feels so much depressed that an idea comes to him "that he might shoot himself"(SC.3-4). According to Percy human brain "registers and records every sensation, sight and sound and smell, it has ever received" and when the neuroses in the brain where such information is stored are stimulated, the stored memories can be recaptured again(SC.6). Thus Will Barrett frequently undergoes depression and suffers from the attacks of *deja vu* and amnesia when he captures the past memories through different signs he comes across.

Michael Pearson, one of Percy's critic, goes to the extent of making a bold statement that "*In Lancelot*, Percy creates a monologue, thereby emphasizing the fact that all is symbolic action." According to him Percy treats the reader of the novel as one of the characters to challenge Lancelot's point of view of life. The reader joins with Percival, the only silent listener to Lancelot's
confession, at the end of the novel and says "Yes" to insist that what Lancelot proposes is not the only view of human life in this age. Man's life can also be viewed differently.

Whatever may be the critics' views but Percy's use of word as a symbol is on its peak in his fourth novel _Lancelot_. In the first section of the novel he discloses how a sign can suggest different meanings to different viewers. Lancelot tells Percival that the following letters,

"Free &
 Ma
 B"

Which he can see "By the almost effort and if you press your temple against the bricks" of the wall, do have their meanings either "Free & Easy Mac's Bowling," or "Free & Accepted Masons' Bar," or they may mean again something else (L.4). The mystery of the fact is that one can not guess the exact meaning of these letters when they turn into symbols. One takes meanings of such word symbols according to one's past experience and the present situation in which one lives. As the reader proceeds further in reading the novel Percy reveals that the complications in communication get minimized between two persons of the similar experience living in the similar situations. Lancelot explains how he establishes easily the communication with a girl in the next room in the same prison whom he has never seen. "Communication is very simple when you are 'in love,'" he says (L.12). Communication between two lovers does not even require word symbols, it takes place through sound symbols, the sound of tapping on the wall.

The letter "O" appears as a very crucial symbol for Lancelot for it gives totally a different turn to his life. When he looks the letter "O" on an
application form of his daughter Siobhan it rouses "the worm of interest" in him. It does not indicate him only his daughter's blood type but it also suggests him Margot's adultery. The action of the novel moves around the symbolical representation of the letter "O" because of which Lancelot is all the while haunted by doubts and develops suspicions about his daughter, wife, and in consequence about his father and mother. The symbol carries him into his past to dig out the disloyalties of his mother and crookedness of his father. It also reveals him the upsidelinessness of the world around in which he lives. In fact the symbol opens for Lancelot a new vistas of reality of the people who live a life of double standard in this modern age of science and technology.

Lancelot explains Percival how the meaning of the word "love" has changed nowadays. It is impossible to understand the word in its old sense.

"Oh, you speak of love. That is easy to do. But do you wish to know my theory? That sort of love is impossible now if it ever was. The only way it will ever be possible again is if the world should end" (L.55-56).

To take this word in its original meaning is possible only after the end of this world. What people do in this world, according to Lancelot, is that they take the meaning of any word according to their convenience; "I pondered. Could it be true all one needs to know nowadays is what one wants?" (L.56).

In Percy's another novel Love in the Ruins the word "Love" is used as name of a clinic which studies not human caring but sexual proficiency. In four walls of Love Clinic Tom, More tries to confess his feelings to Moira but his speech gets distorted and he goes stammering "Love, I, you". As he stammers the seriousness of the word "Love" is lost. Thus love is reduced here only to the name of hospital, a thing; it no more remains a factor of combining two selves
together. In this way in Tom's world of ruins language has become simply a functional or a directive device merely to have stimulus response relation. In such an environment everyone tries to pose himself either as a liberal or a conservative, polarizing one from the other with rigid mind sets which result in conflicts rather than intersubjective relations. The exchange of polarising names between Drs. Billy Matthews and Mark Habeeb well demonstrates the tight compartment of each name from the other.

"Un-American!"
"Kluxer!"
"One Worlder!"
"Racist!"
"Nigger lover!"
"Knothead!"
"Liberal!"

This conversation does not communicate anything to others except the frustration of the speakers for not being able to resolve their differences through proper communication. The lack of communication results in manhandling of the speakers.

"......... In a rage, yet almost happily, the two fall upon one another, fists flying. They grapple for each other, fall to the earth with a thud and roll into the sand trap"(LR.370).

Tom's world is devoid of both types of people who have something important to communicate and who can listen properly to important messages except some exceptional cases like Father Smith. Tom's apocalyptic warnings of noxious sodium vapour and of fallout therefore fall on deaf ears because his metaphysical terminology, his talk of "angelism", "sin," "penance," and the life of the spirit bears little meaning for the people of his society who are
conditioned to view everything in concrete terms. Tom himself falls a prey to such language dysfunction and undergoes "twenty years of silence and decline" after his discovery of More's Syndrome (LR.24). Father Smith also falls a victim to the same situation but he does not lose hope in humanity. He knows that "the channels are jammed and the word is not getting through" between man and God (LR.184).

But such silence can not be prolonged. After certain limit of time people wait for someone to break this silence. At last old Mr. Ives appears as a linguistic "life restorer". He manages to couple a dead language with a living one, thereby restoring the formerly life lesson. Percy implies here that the rebirth of language promises regeneration of life in man. Tom also realises that he can establish communication with others through language and involves himself in the act of prayer. The marital union of Tom and Ellen suggests restoration of the community. The prayer indicates man's efforts to have communion with God.

The appearance of a person becomes symbolical if the same person appears frequently for a year or two. Even if the person does not speak his appearance gives a sense to the lookeron about him. In The Thanatos Syndrome Percy gives example of doctor-patient relationship and how the doctor as "an analyst, who sees a patient several times a week for two years and who has his eyes and ears open --- especially that third ear Reik talks about which hears what is not said --- comes to know her, his patient, in some ways better than her husband, who probably hasn't taken a good look at her for years" (TS.5). Here the lady patient becomes a symbol for the analyst physician who is able to understand the meaning of the unspoken words of the patient by just having a look at her.
Tom observes his old patients as symbols and he tries to guess the situation in which all these patients suffered a drastic change. He wants to find out the cause of the change his patients suffered from. So by studying the patients he does not want to help the individual patients by getting to a particular remedy but to know a common cause of their suffering to save his nation from a great devastation. Tom is well aware that "Little things can be important" because these little things only lead to a great discovery(TS.3).

The process of symbolization according to Percy, is possible only in a free society. Through the communication of Tom and Father Smith in *The Thanatos Syndrome* he tries to convey that in this world of science and technology men are bound by so many things that their minds can not act freely. As a matter of fact, he suggests, in this condition the words have lost their meanings. "If it is a fact that words are deprived of their meaning, does it not follow that there is a deprimer ?"(TS.118). When the words are deprived of their meaning they become empty symbols and "a person can stop believing in the things the words signify" (TS.118). When persons do not believe in what the words signify then the words like God, heaven, hell, sin, do not signify anything as they lose their meanings in this world.

Father Smith asserts Tom that in a free situation a word can signify him different things. For example:

"Clouds"
"Sky, fleecy, puffy, floating, white ----"
"Okey. Blacks."

"Blacks, Africa, niggers, minority, civilrights"

"Okey. Jew."
"Israel, Bible, Max, Sam, Julius, Hebrew, Hebe, Ben ----"
Thus when a person's mind is free then there is free association of a word with its meanings. One word can suggest him different things he is acquainted with in connection with the word. Tom gets connected with "Max, Sam, Julius, and Ben" as soon as Father Smith utters the word "Jew" because all these are Jews and known to him.

"Max Gottlieb is my closest friend and personal physician. Sam Aaronson was my roommate in medical school. Julius Freund was my training analyst at Hopkins. Ben Solomon was my fellow detainee and cellmate at Fort Pelham, Alabama" (TS.122).

The word "tenderness" reminds Father Smith of "the gas chamber" and the Germans who under the disguise of nationalism murdered thousands of Jews. Father Smith makes Tom aware of the hidden meanings of such soft words which are likely to mislead people in this age of science and technology. On the same line Tom More realizes the true meanings of the words "gereutanasia" and "pedeutanasia" and understands how these words have misled the people of America. When a word misleads a person the process of communication gets distorted which ultimately leads to frustration. For Percy "language is not sheerly mental but consists in part of sounds, of energy exchanges, of observable physical phenomena; similarly, it is important for Percy that how people interact with one another through language susceptible of observation and generalization."44 Percy's all protagonists suffer in the beginning because they fail to understand the reality of the things and the individuals around them who represent as symbols.
Notes:

Chapter IV


15. Ibid., P. 49.


17. Tharpe, Jac, Walker Percy; P. 106.

18. Ibid., P. 108.


27. Brinkmeyer, Robert H., Jr., *Three Catholic Writers of the Modern South*, P. 137.

28. Ibid., P. 161.


34. Brinkmeyer, Robert H., Jr., *Three Catholic Writers of the Modern South*, P. 123.


