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ANYTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN? :

WALKER PERCY AND THE SEARCH FOR A THIRD WAY AND PLACE

by

Matthew Jordan Griesbeck

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College

Oxford

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ABSTRACT

MATTHEW JORDAN GRIESBECK: Walker Percy and the Search for a Third Way
(Under the direction of Dr. Martyn Bone)

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate how Walker Percy, through fiction, explores the various inadequacies of place, ontology, and religious belief through his representation of his characters' engagement with these three areas in their attempt to live a meaningful life. I analyze three of Percy's novels, *The Moviegoer* (1961), *The Last Gentleman* (1966), and *The Second Coming* (1980), as well as Percy's non-fiction essays and Percy criticism. I find that the novels are continuous with Percy's non-fiction, and that Percy critics too often simply restate the author's beliefs instead of undergoing a thorough examination of what the author does not believe, and the way he portrays that throughout his fiction. Ultimately, I conclude that one can only understand Percy's fiction in light of the dualities he presents and the ultimate "inadequacy and irreconcilability" of such extremes—that the Percy protagonist must, then, look to something beyond such continuums, and not in-between them, in order to reconcile the existential desire to live in the world and not of the world.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MG (*The Moviegoer*)

LG (*The Last Gentleman*)

SC (*The Second Coming*)

LC (*Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book*)

MB (*Message in a Bottle*)

CONV (*Conversations with Walker Percy*)

MCONV (*More Conversations with Walker Percy*)

"The world was all before them, where to choose

Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:

They hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow,

Through Eden took their solitary way."

-John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

"I wonder if through a kind of despair or through sheer weariness we have not given up the attempt to put man back together again, if indeed he ever was whole."

-Walker Percy

"The centre cannot hold..."

-W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming"

Introduction

> "What is your house saying about you?...Does it form a suitable background for you, your manners, your ambitions, and values? Or does it make you look ridiculous, as if you didn't quite belong, as though you'd strayed onto a stage set? Does your house express the serenity and self-assurance of a person living in a democratic society where Everybody is Somebody? Does it show that you are sure of yourself as a person of character and importance, or does it show you are worried because you're not somebody else?"

Robert Beuka uses this excerpt from an article, entitled "How American is Your Way of Living?" from a 1950 edition of the magazine *House Beautiful*, to open a chapter of his book *SuburbiaNation*. In a work that seeks to examine twentieth-century fiction's portrayal of the American suburb, Beuka analyzes landmark suburban stories and novels such as John Cheever's "The Swimmer" and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. In doing so, however, he ignores another American author, Walker Percy, and his fictionalized observances of life in suburbanized America. Indeed, if one were to replace the word "house" with "place" in the above quotation, he would have the foundational questions for a study of Percy's fiction: the relationship between place and self, or the connection between *how* one lives and *where* one lives—what one's place says about him or her, and whether that place is sufficient in granting meaningful existence.

When the above magazine hit American newsstands, Walker Percy was thirty-four. He was married, settled down in a suburb of New Orleans (Covington, Louisiana) and recently converted to Catholicism. William Levitt had built his first suburb, or "Levittown", three years prior (1947), and, as Robert Beuka observes, "The new middle-

class suburbanite quickly became the object of sociological scrutiny, as a stream of criticism in popular journals and books consistently tied the uniformity of the suburban landscape to a variety of detrimental effects on residents" Sociologists, however, were not the only intellectuals or artists to take note. "At the same time...fiction writers were finding material for best-sellers amid the landscape of the new suburbia" (67).

Though Beuka never mentions him, Percy wrote one of these best-sellers: *The Moviegoer* (1961), Percy's first novel and winner of the 1962 National Book Award, which traces a Louisiana stock-broker as he navigates the malaise of suburbanized New Orleans. The protagonist, Binx Bolling, finds the suburbs alternatingly appealing and haunting—making him capable of emotional highs and existential lows. "The thing that fascinates me," Walker Percy once said, "is the fact that men can be well-off, judging by their own criteria, with all their needs satisfied, goals achieved, et cetera, yet as time goes on, life is almost unbearable. Amazing!" (Conversations, 54).

Critics have examined and re-examined the biographical, existential and religious focuses of Walker Percy's literary canon, writing summaries of his novels that show how the author puts ideas—namely, his Catholic faith and the works of Søren Kierkegaard—into fiction. With the intense and varying landscapes of Percy's fiction, it is difficult to believe that no critic has undergone a thorough examination of Percy's physical-ontological themes. In one novel alone (*The Last Gentleman*), Percy takes his protagonist, Will Barrett, through New York City, northeastern suburbs, the Carolinas, upper-class Alabama, and lower-class Mississippi; and in each region, Barrett and everyone around him not only speaks differently, but places himself in the world in various and unique fashions.

At times (see Allen Pridgen's *Walker Percy's Sacramental Landscapes*), studies have left religious and existential concerns long enough to ponder Percy's landscapes, but even then, such criticism usually returns to focusing primarily on the aforementioned themes. Assuredly, Percy's fiction warrants these religious and philosophical considerations; but I believe that in order to arrive at the essence of the author or a full understanding of his major concerns, one must also examine the ways in which his characters place themselves in an always-shifting landscape.

In this study, I will examine three of Percy's novels, *The Moviegoer* (1960), *The Last Gentleman* (1966) and *The Second Coming* (1980) to see whether the author believes that, in the second-half of the twentieth century and in an increasingly suburbanized New or "Sunbelt" South, the White Southern Male can successfully place himself and live a life worth living. To do so, I will use Percy's various religious, philosophical, and spatial continuums and their accompanying extremes. Spatially (or physically), Percy places his characters into one of two physical locations: either the "Old South" or a "New South" that bears an increasing similarity with the rest of the United States, namely, the North, Midwest, and West.

Secondly, Percy typecasts characters who exhibit slight variations of two ontological modes of being: immanence or transcendence. For Percy, these terms refer to poles of being or ontological stances which Percy's fictional characters use in attempting to place themselves in the world. In his nonfiction work *Lost in the Cosmos*, Percy outlines "Some Traditional Modes of Self-Placement". In a "post-religious technological society", the author believes there are only two remaining options of self-placement: "self conceived as immanent, consumer of the techniques, goods, and services of society; or as

transcendent, a member of the transcending community of science and art" (113). He then goes on to define these two options, saying:

> The (immanent) self sees itself as an immanent being in the world, existing in a mode of being often conceived on the model of organism-in-an-environment as a consequence of the powerful credentials of science and technology...it solves its predicament of placement vis-à-vis the world either by a passive consumership or by a discriminating transaction with the world and with informed interactions with other selves (113).

Meanwhile, without religion, Percy believes the only remaining way to transcend the here-and-now is "self-transcendence", in which the "available modes of transcendence in such an age are science and art" (114). At least in light of *The Last Gentleman* (and one of its most prominent characters, Sutter) Percy seems most interested in exploring the self-transcendence of science. "The scientist," he says, "is the prince and sovereign of his age... He stands in a posture of objectivity over against the world, a world which he sees as a series of specimens or exemplars" (115). In watching the world, he finds himself amidst a "disappointing world and in all manner of difficult relationships, (and thus) escapes by joining the scientific community, either by becoming a scientist or by understanding science" (116).

In light of science's widespread replacement of religion, Percy exhibits frustration with existing forms of religious belief: specifically, atheism or Christian belief. To him, "Christians" are often "commercial" as well, debasing the author's Christian faith by broadcasting it on cable and sticking it on bumpers. Insofar as these believers use faith as

a means of making money, they are just as repugnant as non-believers. Thus, Percy's dichotomies take the following form:

	Location	Mode of Being	Religious (Un)Belief
Extreme #1:	**Old South**	**Immanence**	**Atheism**
Extreme #2:	**New South**	**Transcendence**	**Commercial Christianity**

The question for Percy, his protagonists, and this study then becomes whether or not there is something "in-between" or outside these extremes that, in turn, would grant these characters a life worth living, that is, whether there is a Third Place/Space, a Third Way, and an authentic mode of religious belief. "Everybody has given up," Will Barrett remarks in *The Second Coming*, "Everybody thinks that there are only two things...But what if there should be a third thing, (or) life?" (272).

The three novels on which I focus align themselves well with these three interests of location, mode of being, and religious belief. Thus, *The Moviegoer* concerns itself primarily with life in a Southern suburb, and how this new locale affects the way one lives. *The Last Gentleman* takes this connection a step further, placing Will Barrett in multiple locales and explicitly exploring "geographical transcendence" (as well as implied geographical immanence). Years later, in *The Second Coming*, an older Will Barrett—discontented with "believers and non-believers" alike, will enact a post-modern Pascal's wager and determine "once and for all" whether or not God exists.[1]

[1] It may be asked why I am not analyzing Percy's remaining three novels, *Lancelot*, *Love in the Ruins*, and *The Thanatos Syndrome*. The answer is that I believe the three that I am focusing on best display Percy's interest in place/geography and the way in which a sense of that place relates to ontology and religion. As Rudnicki explains: "For Binx and Will (their) ontological travels are accomplished through literal flights;

Ultimately, my study will conclude that in his fiction, Walker Percy diagnoses the modern and post-modern South and divides its inhabitants into opposing extremes. Then, through fiction, he pits his male protagonists against these various extremes and leaves them discontented and "searching" for some new Way, Space, and Belief. After trying numerous places and non-places and the particular modes of being to which they lend themselves, Percy concludes that there is not (and, importantly, never *was*) a Third Place to live an ideal life, but there is a Third Way: go somewhere (anywhere) and live an ordinary life with people and God. In short, Percy's characters are looking for love (or life) in Place and must stop overemphasizing place and look elsewhere.

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however, for Tom More and Lance Lamar (of the other novels, respectively)...such quests are internal...Percy overcomes his rather transparent reliance on geography, although it remains an important feature in the Percean intellectual landscape" (Rudnicki 46)

Chapter One: *The Moviegoer*

Protagonist: Binx Bolling, early twenties, stock-broker

Location(s): Gentilly, suburb of New Orleans, Louisiana;

Chicago, Illinois

"For Southern writers in modern times—with the lost cause and the life of the active gentleman, the engaged citizen, behind them—the problem of being becomes acute," writes Robert W. Rudnicki in his book *Percyscapes*, "Life appears as a choice between an existence of passive secondhand observation, demeaned by a retreat from 'honor' or 'duty' and old ideals yet partially availed by the critical eye, and an existence of active firsthand involvement" (2). It is precisely this "problem of being" which plagues Binx Bolling in the first of Percy's published novels, *The Moviegoer* (1961). With Percy, how one should live is always a question of importance, but it is not the only question. Perhaps more than any other Percy novel, *The Moviegoer* displays a profound relationship between a character and his or her landscape—a correlation between where one chooses to live and how they choose to live as a result.

The novel begins with John Bickerson "Binx" Bolling, a white, educated male, telling the reader of his conscious decision to live "the most ordinary life imaginable, a life without the old longings; selling stocks and bonds and mutual funds; quitting work at five o'clock like everyone else" (MG, 14). As referenced by "the old longings", the primary component of Binx's new and ordinary life (the "Little Way", as he calls it) is a rejection of his family's old white southern values—especially those held by his aunt, Emily Cutrer—and his tendency towards metaphysical or existential "searches". Yet,

strangely, Binx never identifies or mentions what Scott Romine calls his "reflexivity" in explicit terms: "He is an exile when the novel opens: even the imperative to resist traditional roles (as seen in William Faulkner's Quentin Compson and Jack Burden) has dissipated. Identity conferred by class, family, and community is already a null category" (Romine, 199). Eventually, one can resolve this tension by identifying what Binx *does* versus what he *says*.

The protagonist finds himself in strange, transitional times in which "the Bolling family (has) gone to seed" and some (such as Emily) are unwilling to accept it. She clings to notions of old Southern ideals, obsessing over the Bolling's krewe for the upcoming Mardi Gras parade and incessantly reminding Binx of her desire for him to go to medical school like his father. At least for Percy, these are dated preoccupations which he often satirizes; if anything, they only bring about anxiety or guilt for a modern contemplative such as Binx.

Martyn Bone, in his book *The Postsouthern Sense of Place in Contemporary Fiction*, goes beyond Binx's social secession from "Aunt Emily's southern stoical ethos" and proposes that Binx also "begins to establish a sense of place that diverges from his great aunt's by relocating himself outside her social geography". This, then, is Binx's primary motivation for moving to Gentilly and taking up "a suburban way of life...(that) seems actively postsouthern" (64).

Gentilly is a new suburb of New Orleans which altogether lacks the sophistication and charm of the city. One soon learns that it is this very plainness or ordinariness—that it is *not* his aunt's Garden District—that attracts Binx to it in the first place. It is a place, but a faceless one. "Except for the banana plants in the patios and the curlicues of iron on

the Walgreen drugstore one would never guess it was part of New Orleans." Binx begins. "...but this is what I like about it. I can't stand the old world atmosphere of the French Quarter or the genteel charm of the Garden District." In fact, any sustained exposure to such places has profound psychological and physical effects on Binx. "My aunt and uncle live in a gracious house in the Garden District," Binx explains, "But whenever I try to live there, I find myself first in a rage during which I develop strong opinions on a variety of subjects and write letters to editors, then in a depression during which I lie rigid as a stick for hours staring straight up at the plaster medallion in my bedroom" (6). Obviously, these conditions are ridiculous, but Percy (as always) is trying to make a point: one's psyche and physical well-being are strongly tied to their locale. Percy's dichotomous oppositions in *The Moviegoer*, then, take the following shape:

Old Southern Tradition [--------------------------------] Binx's "Little Way"

Garden District [--------------------------------] Gentilly (Suburbs)

Binx lives on Elysian Fields, a real avenue in New Orleans which is named after a location of Greek afterlife. (This choice of street is perhaps an ironic play on Percy's part. Here is Binx, trying not to be a ghost, living in a location with connotations to the afterlife.) "Though it was planned to be," Binx tells the reader, "like its namesake, the grandest boulevard of the city, something went amiss, and now it runs an undistinguished course from river to lake through shopping centers and blocks and duplexes and bungalows and raised cottages" (9). Again, there are striking parallels between the physical descriptions of Gentilly and the life of Binx—who was supposed to be a doctor.

"like (his) namesake", before "something went amiss" and he chose to become "undistinguished".

Gentilly is also a fitting locale for a writer preoccupied with the living dead or what Percy terms the "ex-suicide"—the man who has chosen to live, and *not* commit suicide—as well as a Southern author interested in his region's transition from the rural, pastoral, or agrarian and into urbanism and mass culture. Critics often identify Percy as a transitional author, caught somewhere between, on the one hand, William Faulkner, modernism, the Agrarians, and the Southern Renaissance, and on the other hand, postmodernism. Even in his own literature and others' perception of it, Percy suffers anxiety as to who or what he wants to identify himself as, and whether or not he wants to be associated with labels such as "Southern novelist".

The Southern Renaissance, which "refers roughly to the period between two world wars when Southern writers were far enough in time from the Civil War and slavery to regard their region with some degree of objectivity" (Makowsky 3), included Faulkner, Allen Tate, Caroline Gordon, and Robert Penn Warren. Collectively, it addressed the following two themes: "the burden of the past in a land that had suffered military and economic defeat, social opprobrium, and the legacy of racism" as well as "the individual's relationship to his or her community"—a complex relationship in which "the Southern individual's identity or honor is based on his or her standing in his community, and that standing is largely based on the family, whose standing, in turn, is determined by the burden of the Southern past" (Makowsky 3).

In Percy's time, there were at least two common reactions to such a burden. The first was a "heroic Southern stoicism, in which the individuals face decline and defeat

with a public face of bravery, fortitude, and nobility". As commonly observed, this is the attitude of Walker Percy's uncle, William Alexander Percy, as well as Emily Cutrer, who tells Binx that all she wants is to pass on "the one heritage of the men of our family, a certain quality of spirit, a gaiety, a sense of duty, a nobility worn lightly, a sweetness, a gentleness with women—the only good things the South ever had and the only things that really matter in this life" (224). The second reaction comes from those, like Binx at the beginning of *The Moviegoer*, who find the Stoic tradition overbearing—and, as a result, run. Binx's intitial reaction echoes that of "post-Southern Renaissance writers like Walker Percy (who) feel overwhelmed by the Southern literary tradition" (Makowsky, 3) and try to dissociate themselves from it. Thus, the questions of postmodern Southern authors and their protagonists become synonymous: both struggle with an on-going identity crisis, of sorts, in which "the problem of being becomes acute" and "the exploration of…destabilization…seem(s) intensified in their work due to their unique historical circumstances" (Rudnicki 3).

Within unique historical circumstances, Percy also crafts unique physical landscapes. In *The Moviegoer*, it is the unique landscape of suburban Gentilly which particularly interests Philip Simmons in his essay, "Toward the Postmodern Historical Imagination: Mass Culture in Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer* and Nicholson Baker's *The Mezzanine*". Simmons believes there is a strong association between history and mass culture, which he defines as "the culture of the products and services of corporations organized on a national or multinational basis" (602). It is a term, he adds, that "encompasses the products of the mass media (film, television, radio) and of consumer culture generally (K-Mart, McDonald's, the contents of your medicine cabinet)…"(603).

In and of itself, mass culture "grows out of its attachment to cyclical theories of history, in which the progress of civilization entails its decline and fall" (602). In short, mass culture becomes a litmus test for where, in the cycle of history, a civilization finds itself, and it urges the members of that society to "look backward to either a lost golden age or a time of drudgery and deprivation" (601).

Within this connection of mass culture and history, Simmons argues, one finds "the range of practices and products that form the central obsessions"(601) of Percy's novel. Notice, even in the quote above, that Gentilly contains curlicues of iron on the chain-store Walgreen's—not on a local pharmacy or doctor's office—because this is a New Orleans (a South) becoming increasingly corporatized. In such a transitional time, Simmons' theory is that, to Binx (and to the reader of *The Moviegoer*), "history is visible in the landscape" (606); that is, one can look at the buildings and landscapes of Percy's novel and identify the changing history of the South. For Simmons, it is a shift in which "the recent history of the rise of mass culture becomes part of the older mythoi of the fall from grace and the loss of the values of the aristocratic, agrarian old South" (603). The key to understanding Percy and the novel, however, is to realize that this is a transformation is not yet complete. "Percy's history of the suburbanization of the South," Simmons says, "attaches to a larger mythic history, and thus establishes a depth of historical perspective that counters the perceived superficiality of the developing consumer culture" (603).

Yet it is this very "historical perspective" and "perceived superficiality" which gives Binx his existential anxiety in the novel. Gentilly sits anxiously alongside New Orleans, even as Binx nervously enters his relatives' home in the Garden District or

listens to his aunt's lectures. It is a strange mixture, as "mass culture is assimilated into existing mythic structures" (603). As a result, Binx is still able to see (in the landscape) and hear (from his aunt) of the old ways of life and subsequently desire the potential escape from everydayness which is offered by mass culture and the movies; and yet, at the same time, he is also able to question whether that escape is in fact authentic, and not superficial.

Early on in the novel, it becomes evident that Binx is always examining other people. To use Rudnicki's phrase again, he has chosen a life of "passive secondhand observation, demeaned by a retreat from 'honor' or 'duty' and old ideals yet partially availed by the critical eye". Binx sees lives and desires which are different from his own, wonders why they are different, and who, if anyone, is right:

> Other people, so I have read, treasure memorable moments in their lives: the time one climbed the Parthenon at sunrise, the summer night one met a lonely girl in Central Park and achieved with her a sweet and natural relationship, as they say in books. I too once met a girl in Central Park, though it is not much to remember. What I remember is the time John Wayne killed three men with a carbine as he was falling to the dusty street in *Stagecoach*, and the time the kitten found Orson Welles in the doorway in *The Third Man* (12-13).

Using this passage, Simmons offers a comparison between the role of books and movies in Binx's life, concentrating on print versus mass media. I would like to focus instead on the use/role of places in this passage. Binx presumes that others "treasure" or find meaning in a paradisiacal mixture of place and circumstance—climbing the Parthenon at sunrise or meeting a lonely girl in Central Park. By comparison, such paradises mean

nothing—or so he says—to Binx. Instead, he would rather consume a manufactured moment at the movies. His favorite places are not ancient constructs (the Parthenon) or metropolitan oases (Central Park)—or are they?

Bone is skeptical of Binx's criticisms of and "divergence" from society as he "begins to go beyond 'vulgar' existentialism to ponder the sociospatial relations to his being-in-the-world" (64). Previously, Binx praised the commercial development of suburbia and participated in it himself by purchasing Alcoa steel (10). But his "peaceful existence in Gentilly has been complicated" (10), meaning Binx has begun to question his adherence to, and participation in, rampant commercialization. Bone correctly identifies the primary manifestation of this early anxiety, namely, Binx's nocturnal strolls around Gentilly in which he is at once thrilled and terrified by what he sees:

> It is good to walk in the suburbs at this hour…The closer you get to the lake, the more expensive the houses are. Already the bungalows and duplexes and tiny ranch homes are behind me. Here are the fifty and sixty thousand dollar homes, fairly big moderns with dagger plants and Australian pines planted in brick boxes, and reproductions of French provincials and Louisiana colonials. The swimming pools steam like sleeping geysers. 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 at this hour of dawn that they are forlorn. A sadness settles over them like a fog from the lake…I muse along as quietly as a ghost. Instead of trying to sleep I try to fathom the mystery of this suburb at dawn. Why do these splendid houses look so defeated at this hour of the day? Other houses, say a 'dobe house in New Mexico or an old frame house in Feliciana, look much

the same day or night. But these new houses look haunted...What spirit takes possession of them?

Here, one sees a repeated juxtaposition between nature and capitalist production. The more appealing the nature (the lake), the more capitalism thrives. "Big moderns" occupy the space next to the water. They have plants sitting in brick boxes, and their architecture or construction is a reproduction of New Orleans cultures. Binx compares the swimming pools—and even the "sadness"—to nature.

These chilly dawns are no joke to Binx. They are disturbing, a nightmarish mixture of pleasant emotions and haunting spirits. "Getting back to nature" has been an ideal repressed by his growing interest in financing construction or selling his family's duck club, yet here he is: walking the streets of New Orleans suburbia and comparing every construct to something natural. Bone hones in on the fact that Binx "avoids answering his own question" at the end of this passage, and "mystifies the question itself...precisely because he is personally implicated in the construction of suburbia" (67). Binx is clouding his "own complicity in...capitalistic process" (65) by calling any adverse effects of such capitalism a "mystery". When Binx goes to the Bayou des Allemands, his crisis only deepens. He "awakes in the grip of everydayness" (145) and sees that even the most remote and pastoral locales have been tarnished by what Bone calls "the demoralizing existential experience of anonymous, mass-produced (sub)urban capitalist space" (68). Even if the ghosts of land redevelopment have not yet reached the swamps, Binx can already feel the effects that such space has on human culture and living. "The everydayness is everywhere now," he says, "having begun in the cities and seeking out the remotest nooks and corners of the countryside, even the swamps" (145).

According to Bone, "the implication is that industrial capitalism has extended its domain beyond mass-produced urban buildings; it is also culturally expressed through, and existentially experienced as, 'everydayness'". He continues: "In other words, the sinister 'spirit' of 'everydayness' has enabled capitalism to move beyond material production of city space into a kind of metaphysical colonization of the country" (68).

Binx Goes to the Movies

To escape such everydayness, Binx heads to the movies. Even as mass culture assimilates itself into New Orleans, Binx inserts himself into that mass culture as an escape from reality. But again, as Simmons aptly identifies, there is an existential fear in Binx. He "treasures" the movies as an escape from everydayness, but he also fears becoming "a member of the mass movie audience." Simmons specifically identifies the existential crisis as follows: "with the pleasures of *The Moviegoer*'s life comes the threat of losing one's individuality and sinking into the 'everydayness' of the repetitive, massified life" (612). Thus, Binx is afraid of "disappearing into the anonymity of the mass audience" and as a result, he "takes positive measures to combat this threat". These positive measures usually involve placing one's self within a specific place, as the following passage from Binx shows:

> Before I see a movie it is necessary for me to learn something about the theater or the people who operate it, to touch base before going inside...If I did not talk to the theater owner or the ticket seller, I should be lost, cut loose metaphysically speaking. I should be seeing one copy of a film which might be shown anywhere and at any time. There is a danger of slipping clean out of space and time. It is

> possible to become a ghost and not know whether one is in downtown Loews in Denver or suburban Bijou in Jacksonville. So it was with me. (74-75)

In Binx's mind, mass culture is dangerous territory and a potentially treacherous pursuit, from both a metaphysical and a physical point of view. There are, here, literal implications within the phrases "touch base" and "cut loose". To touch base appears to mean more than to get one's emotional or metaphysical bearings; it also means to literally place oneself—physically, spatially, and specifically somewhere. Otherwise, one could fall out of space and time and be anywhere—which is the worst possibility according to Binx. It is worthwhile to make inauthentic small talk with a theater operator if it guarantees authenticity and ensures that one will not become a ghost—someone that can be anyone and anywhere. In the paragraph above, Percy chooses its specific places for a reason: collectively, they are all-encompassing. The former (Loews) is an urban theater out West while the latter (Bijou) is a suburban theater in southern Florida. Together, they show that it does not matter where a theater is located within the geographical United States. To Binx, *all* theaters require a degree of placement. One also sees that the same spirits that haunted Binx on his nighttime walks haunt him when he walks into the movies, or consumes mass culture. It is the ghost of anonymity—to be no one and nowhere. Thus, "slipping clean out of space and time" means becoming too immersed in mass culture and "the anonymity of the mass movie audience".

As we have seen, Gentilly is increasingly anonymous, but it still has a reference point: the Garden District and New Orleans. In this state of ghostly being—and in this location—one is no one and he is nowhere. "Thus for all his enjoyment of the movies," Simmons writes, "Binx resists surrendering entirely to them. His experience in a theater

must be framed by an external geography and social history" (613). Any existential crisis, or metaphysical musing, or "search" within Binx's narrative always includes an attempt at spatial placement as well. These correlations come to a head when Binx goes to Chicago with Kate Cutrer.

Chicago

Through his final and grandest comparison, Binx is finally able to situate or reorient himself in the South; and in a satirical, biased, and borderline offensive sort of way, Percy is able to suggest that while the South has its issues, at least it is not the North (or Midwest, or West). Binx has talked about Chicago before in the novel. His Uncle Jules suggests that he go there on a business trip, to which Binx explains the difference between he and his uncle, namely, "...it is no small thing for me to make a trip, travel hundreds of miles across the country by night to a strange place and come out where there is a different smell in the air and people have a different way of sticking themselves in the world" (98). This is nothing to Uncle Jules, Binx explains. His uncle would find it easy, and perhaps enjoyable, to "close his eyes in New Orleans and wake up in San Francisco and think the same thoughts on Telegraph Hill that he thought on Carondelet Street". Binx knows, for better or worse, that his uncle is wrong; after all, Binx is "onto something"—the spatial transcendence of a place, or the ability of a geographical place to grant a sense of detachment or abstraction. "Me, it is my fortune and misfortune to know how the spirit-presence of a strange place can enrich a man or rob a man but never leave him alone," Binx theorizes, "how, if a man travels lightly to a hundred strange cities and cares nothing for the risk he takes, he may find himself No one and Nowhere".

Eventually agreeing to go on the trip, Binx deems it the end of his "life in Gentilly", his "Little Way" (99).

Although Binx will come to repeat this rhetoric upon his arrival in Chicago, there is much to draw from his analysis above. First, he perceives a difference between his own perception and the perception of others, particularly when it relates to noticing the profound consequences of place. He is a "seeker" and therefore sees more than meets others' eyes. Second, the particular differences between places like New Orleans and Chicago are both physical and philosophical. The smells are different to Binx, but so is the "way people stick themselves in the world". The way people live is profoundly different in the Midwestern city than it is in New Orleans; in other words, their way of life is intertwined with their place and sense of that place. This is emphasized further when Binx again says the risk of travel is anonymity—becoming "No one and Nowhere". To one, like Binx, that carries out an ordinary life in an ordinary location like Gentilly, placelessness always breeds a lack of identity, implying that only with a proper sense of place can one find identity in the world.

Upon his arrival in the Midwestern city, Binx's fear of anonymity causes a mental breakdown in the train station. His desire for individuality or particularity recalls his anxiety before entering the movie house in Gentilly when he says:

> If only someone could tell me who built the damn station, the circumstances of the building, details of the wrangling between city officials and the railroad, so that I would not fall victim to it, the station, the very first crack off the bat. Every place of arrival should have a booth set up and manned by an ordinary person whose task it is to greet strangers and give them a little trophy of local spacetime

stuff—tell them his difficulties in high school and put a pinch of soil in their pockets—in order to insure that the stranger shall not become an Anyone (185).

Before entering the movie theater in New Orleans, Binx talks to the theater operator in order to "touch base" and ground himself. The theater is a manufactured source of escape, but also one which Binx can control. He can take the necessary steps or engage in small-talk conversations to ensure a sense of individuality and human connection. It is not so in Chicago. The danger of his South becoming increasingly commercial, and therefore mired in "everydayness", is beyond Binx's control, or more than he can handle. Unlike the New Orleans theater with its operator, there is no train operator to greet him, stuff his pockets with "spacetime", and ward off anonymity. In his mind, Binx does not ask for much. (After all, this is a "Little Way" he is after.) He only wants an "ordinary" person (like himself), a "little" trophy, a "pinch" of soil and some high school gossip. One sees in the passage that Binx desires such an operator at "every place of arrival". Like the movie passage, this quote is all-encompassing. Yet there is a reason Percy chooses Chicago. It is because, to return to Simmons' terms, the city lacks the "external geography and social history" that Binx needs. To use Binx's term, it offers no "certification" or sense of physical and ontological placement.

The reason for this absence of certification is industrialization which has run amok and altered space and time. It has created an increasingly homogenized society in which it is harder for one to "stick himself in the world" authentically. With this homogenization has come the rise of a haunting "spirit-presence of a place"—a phrase Binx employs as an ambiguous description of his existential dread. He is afraid of becoming so "in the world" that he is also of it, undistinguished and placeless. However,

what Binx fears, his travel companion, Kate, savors: "She is strangely at home in the city," Binx remarks, "wholly impervious to the five million personal rays of Chicagoans and the peculiar smell of existence here. All of a sudden she is a regular city girl not distinguishable from any other little low-browed olive-skinned big-butted Mediterranean such as populates the streets and subways of the North" (202).[2]

Binx's use of "the North" here is notable; for just as Kate has become indistinguishable from those around her, so Chicago and the North have become one and the same. Never mind that Chicago is in the Midwestern portion of the United States; by "the North", Binx essentially means "not the South". He has employed geographical binaries, which in turn lead one to think in terms of other binaries within the novel. For one, there is, as mentioned earlier, a constant tension between the philosophical lifestyles of immanence and transcendence, of being "in the world" or else detached and otherworldly. In Percy's fiction, the male protagonists are always the "passive secondhand (observers)", standing at a distance with hands in their pockets and voids in their hearts, trying to figure out the meaning of it all. Usually (and perhaps unfairly), the women fall prey to "immanence", like chameleons taking on the shape and form of their environment, oblivious or else defiant of the malaise which haunts the males. In light of *The Moviegoer*'s Chicago/Wilmette sequence, I would argue, along with Rudnicki and others, that Percy's "North" aligns with notions of transcendence, or detachment, while the South becomes synonymous with immanence.

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[2] This foreshadows Percy's later novels, especially *The Last Gentleman*, in which his characters will employ charades as a means of combatting loss of identity in an increasingly placeless world.

The Genie Soul of a Place

Every place, whether North or South, has what Binx calls a "genie-soul of...(a) place which every place has or else is not a place" (202). It is a spirit which one "must meet and master first thing", or else be mastered by it, Binx explains. In the interest of this particular study, it is worth noting that only one "genie-soul" has mastered Binx before: San Francisco. Out West, Binx says that he "pursued" the genie-soul and "missed", and was thereby haunted by a "presence" and a "sadness" (202). This reminds one of Binx's earlier contrast of New Orleans and San Francisco: to him, one cannot think the same thoughts in the two cities because they are inhabited by different spirit-presences. Here, however, it is worth noting that Binx begins to align himself with other people. Whereas before, Binx mentioned the *differences* between himself and Jules, in this passage he identifies with an entire region—the South. This is perhaps the first sign of Binx's eventual "compromise" with his Aunt Emily:

> Nobody but a Southerner knows the wrenching rinsing sadness of the cities of the North. Knowing all about genie-souls and living in haunted places like Shiloh and the Wilderness and Vicksburg and Atlanta where the ghosts of heroes walk abroad by day and are more real than people, he knows a ghost when he sees one, and no sooner does he step off the train in New York or Chicago or San Francisco than he feels the genie-soul perched on his shoulder.
>
> Here is Chicago. Now, exactly as twenty-five years ago, the buildings are heavy and squarish and set down far apart and at random like monuments on a great windy plain. And the Lake. The Lake in New Orleans is a backwater glimmering away in a pleasant lowland. Not here. Here the Lake is the North

> itself: a perilous place from which the spirit winds come pouring forth all roused up and crying out alarm. The wind and the space--they are the genie-soul...The wind blows in steady from the Lake and claims the space for its own, scouring every inch of the pavements and the cold stony fronts of the buildings. It presses down between, shouldering them apart in skyey fields of light and air...This is a city where no one dares dispute the claim of the wind and the skyey space to the out-of-doors. This Midwestern sky is the nakedest loneliest sky in America. To escape it, people live inside and underground (202-203).

The reason that only Southerners (or perhaps more specifically, white-male southerners) can sense the sadness and genie-soul of the North is because they have experienced, first-hand, the immanence and heightened reality of the South. Shiloh and Vicksburg, with their famous battlefields, have a "social history" that the North lacks. In the South, everyone knows "who built the damn train station"; that is, the South is full of memory. Its residents can recite the names of Confederate heroes and their "wrangling" with the Union. They knows its "soils" (battlefields) and its sorrows. To Aunt Emily and others, the men who fought for the South, and those who uphold its honor, become more than men. Before Chicago, all this was suffocating to Binx. It was a model he could not live up to; so consequently, he shrugged it off and isolated himself. Now, he cannot handle the opposite extreme, the vacuum of the North. He would rather have the life of Aunt Emily--or at least a modified version of it.

Chicagoans

Thus far one has seen Binx's descriptions of the places of the North, but has yet to receive a detailed picture of its people and the way they "stick" or place themselves in the world. One has seen the *where* but not the *how*. Thus, Percy introduces the reader to a few generic businessmen whom Binx joins at a business convention in downtown Chicago, and then to the suburban house of Harold Graebner. The businessmen are "very decent fellows" that Binx finds himself liking very much. "What good people they are. It is not at all bad being a businessman," Binx muses in a manner similar to the description of his own life at the beginning of the novel. In the ballroom, he identifies a "spirit of trust and corporation" and concludes that "the country would collapse tomorrow" if it were not for Stanley Kinchen and company (205).

Nevertheless, Binx is not content with this life. He does not know what to make of it, saying, "But these fellows: so friendly and--? What, dejected? I can't be sure" (205). In a matter of minutes, Binx can take no more. He is "nervous" and out the door before the ballroom itself becomes uneasy. He and Kate have a few drinks, then catch a bus and "cross a hundred miles of city blocks" and "pass in the neighborhood of millions of souls" before coming at last to "a place called Wilmette which turns out not to be a place at all since it has no genie" (206). It is a bedroom community fourteen miles outside a large city, making it not all that different (in location, at least) from Binx's Gentilly or Percy's own hometown of Covington, Louisiana[3]. Yet it lacks a "genie-soul", which one may equate with a sense of place. Binx feels his rootlessness, and as a result, he seeks out Harold Graeber, an old companion from the Korean war, as a source of

[3] Here, one sees Percy's ultimate bias towards the South. Wilmette and Covington are similar in their proximity to larger cities, yet Percy chooses to live in Covington while Binx derides Wilmette.

certification or placement. "Him, one soul in five million, we must meet and greet, wish good luck and bid farewell—else we cannot be sure we are here at all," he says (206). The only problem is that Harold is even worse off than the businessmen.

Binx describes Harold as a "cheerful and simple sort of fellow". Since he and Binx both work in business, they share a mutual bond of stock-market corporation and "expanding benevolence" (208). In this, Harold is similar to Stanley Kinchen; but he also has a gnawing sense of despair that the businessmen at the convention did not possess. "Up and down he goes, arms upraised, restless with it and not knowing what it is," Binx explains (210). Of course, a reader of *The Moviegoer* knows what "it" is by now: a combination of suburban malaise and living in denial of the fact that he is "no one and nowhere". That is why he suddenly wants to wrestle Binx, because Binx has begun to search for and root out and come to grips with the "everydayness", while Harold has not and does not want to. "I walked in and brought it with me, the wrenching in the chest," Binx says, "It would be better for him to be rid of it and me" (211). Thus, he and Kate leave. Her only comment is that the Graebner's are a "peculiar family": she, too, feels the strange unease but is unable to put a (concrete) name to the feeling.

A Third Place?

Like every Percy protagonist, Binx oscillates back and forth between ways of life (namely, immanence and transcendence) within the novel before arriving at the first of Percy's fictional compromises—a mutual agreement, of sorts, with his Aunt Emily. In the words of Philip Simmons, "he makes his peace with the social world of his Aunt Emily...(and) agrees, finally, to conform to the traditional proprieties of professional

respectability and family duty. In return, he gets Aunt Emily to accept that '...I was not one of her heroes but a very ordinary fellow' (217)".

It seems that Binx's desire for a sophisticated or charming "external geography", as offered by the Garden District, and its accompanying pull of "social history" prove too great for Binx to remain in the suburbs. Thus, he "retreats" back into his Aunt's *physical* realm as well as her realm of *traditional ideals*. Despite his Aunt's presumption that Binx possesses none of her Stoic chivalry, Binx decides to not only "take care" of Kate but also marry her. Moreover, they move into one of the Nell Lovell's renovated shotgun houses—a practical sign of Binx purchasing that which he once deplored. In another transaction, Binx sells his duck club—a final, symbolic event of his subconscious participation in urban development of formerly pastoral settings.

Many critics have commented on Binx's departure from Gentilly and his existential search, as well as his retreat into the Garden District and a modified version of Aunt Emily's way of life. Yet for the purposes of this thesis an important question remains: whether, at the end of *The Moviegoer*, Binx Bolling discovers, or is "on to", a "Third Way" and a "Third Space". Though he never uses these terms explicitly, they are implied throughout. Binx has longed, repeatedly, for a world or place where there was an operator to greet and relocate travellers, where one could go to the movies and wrap himself in existential escape, all the while successfully ignoring or denying the "wrenching" of Harold Graebner's inauthenticity.

"I do believe that you have discovered something new under the sun." Aunt Emily says to Binx at the end of the novel (219). In reality, however, Binx has not. He only passively accepts a compromise; he has not found a new way or a new place to live, but

has only moved back in to the Garden District on his own terms. When Kate asks him what he plans to do with his life, Binx replies, "There is only one thing I can do: listen to people, see how they stick themselves into the world, hand them along a ways in their dark journey and be handed along, and for good and selfish reasons" (233). As for his search, Binx declares it to be "abandoned", being no match for Emily, "her rightness and her despair" (228). Later, he settles for indifference, saying he does not possess "the inclination to say much on the subject" (237).

The reason Binx is silent is the same reason he used vague expressions such as "genie-soul" and "everydayness" to account for his existential discoveries throughout the novel: to serve as cover ups for his own participation in mass commercialism. By the end of the novel, one wonders how much Binx was really searching, whether his abstract derision of the North was simply a justification for something he wanted all along—to return to the South of his Emily and the Garden District. As Bone notes, Binx does not have to concede much in order to reach a compromise with his family, as they, too, have been involved with much more land speculation than they are willing to admit. He writes: "Despite Emily's rhetorical distinction between 'integrity' and the 'market place' (31), the Bolling-Cutrer-Lovell clan's profitable involvement in the sociospatial transformation of "the South" helps Binx to bridge the apparent gap between his own bourgeois "Little Way" and Emily's pseudoaristocratic Southern Way of Life" (73).

Here, one finds a resolution to an apparent tension in the text, in which "Binx Bolling appears on the first page of *The Moviegoer* without having [the tacit dimension of a traditional culture] available, even as an option. And yet, paradoxically, Binx is confronted with a plenitude of options, not the least of which is his choice of community

(or place)" (Romine 199). The truth of the matter is that Binx was never fully willing to permanently leave behind the Garden District or completely abandon its notions of old southern tradition. To do so would have left him without a physical or psychological reference point, placeless and rootless. He was literally *buying* his time, going to the movies and participating in "mass culture (as) a temporary escape from the history to which he must inevitably return" (Simmons 610).

At least here, the gap between Binx and the things he deplores is still only "apparent". No matter what Binx says, he is still very tied to his aunt in many regards, and is not willing to keep searching until he finds a new place under the sun. In later Percy novels, one shall see a much more explicit and concrete bridge or binary between the North and the South and their accompanying ways of life, immanence and transcendence. In *The Moviegoer*, however, Bone correctly identifies the gap as apparent. It is implicit and abstract, and Binx does not always convince the reader, even as he tries to convince himself and redeem the South and its way of life. As for Percy himself, Bone hypothesizes that, at least for now, he "dismiss(es) the possibilities of a postsouthern sense of place within the mass produced, middle-class suburbs" (74)—thus the anti-climactic ending. If the "Third Space" is out there, all one knows thus far is that it is not in Gentilly, and especially not in Wilmette.

"The Little Way"

As for whether Binx finds a "Third Way" of life, I would like to take a look back at a passage earlier in the novel:

> Nowadays when a person lives somewhere, in a neighborhood, the place is not certified for him. More than likely he will live there sadly and the emptiness which is inside him will expand until it evacuates the entire neighborhood. But if he sees a movie which shows his very neighborhood, it becomes possible for him to live, for a time at least, as a person who is Somewhere and not Anywhere (63).

Simmons argues that "the movies offer a paradoxical rejuvenation, bringing to life the dead spaces of the urban environment that they themselves, in complicity with the industrialization and massification of the city, have helped kill" (617). Not only is Binx's moviegoing way of life paradoxical, but it is also unrealistic, as even Binx himself sees. It provides him with prized moments earlier in the novel, but they are just that: moments. Therefore, Binx leaves the suburbs and the movies and returns to an adapted version of his Aunt's way of life. He has not found "something new under the sun", but has only bridged a rather small gap between the life of his Aunt and his "Little Way". Just as Binx and his family were not all that different, so the movies and industrialization were doing the same thing: killing people and space. One sees (even if Binx does not) that the gap is "apparent" and the moviegoing way of life is "paradoxical" or illusionary.

Indeed, Aunt Emily is right when she says to Binx that he will live in an interesting age. Simmons says as much as he identifies the unique transitional stage of Binx and *The Moviegoer*. It is a time "when suburbanization and the advances of image culture could still be seen against a backdrop of older social forms, when the materialism

of consumer culture was still reliably opposed by a vital humanist and spiritual tradition, and when the cultural margins could still be located in relation to the mainstream" (603). As I maintained earlier, this transitional stage only provides Binx with an anxious perspective leading him to conclude that he is "living in fact in the very century of merde, the great shithouse of scientific humanism where needs are satisfied, everyone becomes an anyone...and men are dead, dead, dead" (228).

Moreover, Binx says that "the malaise has settled like a fall-out and what people really fear is not that the bomb will fall but that the bomb will not fall" (228). Percy's fictional canon will slowly move towards more of this apocalyptic tone, but for now, we have no answers from Percy as to a "Third Way" or a "Third Space"; Binx does not take us far enough. He "senses the terminal limits of community in any traditional sense" (Romine 200) but is never able to permanently place himself beyond them. "My objections", he says, "though they are not exactly objections, cannot be expressed in the usual way. To tell the truth, I can't express them at all" (225). Thus, for now, we have only Binx's musings: "For a long time I have secretly hoped for the end of the world and believed with Kate and my aunt...that only after the end could the few who survive creep out of their holes and discover themselves to be themselves and live as merrily as children among the viny ruins. Is it possible that—it is not too late?" (231)

Chapter Two: The Last Gentleman

Protagonist: Will Barrett, displaced male Southerner

Location: New York City, Levittown, Alabama, Mississippi Delta, Santa Fe

"I wanted to create someone not quite as flat as Binx in *The Moviegoer*, more disturbed, more passionate, more in love, and, above all, *on the move*. He is in pilgrimage without quite knowing it—doing a Kierkegaardian repetition; that is, going back to his past to find himself, then from home and self to the *West* following the summons of a queer apostle, mad Dr. Sutter, "Going West" is U.S. colloquial for dying" (*SSL*, 382-383, emphasis added).

The Last Gentleman, Walker Percy's second novel, is in many ways continuous with *The Moviegoer*. It features an inquisitive male protagonist, aged somewhere in his late twenties, who is discontented with existing social structures and ways of life. Again, Percy's protagonist is on the move—in search of something, somewhere. It asks "the same root question of life's worthwhileness" (Dowie 60) and answers it with regard (or reflexivity) to a Southern family and its accompanying ideals. However, in this novel, all of Binx's searches and *The Moviegoer*'s ideas become more extreme. Percy's characters become more like symbolic caricatures, and the author's notions of geography and the possibility of "geographical transcendence" becomes more pronounced. With such explicitness—and with Will's willingness to really go out and search for a Third Way or Place—it becomes easier for one to see whether Will finds that for which he is looking. Yet despite his metaphysical and physical searching, "The Last Gentleman" (that is, Will

Barrett) does not find a Third Way as the Percy protagonist again only falls into a slightly modified version of a preexisting way of life. As for a Third Place, if it exists, Will does not find it, although his travelling *does* allow Percy to identify some places where it is *not*.

As seen in my previous section, the purposes of this study are twofold. I am interested in the way in which Percy's notions of philosophy are connected to those of geography—that is, the way in which "how one lives" is connected to, or a manifestation of, "where one lives"—and then seeing whether there is, for Percy, an ideal location in which to begin living an ideal life. Spatially, *The Last Gentleman* covers more ground than *The Moviegoer*, as Will Barrett as "fugito" allows the reader to see more clearly a relationship and/or tension between placing oneself geographically and posturing oneself ontologically. In *Percyscapes*, Robert Rudnicki examines this "fugue state" to situate Percy's fiction within a larger Southern literary canon, in which other writers such as William Faulkner and Willie Morris also use the fugito as a method of exploring modern tensions of living. He explains:

> As for their particular characters...all have a great deal in common: all, with more or less success, try to make synecdoche connection; all seem to be trapped in either a 'dyadic' or 'triadic' consciousness or lost somewhere in between; all, employing Percy's terminology, try either to escape semiotic immanence and achieve semiotic transcendence or to reenter immanence from an 'orbit' of transcendence...I believe these commonalities among protagonists are contributing factors in the psychic makeup of a wide-spread character type: the fugito ...I believe that the characters who experience some type of fugue state

> symbolize, or personify the tensions between the self as immanent and the self as transcendant: the immanent self is caught in a loop of remembrance, mired in time and place; the transcendent self is amnesiac, unmotivated by history. However, as demonstrated by their protagonists, modern writers find neither condition unacceptable (6).

As evidenced by the passage above, Rudnicki's concerns often parallel those of other Percy critics, focusing on semiotics (particularly the desire for dyadic and triadic relationships) as a way of understanding the actions of Percy's protagonists. However, the author also makes spatial observations, namely, that "for protagonists in the fiction of the twentieth-century South, this fugal reaction compels them to flee for days or even years, often to the West or the North" (10). This is entirely true of *The Last Gentleman*, in which Will Barrett grows up in the Mississippi Delta, flees to New York City, and returns South (where he hardly lasts a football season) before heading west. It is an "A-B-A" pattern (or repetition) that echoes the movement of Percy's own life, in which the author grew up in Mississippi and Alabama, lived in New York City, and later made a trip to the Southwest with fellow writer Shelby Foote. Will's spatial pattern directly corresponds with a philosophical one, that is, he is an entirely detached or "angelic" northerner, later overwhelmed by Southern immanence ("mired in time and place"), and then in the desert entirely detached once again. Ultimately, this pattern or correspondence allows Percy to display his ideas of "geographical transcendence and immanence", in which Barrett's movement becomes "a flight in two senses: an escape from one mode of consciousness to another, and a literal escape from home to a new or familiar place" (Rudnicki 9).

In *The Last Gentleman*, Will tends towards a posture of transcendence as he "habitually tries to place himself apart from the capricious pleasures and threats of the physical environment in order to search for the 'truth' about his existence within the abstractions of his own mind" (Pridgen 41). Thus, he works underground and isolated in a New York City Macy's, or else, from his apartment window, uses a telescope to watch people in Central Park, literally gazing at them as scientific specimens. Meanwhile others, such as the Vaughts, take a "stance of material, of place, and of history" (Rudnicki 16), a phenomenological and experiential mode of being as opposed to a spiritual one. They are in the world and not at all worried about becoming of it as well. In fact, becoming of it may be a relief, in which the self finds comfort in being a "compliant role-player and consumer and holder of a meaningless job, the anonymous "one"...in a mass society" (*LC* 113). One sees role-playing and consumerism as manifestations of immanence throughout the novel, and as Barrett observes such modes of being, he, too, often feels the need or desire to play a role as "*The Last Gentleman*". This temptation to come back down to earth and put on a mask explains the incessant oscillation of the text, both philosophically and spatially.

With regard to Percy's fiction, however, the question at hand is whether something lies between immanence and transcendence; and if something does, whether it is a worthwhile or fulfilling way to live. Rudnicki comments on this in-between, and how the Percean fugitive relates to it:

> Between the two extremes lies the abyss of self in which we either languish in despair and alienation because of our unawareness of that despair or we become fugitives who in searching for a more tolerable ontology often doom ourselves to

> a life of oscillation between one absolute category and its other. To be a fugitive is to have owned up to the possibility of a Percean 'search'... This empty space between the two categories has, according to Percy, been riven of its meaning and is responsible for humankind's modern malaise, alienation, 'fecklessness', and feelings of inauthenticity (15).

A "more tolerable ontology" is what Will Barrett will later call the "Third Way". However. searching for such a way/place often leads to greater despair than that in which the character started. The search becomes a "Road to El Dorado" in a sense, a wandering adventure to a place that may or may not exist. Despite this risk and uncertainty, Percy seems to believe it is better to authentically own up to the malaise than to be inauthentic and repress it, for humans are "pilgrims", "sojourners", and "wanderers"—that is, they move and search and look for signs.

In his fiction. Percy "was looking for a 'key' to open the door between the loft of transcendent categories and the vault of immanent ones" (Rudnicki 18) . These respective "lofts" and "vaults" are not just phenomenological but also physical. "Spatially," Rudnicki explains, "The tension is one between placeness and possibility, captivity and freedom; temporally, it appears as a struggle between history and gnosis, past and future" (21). While others around him concede to immanence or transcendence, the Percy protagonist or fugito finds each inadequate, and must therefore search for a way to be in the world but not of the world. Indeed, "one can see in all cases that Percy is trying to bridge the gap" (Rudnicki 22). That is why Percy himself chose to live in Covington, Louisiana. a town with "nearness to New Orleans—which is very much a place. drenched in its identity. history, and rather self-conscious exotica" but also maintains "its own

attractive lack of identity, lack of placeness, even lack of history". Contrary to the battlefields of northern Virginia, nothing has ever happen in Covington, Percy claims. There have been "no great triumphs or tragedies" (*SSL*, 6).

Percy starts *The Last Gentleman* by historically placing Barrett within a larger context of southern fugitives. "In Southern genealogies," he writes, "there is always a mention of a cousin who went to live in New York in 1922 and not another word. One hears that people go to New York to seek their fortunes, but many go to seek just the opposite". These men, such as Barrett, "come from a long line of old settlers and a neighborhood rich in memories", therefore they eventually desire and flee towards just the opposite: "to live in a flat on 231st Street, pick up the paper and milk on the doorstep every morning, and speak to the elevator man" (9). Barrett's particular detachment is "part of a family pattern" in which "over the years his family had turned ironical and lost its gift for action". The Barrett males were once outwardly "honorable and violent", but gradually the violence "turned inward" and they became angst-filled and indecisive. Will's great grandfather "knew what was what" (Percy jargon for "knowing how to live and act") and once challenged the Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan to a duel. He had an identity; he was a "Southern Liberal" and a hero. Next came Barrett's grandfather, who "seemed to know what was what but...was not really so sure", and then Will's father, for whom "living...was a strain". This second-to-last gentleman had trouble walking down the street "on an ordinary September morning", and so he eventually committed suicide. Will is the "last of the line", *The Last Gentleman*. As a child, "he did not know what to think", and thus became "a watcher and a listener and a wanderer". He

continues his family's downfall into indecision, and "like many young men in the South, he became overtly subtle and had trouble ruling out the possible" (9-10).

Yet to Percy, Will's case is "more than being a Southerner" (10) . He begins to delineate Will, in some ways, as he describes just how bad it has all become. He has a "nervous condition" that makes him collapse to the ground and wake up hours later "refreshed but still haunted" (11). He calls it déjà vu, which Percy—as physician of the soul—repeatedly implies to be an insufficient psychological diagnosis, especially in light of Will's movement. For Barrett, it become more than simple amnesia; it becomes a symbolic one, as "he took to wandering...(having) a way of turning up at unlikely places such as a bakery in Cincinnati or a greenhouse in Memphis" (12). One specific time, Barrett had "fallen into a fugue state and wandered around northern Virginia for three weeks, where he sat sunk in thought on old battlegrounds" (12). Barrett, here, serves as a fictional representative of Percy's non-fictional theories, namely, that "the Southerner never thinks about the Civil War—until he finds himself among Northerners...lost in the great cities of the North, he feels for the first time the need of his heritage" (*SS*, 72). It is a manifestation of a larger phenomenon which Percy terms a "new interest in the Civil War" (*SS*, 75). He explains:

> There is an ambiguity about this new interest...On the one hand, it is the past recaptured, the authentic recovery of the long agony during which this nation came to be what it is. Yet there is also the temptation to yield to a historical illusion by which the past seems to gain in stature and authenticity as it recedes and the present to be discounted because it is here and now. We sense the illusion in the words of the old-timer, 'Yes, they came through here,' in which it is

> somehow implied that this place has existed in a long trivial aftermath after its one day of glory (*SS*, 76).

The Civil War, or a glorification of the South's past, then, is particularly dangerous to a misplaced southerner; it is a temptation or trap of heightened reality ("Yes, they came through here") that Barrett must avoid. In *The Last Gentleman*, there are not only physical representations of such traps, but also personal manifestations of these "old-timers"—namely, the Vaughts, a rich Southern family that lives on a golf course in Alabama, part of a community of Southerners that not only in-authentically *glorify* the Old South but also begin to *commodify* the New South as it becomes increasingly placeless or dislocating.

As he did with Emily Cutrer and her old Southern tradition, Percy again uses a family and its ideals to compare with his searching protagonist. If Binx-Will is the control, than the Vaughts, replacing Aunt Emily, are the variables. "The center of the Vaught family, mother and father, generally frame their lives in terms of the commercialized Southern tradition" while their children divert towards one extreme or another (Dowie, 60). Will quickly falls in love with their daughter, Kitty, whom Will presumes to be his female counterpart. Surely "she might wander with him through old green Louisiana, perch on the back step of the camper of an evening with the same shared sense of singularity of time and the excellence of space", Will presumes (*LG*, 260). Their other daughter, Val, is a religious extremist; deterred by the Vaughts' commercialism, she moves to a nunnery in rural Georgia. Jamie is a crippled teenager that takes the place of Lonnie from *The Moviegoer*. Caring for the dying Jamie becomes Barrett's redemption (It helps that Jamie asks the same metaphysical questions as Will). Rita, Sutter Vaught's

ex-wife, is obsessed with modern notions of "self-actualization" and "the cultivation of joy" (245-246) which Sutter and Will find repulsive.

As one critic notes, it is the final member of the Vaught family, Sutter, that becomes "Percy's main progression over his previous novel" (Dowie, 60). For it is Sutter that attempts to put into words what Binx and Will are looking for: a way of finding and maintaining a posture of life that balances transcendence and immanence. Sutter himself is a scientist, a "transcendent self" that is disillusioned with life on earth and flees to the supposed autonomy of scientific knowledge. In fact, Sutter has written on his attempts to understand human desire for immanence/transcendence. He lends the writings to Barrett—a book entitled "*The Incidence of Post-orgasmic Suicide in Male University Graduate Students*…(that was) divided into two sections… "Genital Sexuality as the Sole Surviving Communication between Transcendent-Immanent Subjects" and the second, "The Failure of Coitus as a Mode of Reentry into the Sphere of Immanence from the Sphere of Transcendence" (*LG*, 65). Sutter's writings comprise what becomes almost a canon for Percean ideas of place, personal philosophy, and the relationship between them. In time, Sutter will become a guide, and his writings a mysterious roadmap, for Barrett's journey throughout the United States.

For now, however, Percy leaves Barrett with the other Vaught's to disgust and dissatisfy him with their lifestyles of immanence. After meeting the family, Will plunges into a desire for normality—what he calls "putting his life back together" (87). He eats, sleeps, works out, buys new clothes and reads business magazines. After years of doing nothing, he decides to do something, namely, head South with the Vaughts.

> No more crazy upsidedownness, he resolved...Back to the South, finish his education, make use of his connections, be a business or professional man, marry him a wife and live him a life. What was wrong with that? ...What was wrong with a good little house in a pretty green suburb in Atlanta or Birmingham or Memphis and a pretty little wife in a brand-new kitchen with a red dress on at nine o'clock in the morning...? (88-89)

Here is Barrett's idealistic, romantic vision of time and place in the South. Like Binx, he mentions specific locations: Atlanta, Memphis, or Birmingham will do. He lists a specific time: nine o'clock in the morning. He will own a good "little" house, reminiscent of Binx's "little way". His dream is ordinary and immediate; yet it is the extreme immediacy of it that calls it in to question. Surely, Percy hints, this too is a facade--the normal being just as crazy and upsidedown as the "upsidedownness". This dream of immanence is equally ridiculous as Barrett drifting around the YMCA with his knee jumping like a fish, aware of the ravening particles around him.

The North grows worse to Barrett, especially as he begins recalling evidently repressed memories of his childhood in Mississippi. It is obvious that he has to return home, despite Rita's warnings ("You have no idea what it's like down there these days, the poor bloody old South"). The draw of his deja vu, and the thought of Kitty and "the astounding immediacy of her" (109) is too much. "She was more present, more here, than he could ever have calculated", and so, to, will be the South to which he returns.
From here, Barrett spends time in four distinct communities, each of which Percy criticizes as inadequate: the suburbs of Levittown, the "Carolina/New South" of the Vaughts, the old Delta South, and the West. This comes in light of what Percy repeatedly

calls the "losangelization" of America, in which "the south as well as the rest of the country has fallen into decay…" (Ford 561) during the development of post-World War II suburbia. Though the South, as countless critics have argued, has become and is becoming more like the rest of the country, to Percy, each "decayed" community—Southern or otherwise—still carries a unique sense of displacement, as one shall see.

Levittown

Leaving New York and hitchhiking south, Barrett can hardly stand "the ruinous New Jersey flats" with their "abandoned miniature golf links" (126-127). His travel companion is Forney Aiken, a white photographer that is headed South disguised as a Negro, on a mission to analyze and document African-American communities. Here, Percy's fiction begins to address racial concerns—after all, he is writing in 1966—and show how racism and prejudice disqualify different communities' potentiality as a Third Place.

After making a brief stop at Aiken's home, he and Will leave to visit Mort Prince, a lewd novelist whom Aiken idolizes. The author lives in "Levittown, the post-World War II middle-class enclave constructed as a model American community" which, for Percy, serves as "another failed sign of community, what Tocqueville predicted as the outcome of the gospel of American individualism" (Desmond 90). Percy writes:

> They reached Levittown. The freshly sprinkled lawns sparkled in the sunlight, lawns as beautiful as Atlanta lawns but less spectral and druidic. Chipper little Swiss swales they were and no Negroes to cut the grass but rather Mr. Gallagher and Mr. Shean cranking up their Toros and afterward wisecracking over the

fence...Not a bad life! He would live here cheerfully as a Swiss with never a care for the morrow (140).

For all its orderly landscape and appeal, "Levittown turns out to be a bastion of white racism, not harmonious community" writes John Desmond (90). As Percy implies, Levittown is a racially homogenous society where the wisecracks which the men yell over the fence are, more likely than not, made at the expense of blacks. Its citizens begin accusing (and even hitting) Will as he and Forney arrive at Mort's door, as they believe Will to be a realtor trying to sneak a black man into their homogenous neighborhood. "Behind their pleasant facades," Desmond writes, "American communities, as typified by Levittown...are a shambles of hypocrisy, rage, sexual self-indulgence, and violence" (96).

Trav-L-Aire

Leaving Levittown, Will eventually catches up with the Vaughts somewhere in northern Virginia (a transitional area and " in-between" of U.S. geography, but also close to Richmond, the confederate capital). He takes up in their Trav-L-Aire and soon becomes enticed by the mobile home. It is "mobile" and yet it is "home", a combination (and a potential bridge crossing Percean dualities) which Barrett finds appealing. He explains: "Now here surely is a good way to live nowadays...mobile yet at home...in the world yet not of the world, sampling the particularities of place yet cabined off from the sadness of place..."(153). This is, if nothing else, a third option; but it remains to be seen whether it is a realistic one. If Percy is searching for a third way of life for modern man,

surely he cannot expect him to live forever in a mobile home. (One will see Percy explore more of these "fake" places in *The Second Coming*.)

They reach the Carolinas, at which point Percy remarks that Barrett is at home. Though they are hundreds of miles from the Mississippi Delta, he has returned home, because in this "New South" the entire South is the same, or at least similar enough for Barrett to have déjà vu of Mississippi while in Carolina. "The odd thing I've noticed," wrote Percy in 1987, is that while of course the South is more and more indistinguishable from the rest of the country...the fact is that, as Faulkner said fifty years ago, as soon as you cross the Mason-Dixon line, you still know it" (*SS*, 377). Thus, in a sense, Percy seems to group all of the South together, even in the face of increasing commercialization and its inevitable result, homogenization. Yet in *The Last Gentleman*, he seems to differentiate between the New or "Carolina" South, and the South of Will's hometown in the Mississippi Delta. Indeed, just what, in fact, constitutes the "South" or the *real* South has been a matter of much debate. Paul Binding, in his work *Separate Country: A Literary Journey through the American South*, wrestles with such questions:

> Is the term *South* as used today synonymous with the old Confederacy? This issue had much exercised me... The answer is no. That the South means Virginia, North, Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana, no one would dispute, least of all the citizens of these states...Of the other Confederate states, Texas seems to me (and to others, including themselves) simply Texas...Texas' northern neighbor, Arkansas, is also geographically and culturally different from the other Southern states...the Mississippi River would appear to constitute a real frontier (25).

Binding then goes on to distinguish Florida, as well as Missouri and Kentucky. While Percy would not agree with all of Binding's southern boundaries, he would agree with the fact that the South, in and of itself, represents varying cultures as well as degrees of what Percy calls "Losangelization", or commodification/commercialization. As Richard Ford remarks in a review of one of Percy's later novels, "Percy remains a respecter, at least temporarily, of the old boundaries between the south—the real south, purlieus that include Louisiana, with points east to the Carolinas and Virginia and north as far as Memphis…and the rest of the country, particularly the middle west and Texas". In the light of destructed landscapes and commercialization, however, he writes novels "which are set in the south yet…point us convincingly towards the rest of the country" (Ford 558). The South, then, becomes not all that different from the rest of the U.S. Later, in Mississippi, one will see that it never really *was* ever better.

A "Happy South": Commodification and Preservation

As Will travels through the Carolinas, he perceives a land of preservation and construction, where "along the Tidewater everything was pickled and preserved and decorous" while in the backcountry "everything was being torn down and built anew". Collectively, "the earth was being transformed overnight, gouged and filled, flattened and hilled, like a big sandpile. The whole South throbbed like a diesel" (169). The whole South throbs with construction and commodification. To live in the South is not to live on an idyllic old plantation by the levee; it is not "summertime...(with) close privy darkness and the black tannin smell of the bark and the cool surprising vapors of millions of fleshy new leaves". Its girls are not the old "Alabama girls (no, Mississippi), who bathe and put

on cotton dresses and walk uptown on a summer night" (99). Instead, this is a South where the Vaughts "live on a country club...right there on the golf links along with a hundred other houses", where "the men make money and watch pro football" and "the women play golf and bridge at the club" (115). Its young women are sorority girls, not Southern belles, and its houses sit on golf courses, not plantations. Yet more than anything, the South is happy, and when he returns, this happiness "drove him wild with despair" (187).

In *The Moviegoer*, Binx underwent a similar "A-B-A" pattern to that of Barrett. It took a trip to Chicago to finally convince him that the South was not bad as he had once thought. Barrett's stay up north was much longer; whereas Binx could not last a week in the Midwest, there were some things about New York that Bill actually enjoyed. As is the case with everything in *The Moviegoer*, Binx's anxieties were more disguised or covert than Bill's. He could not *explain* why he objected to her old code of honor, and his retreat back into the Garden District made one wonder whether he ever really objected in the first place. Becoming more overt in this novel, Percy begins Chapter Four of *The Last Gentleman* with his most vivid fictional comparison of the South and the North thus far.

> The South he came home to was different from the South he had left. It was happy, victorious, Christian, rich, patriotic and Republican. The happiness and serenity of the South disconcerted him. He had felt good in the North because everyone else felt so bad... Their cities, rich and busy as they were, nevertheless looked bombed out. And his own happiness had come from being onto the unhappiness beneath their happiness. It was possible for him to be at home in the North because the North was homeless. There are many things worse than being

homeless in a homeless place--in fact, this is one condition of being at home, if you are yourself homeless. For example, it is much worse to be homeless and then to go home where everyone is at home and then still be homeless. The South was at home. Therefore his homelessness was much worse in the South because he had expected to find himself at home there. (186)

Binx Bolling hypothesized about "repitition" and "rotation", and this is repetition and rotation gone awry. While Binx found the South acceptable after a trip north, Barrett finds it unacceptable. It seems, perhaps, that it would have been better if he had never left the Delta at all. However, Percy also hints at another reason for Barrett's discontent: Bill had "expected to find himself at home there". Perhaps Barrett's expectations were too high. Perhaps Percy is hinting at a smaller, "littler" way of life than Bill's dreams of kissing Kitty in the kitchen at "9 o'clock in the morning".

Percy gives multiple reasons for why Barrett finds the South so despairing, besides the fact that everyone is "at home" and "happy". Percy will deplore the new South in further detail in *The Second Coming*, but for now it suffices to say that Barrett hates the fact that it is "victorious", despite the fact that Southerners lost the Civil War, and that it is obnoxiously "religious", with "plastic Christs on the dashboard (of their cars)". Moreover, their happiness is in many ways inarguable and irrefutable; for their women really are "beautiful and charming", and the men are healthy and wealthy. "They had everything the North had and more," Percy explains, "They had a history, they had a place redolent with memories...". This, then, is the difference between the North and the South; the latter has a historical and cultural backbone that the former lacks. Even the golf courses (often Percean symbols of the 'New South') are haunted by memories of the

old. The course on which the Vaught's "castle" sits "was the very golf links...where (Bill's) grandfather had played an exhibition round with the great Bobby Jones". Bill describes it as "an ancient sort of links, from the golden age of country clubs...peaceful as an old battlefield". For the engineer (as Percy usually calls him), the place is "haunted by memory", despite the fact that he has never been there.

"How bad off was he," Barrett self-examines, making it a good time for Percy to re-introduce Sutter. "You sound like Sutter," Jamie tells him, "...yonder he goes now"; but like a genie, Sutter is gone, leaving the engineer to pen him as "a quixotic type who admires his own gestures" (188). Before Sutter can fully enter the story, Percy must first establish immanence in its most extreme forms: both in the lifestyle of Kitty and the landscape of the Vaughts' "New South".

The wealthy family lives in a castle, built in the 1920s "when rich men still sought to recall heroic ages" (189). Yet it is entirely tacky and distasteful, with purple bricks and extravagant gables. It is a symbol of history trying to recall history, and Percy makes it clear that they have gotten it all wrong in these transitional times. For that is what they are, transitional; and the Golf Course becomes, for Percy, a (potentially non-serious) symbol of the New South's transformation of landscape and identity. Kitty's sister Val, who lives in a nunnery in Georgia, remarks to Barrett, "In the past, people have usually remembered their childhood in old houses in town or on dirt farms back in the country. But what I remember is the golf links and the pool...".

What becomes particularly repulsive to Barrett is the fact that these Alabama southerners do not realize how fabricated their landscape and their way of life really is. Instead, they see it as a sacred preservation of by-gone times, and view it at times as an

almost spiritual existence. One character, Lamar, remarks, " 'There's nothing like the old-timey ways!' " Percy writes that, "The Vaughts' retainers seemed to remind Lamar of an earlier, more gracious time, even though the purple castle didn't look much like an antebellum mansion and the golf links even less like a cotton plantation" (272). Within these "Sun Belt" southerners, there is a thirst to preserve history and tradition at all costs (or, perhaps, to gain costs). One critic, Brian Carpenter, writes that "no one, not even Faulkner, wrote more about the historic preservation in the South than Walker Percy...(he is the) most place-haunted of southern writers" (Splendor 1). In fact, the two authors' view of Southern place is entirely different. "Where Faulkner took for granted that there was a past worth preserving," Carpenter argues that "Percy questioned just what it was that the South was trying to preserve...(in) the aftermath of the Bulldozer Revolution..."(1). Pretending that the real, Old South still exists, these Sun Belt southerners are living a lie, and it is Percy's job "to attack the fake in the name of the real" (*Signposts* 161-2) and expose this "secret relishing and romanticizing of defeat and tragedy" (166).

These preservations attempt to bottle up not only the South's landscapes and architecture, but also its old Confederate heroes. They find these on the football field, as *The Last Gentleman* describes football, a game of temporary consequence, in spiritual and time-altering terminology:

> It was the night before the Tennessee game (versus Ole Miss). There was a grace and dispensation in the air, an excitement and hope about the game on the morrow and a putting away of the old sad unaccomplished past...A big game is more than a game. It allows the kindling of hope and the expectation of great deeds. One

liked to drink his drink the night before and muse over it: what will happen? (264).

Percy says that ordinarily, presumably in his former days in the Delta, Barrett "liked nothing better than the penultimate joys of a football weekend"; but now it unsettles him that everyone "feels better than ever". Unlike them, the engineer is aware of the fabrication of it all: the cheap opportunity to redeem losing the Civil War, searching for heroes in college athletes, and the fact that a game cannot be just a game, but must be a time of grace, hope, and expectation. It is, then, up to Percy's "existential fictions" to "repeatedly challenge" the New South's "sacred 'covenant with history and memory' " and to see that, if anything, it was not a "sign of southern renascence" (Splendor 1, 8) but of cultural decline.

For Percy, the bulldozing and restoration of the South is not without existential consequences. With its "economic metamorphosis...come(s) a heightened sense of 'alienation' " (Splendor 9) which one must confront, or, in Binx's words, "meet and master". In *The Last Gentleman*, these new southerners often use role-playing and the transformation of identity to counteract their increasing sense of spatial dislocation. "...It was his own Kitty who had been most mysteriously transformed. No longer was she the solitary girl on the park bench, inward and watchful as he...No, she was Miss Katherine Gibbs Vaught and the next thing he knew she'd have her picture in the (Memphis) *Commercial Appeal*" (261).

Perhaps it is this change in Kitty's identity that makes Barrett disillusioned with this South of preservation and Southeastern Conference football. After all, he has suffered a personal loss: "it was his own Kitty who had been most mysteriously

transformed. No longer was she the solitary girl on the park bench, inward and watchful as he...No, she was Miss Katherine Gibbs Vaught and the next thing he knew she'd have her picture in the (Memphis) Commercial Appeal" (261). Seeing her through his telecope in Central Park, Barrett had hoped that she might be a "sign"—that, like Binx, he was "onto something". Now, she has become just like the rest of the new Alabama southerners. Kitty is not "inward and watchful" but outward and social, wanting nothing more than to go to parties and wear fraternity pins. She completely changes her disposition, even taking on roles. "Since she had become a coed," Percy writes, "Kitty had given up her actress's lilt for a little trite sorority cry...she wore a cashmere sweater with a tiny gold sorority dagger pinned in her breast" (228). In a word, she is entirely immersed in Percean immanence—the unawareness of despair, the assuming of various fraudulent identities and the putting on of a happy face.

Moving on from the new "Carolina" South, Percy takes Barrett back to the Mississippi Delta, a "Deep South" where southerners build their lives around prejudice instead of leisurely rounds of golf. Again, Barrett sees the attraction of this other South's way of life. "The old way is still seductive," Percy writes his his essay entitled "Mississippi: the Fallen Paradise", in which he shows Ross Barnett and other Mississippians "hearkening to the antique summons of noblesse oblige" (Signposts 47). Observing Lamar and a group of Deltans, he thinks to himself, "They're good chaps and so very much at one with themselves and with the dear world around them as bright and sure as paradise. The game was tomorrow and they were happy about that" (266). Barrett is jealous of the fact that, like his father and the other southern liberals of noblesse oblige, "they knew what they wanted and who they hated". They had a code by which to live,

and the engineer wants to know "why (he) ain't like them" (265). The problem with their old code is that it is comprised of bigotry and racial hatred. They create a paradise, but it is a fallen one. (Even here, the Deltans are gathered over a joke about a Negro.) The engineer, Percy explains, is "by no means a liberal", precisely because he has never given thought to what he is—the nature of his skin or blood line. Rather, he is "so mystified by white and black alike that he (cannot) allow himself the luxury of hatred" (266). Again, Barrett realizes that this is an attractive way of life—to pit one's self against a certain race and therefore orient one's life and action. This is what the South has been doing for years. They are blinded to their bigotry, and Barrett is "onto" their ignorance and prejudice. As Percy's portrayal of the "Old South" shows, "the Southern complex of honor, stoicism, and courtesy loses its positive connotations as soon as it becomes a way of avoiding treating people as complex human beings by succumbing to the temptation to simplify them into abstractions of honor" (Makowsky 6). Even worse, they often simplify human beings to the point of racial jokes—and Barrett has had enough.

"Are you still strongly affected by the Civil War?" Sutter asks him, to which the engineer replies, "Not as strongly as I used to be". Barrett has overcome, to some extent, the "nationalistic feelings" that led him to formerly blow up a Union monument and scan the manifests of flights that crashed in New York to see if they contained any Southerners. The happiness of the Alabamans and the hatred of the Deltans, as well as his encounters with Sutter, have led the engineer to further deviate himself from his home, but he still wants to know one thing: "Why do they feel so good…and I feel so bad?" Sutter takes it from here, saying, "The question is whether they feel as good as you think, and if they do, then the question is whether it is necessarily worse to feel bad than good

under the circumstances" (268). In light of what one knows of Percy, this may be translated: better to recognize despair than to be caught in it.

Barrett had returned to the South thinking that he, too, would feel good, but that did not turn out to be the case. In his words, he "returned to the South from New York, where I felt quite dislocated as a consequence of a nervous condition...only to find upon my return that I was no less dislocated here" (320). The engineer has experienced three places/modes of living up to this point in the novel: the North, which he found dislocating; the New South of the Vaught's on the golf course, which he found too happy; and the Delta, which he found to still be mired in racial hatred and cotton picking and "simmered in its own richness" (303). Each space, therefore, is insufficient for one, like Barrett, that genuinely watches and examines everything around him.

Thus, the only geography that remains is the west. Thankfully, Jamie has decided that he wants to leave behind his life as a student at the University of Mississippi, and head west. The engineer rejects one final temptation (from Rita) to fall into ordinary southern immanence ("Let us see if you can do what you say you want to do, stay here...marry a wife and live a life") and decides to follow Jamie. For the remainder of the novel, Barrett will grow increasingly abstracted. Though he is physically chasing Jamie, he is really chasing Sutter, from whom he expects "maybe to find a clue or sign" (278). In Sutter's casebook, he will find many.

Sutter was once married to Rita, but "opted out of his successful marriage and successful medical practice because he decided that the ultimate satisfaction of life was free lewdness blended with scientific speculation" (Dowie 60). His notebook is full of notions of pornography, which he sees as a means of achieving at least temporary

immanence. As the title of his study suggests, however, men which cling to the power of sexual encounter often fall into depression when the act is over, "post-orgasmic despair without remedy" (345). They do not know how to live--which, for Percy, is always harder than dying—and therefore kill themselves. Sutter, too, has seen the failure of his plan to maintain immanence through fortification and transcendence through science . One learns in the story that he, too, has tried to kill himself.

It is obvious from the text and the work of other critics that Sutter is trying to maintain both immanence and transcendence through a combination of sex and science, of objectivity and subjectivity. What is often overlooked is that, to Sutter, this ideal balance can only be found in ideal locales. "The perfect pornographer = lapsed Christian Southerner (who as such retains the memory not merely of Christianity but of a region immersed in time and place) who presently lives in Berkeley or Ann Arbor, which are not true places but sites of abstract activity which could take place anywhere else" (280). This description aptly parallels what one knows of Will Barrett, who is theoretically a lapsed Christian Southerner that has begun to recall formerly-repressed memories of his childhood in the Mississippi Delta. He is discontented with the South to which he returns, and according to him, has never given a thought to religion. Now, to test Sutter's theories, Percy must place the engineer out west, in the land of abstraction and placelessness.

Similar to Barrett, Sutter has been on a search before. "I had left the old ruined South for the transcending Southwest," he writes, "But there transcendence failed me...(the) Genius loci of Western desert did not materialize" (349). In fact, the West is an attractive way of life for any thinking such as Barrett or scientist like Sutter, who,

heading West, "had hoped for free-floating sense of geographical transcendence, that special dislocatedness and purity of the Southwest which attracted Doc Holliday and Robert Oppenheimer...(349)". To Sutter, the West is enticing because it is a "locus of pure possibility" where men can make great scientific discoveries (i.e. Oppenheimer's bomb). Yet for all its scientific assistance, Sutter maintains that it is a terrible place to live. "It didn't work," he says, "...in a month's time (I) was struck flat by an acute depression" (350). Though his marriage to Rita temporarily saves him ("We ate the pure fruit of transcendence"), she could not take the West and moved back to the South. She could not accept, like Sutter did, that humankind is "doomed to the transcendence of abstraction", and therefore choose sex as "the only reentry into the world which remains to us" (354).

As Barrett heads West, he seems to agree with Sutter's descriptions of it—that it is geographically transcendent and somehow clears one's head. He feels "unusually elated" (351) by his geographical movement as well as Sutter's writings, and his overall condition seems to be improving. The engineer, however, does not completely agree with Sutter's philosophy. They are on different searches, "Barrett searching for a way to unite immanence and transcendence rather than accept Sutter's bifurcation" (Dowie 61). Where he probably goes wrong, mused the engineer sleepily, is the extremity of his alternatives: God and not-God, getting under women's dresses and blowing your brains out. Whereas and in fact my problem is how to live from one ordinary minute to the next on a Wednesday afternoon (pp. 354-355).

This is always the case with the Percy protagonist. He struggles with day-to-day and wants to know how to live ordinarily but meaningfully. What is interesting and

unique to Percy's ideas in *The Last Gentleman*, though, is how the ordinary life of Wednesday afternoon differs from place to place. The answer of how to live at three o'clock in the afternoon in the South is different from the solution to navigate a late afternoon in Santa Fe. Percy explains:

> He sat down under the cistern and sniffed a handful of soil. The silence was disjunct. It ran concurrently with one and did not flow from the past. Each second was packaged in cottony silence. It had no antecedents. Here was three o'clock but it was not like three o'clock in Mississippi. In Mississippi it is always Wednesday afternoon, or perhaps Thursday. The country there is peopled, a handful of soil strikes a pang to the heart, deja vus fly up like a shower of sparks. Even in the Southern wilderness there is ever the sense of someone close by, watching from the woods. Here one was not watched. There was no one. The silence hushed everthing up, the small trees were separated by a geometry of silence. The sky was empty map space... This is the locus of pure possibility, he thought, his neck prickling. What a man can be the next minute bears no relation to what he is or what he was the minute before.

Earlier, Percy described the western wind, which "came howling down from Colorado, roaring down the railroad cut like a freight train" (352), bringing to mind *The Moviegoer*, in which the genie-soul of abstraction was compared to a haunting wind which whirled through Chicago's skyscraper canyons. Now, Barrett stands by real canyons, and winds blowing down from Colorado as opposed to Lake Michigan. The meaning of the two images remains consistent, however. Both locales are placeless and timeless. Man's actions carry less weight, and one does not feel the "burden of history" or the threat of

living up to a familial code or tradition of honor. Besides the wind, the west is silent, and its silence bears no relation to the past and is proceeded by nothing. Both the past and the future are, in some mysterious way, eliminated.

Percy himself traveled to the West in his twenties (while sick with tuberculosis) and found the landscape enticing and healing. Thus, he knows wells what Sutter calls the "trap of transcendence". However appealing the silence of the West, it also signifies the fact that Barrett is profoundly alone. There is no communal support (Even Sutter needed Rita to "save him".) and there is little opportunity for dyadic or triadic relationships. Throughout, the engineer has been a watcher; yet here, he also desires to be watched, and there is no one to watch him. John F. Desmond, in his work *Walker Percy's Search for Community*, comments on Percy's West:

> The West, one of the most important tropes in Percy's novels and essays, is on one level a symbol of the great secular American Dream of freedom and self-realization, the locus of the romantic myth of Edenic community so powerful in culture. But negatively, it signifies the end-all of the abstracted solitary spirit...Will sees it illusorily as the place of pure potentiality. But the real question is, What concrete actions will derive from this potentiality? (110)

After all, Will has simply wanted, throughout the novel, to know what to do. As Desmond points out, the Los Alamos scientists (i.e. Oppenheimer and Doc Holliday) headed west as the "ultimate transcendent(s)", and what they did was proceed to "invent destructive weapons" (110). Percy is skeptical of what one can do without anyone watching. One may achive the "self-realization" of the American Dream, and find a temporary Eden out west, but still not be able to live concretely, day-to-day.

All of this stands in sharp contrast with Barrett's Mississippi home, which is full of time and place and people. Its very soil touches one's emotions and memories, and one is never alone. It is important to remember that Barrett is searching for how to live out an ordinary Wednesday afternoon, and in Mississippi it is always Wednesday afternoon, while out West is is almost never—or if it is, it is not the same. Thus, Percy seems to establish the West as a great land of scientific discovery, where one can leave behind humanity, live in abstraction, and come up with great ideas. Nevertheless, it is not a viable locale for discovering how to live ordinarily, a life without great discoveries. It seems, at least here, what Barrett seeks must be found somewhere in Mississippi (or the Deep South). Percy's logic seems as follows: in order to know how to live out a Wednesday afternoon, one should live where it is always Wednesday afternoon—the South, a place immersed in time—even if he must suffer from its suffocating history and its "bloody immanence".

Barrett, then, decides to be done with the "great". "I'm through with telescopes, he thought, and the vasty galaxies," he says, "What do I need with Andromeda? What I need is my Bama bride and my cozy camper…a warm bed and there lie dreaming in one another's arms while old Andromeda leans through the night" (358). He is like Binx after his trip to Chicago, longing for a "little way" of life with Kate in his arms. Barrett wants Kitty, the immediacy of her, lying beneath the stars instead of attempting to understand them. The engineer seems ready to "come back to earth" and move back to the South.

In the novel's closing pages, the third-person narrator makes a series of observations regarding Barrett's emotional state. He passes a Union monument in Santa Fe commemorating the Battle of Valverde, and "there (occurs) no stirring within him, no

bloody English toward the reversing of that evil day..." (358). Thus, Percy leaves the reader to believe that Barrett has finally accepted the fact that he does not have to be *The Last Gentleman*. He no longer feels the burdens or pressures of southern chivalry, nor the sadness of its defeats. The South simply is what it is. Second, Barrett seems to have accepted who he is—to have overcome his "fugue state", instead "becoming acutely conscious of the most significant sensation". Likewise, "his memory, instead of failing, became perfect." Again, Barrett has learned to accept his condition and the condition of his environment. As well as accepting the condition of he and the South, Barrett knows for the first time what to do (382). "Kitty and I are getting married," he tells Sutter, "I am going to take a good position with your father, settle down on the South Ridge, and, I hope, raise a family...I think I'm going to be a pretty fair member of the community." (383-384). As if to assure the reader that Barrett is not falling prey to immanence—that he will not become like one of the Vaughts—Percy adds, "Perhaps this moment...marked the beginning for the engineer of what is called a normal life. From that time forward it was possible to meet him and after a few minutes form a clear notion of what sort of fellow he was and how he would spend the rest of his life" (389). In his transcendent abstraction, or else the temptation to assume immanent role-playing and act out a life as "The Last Gentleman", no one was able to determine who or what, exactly, was Will Barrett. Now, Barrett has decided how and where to place himself, a profound result of which is others' ability to place him.

Like Binx and Percy himself, Barrett, too, has decided to move back to the South "on his own terms". Again, Percy has written a novel "in which existential exiles...eventually...settle down" (Splendor 11). The only issue is that, at least in this

novel, the reader does not get to see Will Barrett spatially placed in a new locale. He is not able to know whether Sutter was right when he said, "I think you'll be very happy. In fact I'll go further than that. I don't think you'll have any more of your fugues" (384). Barrett has "one more question" that he is unable to ask Sutter before the latter drives off in his Edsel, setting the stage for *The Second Coming*—a novel which will show Barrett entirely placed spatially, but also completely immersed in immanence and Christian commercialism. Percy has shown the pitfalls of abstraction, and now must show the dangers of its opposite—the trap of immanence.

Chapter Three: The Second Coming

Protagonist: Will Barrett, forties

Location: Linwood, North Carolina

"The American novel in past years has treated such themes as persons whose lives are blighted by social evils, or reformers who attack these evils, or perhaps the dislocation of expatriate Americans, or of Southerners living in a region haunted by memories. But the hero of the postmodern novel is a man who has forgotten his bad memories and conquered his present ills and who finds himself in the victorious secular city. His only problem now is to keep from blowing his brains out" (*MB*, 112).

As a sequel to *The Last Gentleman*, Walker Percy's 1980 novel, *The Second Coming*, shares the same protagonist and similar themes with its prequel. However, the context of the story—both historically as well as within the novel—is entirely different. Percy wrote this later of the two "Barrett novels" fourteen years after *The Last Gentleman*, and Will Barrett himself is no longer a twenty-something wandering around the continental United States. As the earlier novel said he would, Barrett has not "settle(d) down on the South Ridge" with Kitty, the two of them raising a family. He has settled down, but he is now a middle-aged widower living on a golf course in North Carolina. Barrett no longer struggles with dementia or fugue states, but conversely remembers everything, with everything becoming a "sign of something else" (51). His traveling is over, and Percy wants "to know what happens to people after the book ends and the show is over: when they win the fight, get the girl, and accept the reward money, (and wonder) then what? Go to Wal-Mart?" (Rudnicki 34). Wal-Mart may be Barrett's

only option: for although the South is happy and victorious, it is more commercialized, suburbanized, and therefore (in Percy's mind) miserable than before. Likewise, Barrett is, in many regards, worse off. He has changed his ontological posture, and he is likely to "blow out his brains" (134). If before he maintained a posture of Percean transcendence, hovering above humanity as a passive observer, here he is immanent—practicing law, playing golf, and literally falling down to the earth in sand traps (1).

As referenced earlier, I believe that three of Percy's major concerns in his fiction (the three areas or ideas which he wishes to put into story) are place, ontology, and religion, and that these three interests are closely intertwined. Part of my reason for choosing the three Percy novels which I did (as opposed to say, *Lancelot* or the Tom Moore novels) was because each, to some extent, emphasizes or highlights one of these three themes above the others. For example, in *The Moviegoer*, I focused largely on Gentilly, New Orleans, and a "post-southern" sense of place, in which Binx Bolling sought to resolve his sense of alienation or "malaise" that was a result of increasing "placelessness". *The Last Gentleman*, and particularly Sutter's notebook, allowed me to build upon sense of place to more explicitly examine how particular areas of the U.S. lend themselves to particular modes of being, namely, immanence and transcendence. Thus, as one saw, Will Barrett tended to be more transcendent or abstracted while out West, while those of the "New South", in effort to place themselves, sided with immanent consumerism or role-playing. *The Second Coming* takes place entirely within this "New South" (it does not move around like *The Last Gentleman*), thus making it an ideal novel through which to study Percy's critiques of this "Sun Belt" society. It allows one to ask how this South is different from that of Binx Bolling and Aunt Emily, and

whether Percy's particular critiques or anxieties remain constant. Sure enough, to Percy, the main difference between that South and this one is religion, allowing me to explore more deeply this third and final emphasis. Percy wastes no time in establishing the area's intensely permeating Christianity. "(Will Barrett) lived in the most Christian nation in the world, the U.S.A.," he writes, "in the most Christian part of that nation, the South, in the most Christian state in the south, North Carolina, in the most Christian town in North Carolina" (13). There is a reason the author places Barrett here. He (like me) is trying to examine the way in which religion (particularly commercial Christianity, which I will define shortly) affects one's ability to successful place himself both physically and ontologically. Percy wants to see whether this New South is a suitable place to live and be, or whether one must continue searching for a "Third Way" or "Third Place". [4]

Linwood, North Carolina

One recalls from Philip Simmons' essay that he described the world of *The Moviegoer* as a transitional one, in which "the recent history of the rise of mass culture becomes part of the older mythoi of the fall from grace and the loss of the values of the aristocratic, agrarian old South" (603). Thus, for Binx, history was "visible in the landscape"; he found himself in a world of mass suburbanization and consumerism, but was still able to fall back into the Garden District. In that same essay, Simmons compares *The Moviegoer* with a later novel (Nicholson Baker's *The Mezzanine*), written in 1988, in

[4] It must be said on the outset that there is a relative scarcity of existing Percy criticism with regard to *The Second Coming* that does not primarily concern itself with semiotics (particularly in the relationship between Allie and Will) or else simply restate Percy's Catholic beliefs. Rarely, as far as I can find, has any one written primarily on Percy's portrayal of the "New South" within the novel (and how it differs from that of Binx Bolling) or on Will Barrett's search for a "Third Way/Space". Thus, I will be relying more heavily on Percy's non-fiction as well as on my previous two sections, and this third and final section will be shorter than its predecessors.

which "mass culture promises to replace history entirely". When this overtake of mass culture reaches completion, it creates a world without "historical perspective", where "any larger historical frame...is gestured at only through the irony of its absence" (603). It is interesting to ask whether this is true, also, of the world of Percy's *The Second Coming*. For here, in 1980, the characters which Barrett encounters are no longer pining for Confederate and SEC football heroes. Instead, they are entirely immersed in mass culture, "watching Billy Graham and the Steelers and M*A*S*H on 45-inch Jap TV" (SC 19). They seem to lack any "historical perspective" whatsoever, and only Barrett (and his lover, Allie) seem bothered by it.

In 1961, Percy described a New Orleans of movie theatres, Walgreen's with curlicue iron-work, and the juxtaposition of Gentilly and the Garden District. Because the South was not yet fully immersed in mass consumerism, Binx was still able to find a retreat from the malaise of the suburbs and the "genie-soul" of Chicago. At the beginning of *The Second Coming*, however, it appears that no such retreat is available—at least not in Linwood, North Carolina in 1980. Percy describes the skyline of this tourist mountain village as follows:

> (First was) The Wee Shoppe: Chockful of British Isle Authentics and The Happy Hiker: Trail Gear and Camping Equipment. Next to The Wee Shoppe was a Gulf Station with a clean rest room...Across the street was a barbershop...(and) next to the barbershop was the Twin Cinema, an old frame movie theater cut in two. A movable sign on the sidewalk displayed posters of movies. The posters were old and tattered. (23)

Here, the shops of Linwood, North Carolina are "so entirely solipsistic, so limited to the domestic, the personal, and the resolutely mundane, that any larger historical frame" becomes ironic (Simmons 603). British Isle "authentics" are mass-produced, and the hikers are "happy" to have a store meet all their hiking needs. Strikingly, the town movie theater is in shambles. Whereas Binx Bolling used the movies as a "significant source of experience" (Simmons 612), no one needs the movies in '80s North Carolina. Instead, the people stay at home and watch television. While "Bolling can literally see a genteel, rural and agrarian past being displaced by suburban development" (Simmons 614), this South appears entirely displaced.

Robert Rudnicki writes that in *The Last Gentleman*, Will Barrett "wanders aimlessly through a life strangely deprived of meaning and, having rejected the values and goals of family and friends, finds that modern culture and communication are shopworn, clichéd, attenuated" (41). As mentioned earlier, most existing criticism on *The Second Coming* focuses on the latter of these two clichéd entities, communication. Indeed, it is easy to do so: for "most critics agree that *The Second Coming* is Percy's most linguistic novel" (Rudnicki 44)). Allie Huger, Kitty Vaught's granddaughter, is re-discovering human language throughout the novel—often amazed at the unspoken meanings attached to simple phrases. Rather obviously, she and Will Barrett's "dichotomous postures cancel out one another, thereby neutralizing each other's dis-ease by mediating immanence and transcendence" (44). This, however, is a too simplistic reading, for it assumes that the Percy protagonist is concerned only with establishing semiotic intersubjectivity. Yet, as one has seen in *The Last Gentleman* (and as Rudnicki himself admits), Will Barrett is also searching for spatial reconciliation. Rudnicki claims

that "if in *The Last Gentleman* is physically and psychically led astray, in *The Second Coming* he comes together by finding himself with Allie Huger in, of all places, a greenhouse" (44).

Ethel Rosenblum and Non-Real Solutions

Before trying a greenhouse, however, Barrett tries to conjure up a strange solution which is a combination of (non)place, love, and memory. In reminding one of Will's earlier attempts at resolution to sense of place/immanence and placelessness/transcendence, it also foreshadows Will's later attempts at escaping Christian Carolina by hiding in a cave or the greenhouse. Mentally escaping a round of golf with his friends, Will recalls a scene from thirty years ago:

> Instead of the brilliant autumn-postcard Carolina mountains, he seemed to see a weedy stretch of railroad right-of-way in a small Mississippi town...It was shaped like a bent triangle, the bend formed by the curve of tracks...Only once in his life had he ever set foot on this nondescript sector of earth. It was shortly after he had seen Ethel Rosenblum. (7)

Will then goes on to explain his relationship with Ethel. She is beautiful and smart, able to work the most complex algebraic equations, making sure they "factored out and cancelled and came down to unity, symmetry, beauty" (7). This unity is what Will and the Percy protagonist desires out of life, a unification or resolution of Percean dulaties: of place and non-place, immanence and transcendence, etc. Will asks: "Would not life itself prove so?" before saying, "No, as it turned out" (8). Yet Will's memory remains persistent, trying to reconcile all of his mind's oppositions, as well as his intersubjective

separation from Ethel Rosenblum. As Will explains, the two of them were academic competitors, she finishing as valedictorian and he as salutatorian. Now, Will still asks:

> Ethel, why is the world so designed that our very smartness and closeness keep us apart? Is it an unspoken pact? Is it an accursed shyness? Ethel, let's me and you homestead this left-over land here and now, this non-place, this surveyor's interstice. Here's the place for us, the only place not Jew or Gentile, not black or white, not public or private (8).

Will's desire echoes Sutter's from *The Last Gentleman*: an attempt at reconciling existential anxieties through a combination of human relationship/sexual encounter in a non-place. For Sutter, it was he and Rita out West; for Barrett, it is he and Ethel Rosenblum in an "unnamed unclaimed untenanted patch of weeds" (8). As he and Allie will say later with regard to the greenhouse: "Here's the place for us".

One must ask (and Rudnicki seems to have his doubts) whether this is a real place—a genuine option of "reentry" from the orbs of transcendence—or whether it is, like the Trav-L-aire from the previous Barrett novel, an unrealistic "in-between" or "Third Space". Elsewhere, Percy claims that "the best part of (Mark Twain's) *Huckleberry Finn* begins when Huck escapes from his old man's shack and ends when he leaves the river for good...he is on the Mississippi, which, during the entire journey, flows between states: he is neither in Illinois nor Missouri but in a privileged zone between the two" (MB 89-90). Yet again, Percy cannot expect one to remain, forever, on a river raft or a mobile home. He must, to use the analogy to Twain, eventually leave the raft. Will Barrett has left given up on rotations, left the raft, and settled in North Carolina—and it is debatable whether there are any stable and/or real homes here.

"You Never Even Looked"

The central tension of *The Second Coming* comes from Will Barrett's struggle to place himself (as all Percy protagonists try to do) but also, uniquely, overcome the vivid and haunting memories of his father's suicide as well as the particular adverse culture of "Christian Carolina". Though Percy briefly touched on the suicide of Will's father within *The Last Gentleman*, he returns to it much more frequently in *The Second Coming*. As Will comes out of his fugue states and now remembers everything, Percy is able to recount, in detail, the suicide. He is also able to establish Will's mission throughout the novel: to find a "third way" beyond or between that of his father and that of Christian Carolina:

> Why did he (Will) feel good? Was it because for the first time in his life he could suddenly see what had happened to his father, exactly where he was right and where he was wrong? Right: you said I will not put up with a life which is not life or death. I don't have to and I won't. Right, old mole, and if you were here in reborn Christian Carolina with its condos and 450 SELs and old folks rolling pills and cackling at Hee Haw, you wouldn't put up with that either.
>
> Ah, but what if there is another way? Maybe that was your mistake, that you didn't even look. That's the difference between us. I'm going to find out once and for all. You never even looked.
>
> Is there another way? People either believe everything or they believe nothing. People like the Christians or Californians believe anything, everything. People like you and Lewis Peckham and the professors and scientists believe nothing. Is there another way? (131-132)

It is worth noting that nearly all of Will's formerly repressed memories of his father return to the surface as Will becomes disillusioned with the Christian Caroliners and their way of life. Here, it is Jack Curl, a phony preacher ("God's own con man"). At other times, it is Lewis Peckham or Ewell McBee, other caricatured symbols of the New South's consumerism or religious fakery. Will cannot help wondering what his father—who, "one night after the war and during the Eisenhower years…taking a turn under the oaks", looked out on the Mississippi Delta and called its existence a "death in life"—would have thought of "rich Christian Carolina". To Will, the old way seems better than this, and yet the old way implies death, which he is unable to accept. Thus, in spite of Carolina in all its wealth and Christianity, Will becomes determined to live. He becomes Percy's "ex-suicide"—"a Quentin Compson who didn't commit suicide" (*Conversations*, 299-300) and returns to the South as a prodigal son.

It is also difficult not to think of Sutter Vaught from Will's preceding descriptions of his father. In *The Last Gentleman*, Will had remarked that where Sutter went wrong was in his extremes, his bifurcations—and here, too, Will shows animosity towards his father believing in only life or death and refusing to except something in between. So Will, then, has left behind Sutter as well as his father's extremities, yet the question still remains as to whether there is anything in-between, especially in "Christian Carolina".

Believers and Non-Believers

Throughout *The Second Coming*, Will deplores this "Christian Carolina", but here, it becomes necessary to define and analyze Will's gripes, both through his own words as well as Percy's non-fiction (the two being, of course, continuous). Will says:

> My quarrel…can be summed up as a growing disgust with two classes of people…the believers and the non-believers.
>
> Take Christians. I am surrounded by Christians. They are generally speaking a pleasant and agreeable lot, not noticeably different from other people… if they have the truth, why is it the case that they are repellant precisely to the degree they embrace and advertise that truth? One might even become a Christian if there were few if any Christians around…A mystery: If the good news is true, why is not one pleased to hear it? And if the good news is true, why are its public proclaimers such assholes and the proclamation itself such a weary used-up thing?...
>
> As unacceptable as believers are, unbelievers are even worse…(he) is crazy because he finds himself born into a world of endless wonders, having no notion how he got here, a world in which he eats, sleeps…and dies, and is quite content to have it so. Not once in his entire life does it cross his mind to say to himself that his situation is preposterous, that an explanation is due him and to demand such an explanation…No, he takes his comfort and ease, plays along with the game, watches TV, drinks his drink, laughs, curses politicians…
>
> It has taken me all these years to make the simplest discovery: that I am surrounded by two classes of maniacs. The first are the believers, who think they

know the reason why we find ourselves in this ludicrous predicament yet act for all the world as if they don't. The second are the unbelievers, who don't know the reason and don't care if they don't (188-190).

Barrett, then, is tired of Christians, who make up the majority of his community, for their obnoxious evangelism and advertising of their truth as "public proclaimers". They intertwine mass culture and their faith, using the former to spread the latter in inauthentic fashion. He is also repulsed by their lukewarmness, their being in the world and of the world and watching just as much TV as the non-believer. The non-believers, however, are even more insane because they do not ask questions, they do not search, and they never pay attention to the "mystery" that surrounds them. One extreme (the Christians) says they have "found", and yet they sell their faith and put it on license plates instead of actually practicing it. The other pole of humanity never really searches in the first place, but instead relies, in-authentically in Percy's mind, on the answers of scientific experts (as Barrett wanted to do with Sutter in *The Last Gentleman*). In light of this duality, it becomes easy to place the Percy protagonist: at least up to this point, he is somewhere in-between. He has asked questions, but without tangible answers. Binx and Will have been amazed by existence-- "the singularity of time and place"—enough to embark on searches, but their searches never really turn up anything. It seems, however, that the very culture in which they live is what *allows* them to embark on such searches in the first place. As Will says, "My belated discovery of the bankruptcy of both classes has made it possible for me to take action. Better late than never" (188).

Percy, in his non-fiction, agrees. In an essay entitled "Culture, the Church, and Evangelization", he analyzes U.S. culture within the context of Christian evangelism,

which, in modern times, has "certain impediments, *as well as* opportunities" (*SSL*, 295). With the rise of mass media, "all-pervasive consumerism", and the "ever-increasing secularization of (a) society" in which the common person continually seeks answers from scientists or experts instead of God, Percy admits that "it is indeed difficult to imagine a less hospitable environment for the Christian evangel" (296). Yet, at the same time, he believes that opportunities arise "from those very cultural traits which seem to oppose the evangel" (299). In other words, it becomes easier to preach Percy's Catholic faith to a world completely saturated and exhausted by secularization and an obsession with scientific explanations. He writes:

> ...this scientism, said Kierkegaard, explains everything under the sun except what it is to be a man, to live, and to die. Nor do the manifold delights of consumerism and six hours of TV a day change this state of affairs. Indeed, it is in the very face of this massive consumption of goods and this diversion by entertainment, either despite it or because of it, that psychiatrists...have remarked the ominous increase in the incidence of depression and suicide—to say nothing of the recourse to drugs. In a word, the consumer of mass culture is lonely, not only lonely but spiritually impoverished (302).

Binx Bolling and Will Barrett are not Christian evangels, of course. Binx treated God with irony and Will repeatedly asserted that he gave no thought to such matters. Yet due to "used-up" nature of both the physical landscape *and* scientific explanations for life on earth, it becomes possible not only for evangels to effectively preach the truth, but Percy's protagonists to really search for it. Perhaps this is why Binx said in *The Moviegoer* that he "secretly hoped for the end of the world", because "only after the end

could the few who survive creep out of their holes and discover themselves to be themselves and live as merrily as children among the viny ruins". Although he wondered whether it was too late to discover his identity or find answers to his search, Will says that it is not, that it is "better late than never".

The Cave

Thus, Barrett embarks on a search much more outrageous than that of Binx. It is no longer a horizontal, physical search like that of *The Last Gentleman*, but is instead a vertical or metaphysical search for God and religious meaning. More specifically, it is an "experiment" that comes out of a "great discovery": that his father's suicide was a waste. Because his father's death manifested itself out of his belief that nothing remains but life and death, and because it searched for nothing more/no "third way", "it availed nothing, proved nothing, solved nothing..." (182). Barrett, then, decides to actually answer the question, once and for all—to see whether there remains a worthwhile life for the man that decides *not* to kill himself (the ex-suicide). He decides that the rest of his life "shall be devoted to a search for the third alternative, a tertium quid—if there is one" (190, emphasis added).

Will compares his experiment to Blaise Pascal and his "wager", which claimed that God either existed or he did not—there was no third way—and it was better for one to believe in him than to not believe in him. The death of Will Barrett's father, however, showed the "frivolity" of Pascal's wager: one could still say "I'm having no part of any of you" and walk out. Will has discovered what he calls a "better way". He "shall go to the desert and wait for God to give a sign" as to whether he (God) exists. Specifically,

Barrett will not go to the desert, but place himself in a cave, concluding that if God indeed exists, he will save Will from the cave. "Madness! Madness! Madness!", the narrator cries. "Yet such was the nature of Will Barrett's peculiar delusion when he left his comfortable home atop a pleasant Carolina mountain and set forth on the strangest adventure of his life, descended into Lost Cove cave and looking for proof of the existence of God" (198).

It is important, again, to observe that Will is performing his experiment/ looking for answers in a largely manufactured locale, not all that different from the false escapes of the movie theater, the Trav-L-Aire, the triangular patch with Ethel Rosenblum, or TV. He is searching for God, but doing so by physically escaping. Lost Cove cave doubles as a site of historical significance, where Confederate soldiers once hid during battle, as well as a sort of manufactured, exaggerated amusement park that boasts the remains of an ancient saber tooth tiger in order to attract visitors. (It is also, perhaps, an ironic reference to the "Lost Cause".) This irony—that Will, as scientific observer, is solving once and for all the epistemological questions of mankind in an amusement-park cave—escapes Barrett, so Percy ups the irony. Will falls nauseous with a tooth-ache, an annoyance that eventually ends his experiment and drives him out of the cave.

As Allen Pridgen observes, this cave scene is a "rebirth" of sorts, in which Percy compares Will to a baby and the cave to a pod (4). In light of Percy's Catholic beliefs, one also recalls Christ in the tomb before the stone rolls away. No matter the symbolism, it is impossible to deny that Will is different when he paradoxically falls up into Allie's greenhouse. "Most importantly, Pridgen says, "he learns that 'there must be a place' to have a life and that place is not Lost Cove Cave and not the Thomasville swamp of his

memory". Thus, what Pridgen calls "part two" of the novel "chronicles Will's search for a 'place' in the realities of the sacramental world and among the people who share it with him" (4).

The author writes that "such (sacramental) imagery appears at the very beginning of *The Second Coming*, when we see Will playing a pleasant round of golf with his wealthy friends, insensitive to the sacramental signs in nature...he sees a 'low ridge of red maples...in the brilliant sunlight' that looks like a Pentecostal 'tongue of fire'...He is, however, incapable of discovering the sacramental significance of this observation" (3). Perhaps Will does miss something and does move inward, but this does not tell the whole story.

Returning to the cave, Pridgen is correct insofar as he observes that Barrett has learned that Lost Cove Cave is not a legitimate or real place to live. Yet assuming that only Barrett's ignorance (his rejection of nature's sacrament) kept him from discovering a worthwhile way of life in the South is limited, for it altogether ignores the transformation of the South in Barrett's (and Percy's) lifetime as well as the existential malaise of its consumerism. Pridgen views Barrett's golf-playing as pleasant, not a sign of consumer-escape. If it is true that "there must be a place" besides Lost Cove Cave and Thomasville, one must actually examine these locales (as the Percy protagonist does) in and of themselves to discover outward or physical reasons why they do not work. As Barrett comes out of his post-cave sickness, Percy gives the reader Barrett's vision of the gradual transformation of Thomasville, the site of Will's father's first (and unsuccessful) suicide attempt:

> He found himself in a certain place. It was a desert place. Weeds grew in the sand. Vines sprouted it the rocks. The place was a real place. Its exact location could be determined within inches by map coordinates...He had been there forty years earlier. Then the place had not been deserted. It was a spot near a stream which ran through a meadow...
>
> Then the spot became part of a country club, the exact patch of grass in the concavity of a kidney-shaped bunker on number-six fairway. For twenty years winter and summer thousands of golf balls, cart tires, spiked shoes crossed the spot...After twenty years the country club became a subdivision. The spot was the corner of a lot where a ranch-style house was built for a dentist named Sam Golf...After twenty-five years the subdivision became a shopping center, with a paved parking lot of forty acres. The spot was now located in the mall between the Orange Julius stand and the entrance to H&R Block. The mall was crowded with shoppers for twenty years. Now it was deserted...(276-277)

"There Is No Other Place for You"

One has to wonder just how "sacramental" the landscape of the apocalyptic vision above really is. After all, it is no different from Percy's earlier description of Linwood, except now all of the thriving and happy commercial enterprises are decayed and deserted. It is a "real" place, Percy says, but there is no one there. Lost Cove Cave and Thomasville, Georgia do not work for the same reason Santa Fe did not work: one is left abstracted and alone. In this day and age, Percy seems to be saying it is increasingly harder to find a place that works: a place that is both "real" and filled with people that

one must learn to bear. Consider Will's "conversation" with his father while still in the cave:

What am I doing down here under this earth with you, old mole?

Because there is no other place for you.

The hell there isn't.

Name one.

Atlanta?

No.

San Francisco?

No.

New Orleans?

No.

Santa Fe?

No.

Back home?

No.

Linwood in the beautiful fall?

No...

La Jolla?

No.

Nantucket?

No.

Georgia?

No.

What's wrong with these places?

They're all closed down.

There must be a place. (215-216)

It is unclear what is meant by "they're all closed down". (After all, this is only a hallucination, with Will imagining his father's words, so one wonders how seriously he can take this passage.) Yet the rest of Percy's fiction attests to the "closing down" of places—whether it be the literal closing of shopping centers and movie theatres or the metaphorical closing of pastoral-turned-commercial land and towns. Although Percy, perhaps, does not agree with the "extremities" of Will's father, it is clear that he is trying to make a point: in 1980, it is much harder to place one's self than it was in 1961. New Orleans, Binx's retreat, is an increasingly unviable option, as is the desert mirage of Santa Fe. Whether one is South (Atlanta), North (Nantucket), or West (La Jolla) does not seem to make much difference—or at least not as much difference as it once did.

To some extent, Will's father is right: there is no place for Will. Again, where Will's father goes wrong, however, is in his extremes—in this case, believing that life requires a sufficient place in which to live it, or that a sufficient place once existed (as implied by the notion that all places are *now* closed down). Ultimately, Will and Allie diverge from such beliefs, but not before trying one last place: Allie's greenhouse.

The Greenhouse

In the novel, Allie (like Will and Binx in previous novels) owns a piece of land. It is near the golf course, has long been deserted, and contains no proper living spaces. It does, however, contain a greenhouse, in which Allie has lived since leaving the psychiatric hospital. Upon leaving the cave, Will paradoxically "falls" upwards, into the greenhouse, where he and Allie subsequently fall in love and fill each other's insufficiencies (i.e. Will, who cannot forget anything, helps Allie remember). For the first time, they are able to really look at one another, speak with one another, and make love. They are both able to recognize the psychological and emotional benefits of living here forever. As Allie says, "Imagine having you around at four o'clock in the afternoon" (257). In many ways, they have created an Eden; they are Adam and Eve, alone on the earth and discovering one another as "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh". It is a fairy tale story which at least one critic, William Rodney Allen, finds potentially problematic. He explains:

> The problem with Percy's depiction of Will and Allie as poetic visionaries whose sanity appears as madness to an insane world lies in Percy's romantic willingness, for the most part, to allow his lovers to escape that world...His whole fiction has argued that man's condition is always one of alienation—in existential terms, that his freedom will always cause him anguish. In allowing Will and Allie to escape into a near-perfect world in his self-proclaimed "unalienated novel," Percy contradicts his earlier work: since Binx (as well as) Will in *The Last Gentleman*...end their struggles with ambiguous victories at best, the perfection

of Will's triumph appears suspect…this is just the sort of movie that Binx would have found inauthentic (Walker Percy: A Southern Wayfarer, 147)

If Percy's novel ended with Will and Allie in the greenhouse, his concerns would be legitimate; but the novel moves further, and as it does so, Will and Allie begin to see the problems or inauthenticity of life spent in a greenhouse. When Will sends Allie on an errand, to tell Dr. Battle, Will's physician, that he would like to see him, Dr. Battle says, "All right. Where is he?" Allie then replies, "'He is at my—'My what? '—place'" (249). She is hesitant in her response, for she knows that this is an abnormal way to live—a form of Eden-like escape that does not align with reality. Here, Percy again begins to outline a specific qualification for a "place": it must contain people. Yet people, as Allie explains, are the problem:

> Rather than go home to Williamsport, (Allie would) rather live in a stump hole even though her parents' home was not only registered with the National Registry but restored and written up in *Southern Living*. Rather than marry and have a life like her mother (Kitty) she'd rather join the navy and see the world. Why is a home the best place and the worst? How can the best place become the worst place? What is a home? A home is a place, any place, where one sinks into one's self and finds company waiting. Who's company? Oneself? Somebody else? That's the problem. The problem is not the house. People are the problem. (242)

Despite the fact that people are the problem—that the Christians are repulsive and so are the non-Christians—Will and Allie still believe (or at least know) that some form of community is essential for meaningful life. They still need to place themselves in a real place with real people. "I just realized something," Will says after he and Allie leave the

cave and temporarily take up at a Holiday Inn. "I don't have an address. I don't live anywhere…I should like eventually to have an address" (332). Allie, at first, is reluctant. "Let's leave now…the cave! Let's go in the cave!" Yet having tried the cave before, Will is finished with such locales the cave, the greenhouse, the triangular patch of grass with Ethel Rosenblum. He laughs, saying, "No. We don't have to go in the cave. The cave is over and done with. We can live up here. How would you like to begin your life?" (331)

A New Life

Thus, Will and Allie leave the Holiday Inn, and instead of retreating back into the cave or greenhouse, they begin to live an ordinary life just like Binx and the younger Barrett. As Allie earlier observed (and Binx before her), "the trick lay in leading the most ordinary life imaginable, get an ordinary job, in itself a joy in its very ordinariness, and then be as extraordinary or ordinary as one pleased" (247). For the soon-to-be-married couple, an ordinary life looks as follows: Will decides to take the North Carolina bar exam and become a clerk for a local law firm (334). In the meantime, Allie will continue growing plants in her greenhouse. "We'll find a villa or condo or a garden home", Will explains, and they also consider "perhaps build(ing) log cabins on ten- or twelve-acre plots…It would be a pleasant business" (343). These "plans" set the course for the rest of the novel, as Will and Allie set about recruiting various citizens of Linwood for their business.

One must ask, then, whether this novel, written nineteen years after *The Moviegoer*, is any different from its predecessors—whether Will Barrett discovers "something new under the sun" that his earlier self, or Binx, did not. With regard to

Will's aforementioned decision to "choose life" over his father's death, Allen remarks, "Making this simple pronouncement has been the goal of all of Percy's protagonists—the object of their search, their Holy Grail, their omega; Will's rejection of Thanatos and choice of life is the climax of Percy's fiction to date" (148). If this is true, one must ask why Will in *The Last Gentleman* and Binx of *The Moviegoer* did not find this "Holy Grail". After all, did they not also choose life over suicide?

The answer is that Will had to first look (physically) everywhere. He had to complete a physical Pascal's wager of sort; if there was a place, he was going to find it, once and for all. After recognizing the attractiveness as well as the pitfalls of a myriad of places (and non-places), and the pros and cons of immanence and transcendence. Then, despite the religious fakery of the Sun Belt South, he had to decide to settle down at all costs, once and for all defeating the temptation to flee or succumb to his father's model of suicide in *The Last Gentleman*; and then seeing the physical beauty and religious fakery of Sun Belt Southerners, Will has finally decided to "settled down" at all costs. "I'm not going back to Georgia," (297) Will says, "it's not going to end like this or in a Georgia swamp either because I won't stand for it and don't have to" (297-298). In so doing, Will gives up on physical place and finds his identity/dwelling elsewhere. For him, kissing Kitty becomes "like entering a new and happy *land*" and a "sweetness" in the "deep *regions*" (328, emphasis added). "Is it possible that there is such a life...as a life of smiling ease with someone else and the sweetness for you deep in me and play and frolic and dear sweet love the livelong day, even at four o'clock in the afternoon turning the old yellow green-glade lonesomeness into being with you at ease not a being with you at unease?" Kitty asks in the end, to which Binx responds, "Yes, it's possible" (329).

Yet Percy, even here, does not specify *where* this life is possible, leaving one to conclude that there is, in fact, a Third Way, but not a Third Place or Space. The Third Way is, as mentioned earlier, a choice of life over death, and a choice to dwell in a real community at a real address. Moreover, in Percy's mind, one must demand to have all of the above, as well as God. "Am I crazy to want both, her (Allie) and Him? No, not want, must have. And will have" (359). Where the Percy protagonist goes wrong is focusing too much on his alienation in time and place and trying to place himself within them. Others, he sees, choose extremes. He must, then, go one step beyond this recognition and see that the answer to meaningful life and self-placement lies outside these extremes and not in-between them.

Conclusion: The Centre Does Not Hold

"The values that we attach to mass culture have much to do with whether we think ourselves at the end of empire, at the dawn of a new age, on the forefront of progress, or just muddling through…Mass culture can represent both the cutting edge of progress and the decline of civilization…(It is) both problem and promise, and its insistent presence urges us to look backward to either a lost age or a time of drudgery and deprivation, forward to either paradise or disaster" (Simmons 1)

In light of the transition of Walker Percy's fictional landscape—from a world of juxtaposition between the Garden District and the suburbs, to a world in which mass consumerism has completely taken over—it is interesting to ask which it is for Percy, paradise or disaster. Indeed, his sharp critiques (and at times, satire) of the West, Midwest, North, and New South—as well as his increasingly apocalyptic tone—would leave one to assume that the world of Happy Hikers and M*A*S*H spells disaster. Yet as previously seen, Percy views the bombed-out landscape of postmodernism with optimism—that only after the emptiness of engagement in mass culture will one look out and up instead of inward or at a television set. It is late, of course, but "better late than never".

When describing the roles and goals of the novelist, Percy once said, "To tell the truth, I don't see how any serious fiction-writer or poet can fail to be moral and edifying…since he or she cannot fail to be informed by his own deep sense of the way things should be or should not be" (*SS*, 379). Rarely does Percy show how life *should* be, but in every novel he shows how it *should not*. His novels, then, become processes of elimination. They show everywhere that the Third Place is not: on the one hand, places of

"geographical transcendence", in which one easily falls into the accompanying traps of science and what Percy calls the "Berkeley-Cambridge axis", or else places mired in "the virtues of rootedness in place and time...a secret relishing and romanticizing of defeat and tragedy" (166). The author believes that none of these supposed virtues will "be much use in a burgeoning Sunbelt of agribusiness, superdomes, condos, and high-rises" (*SS*, 165-166). Indeed, he questions whether such "virtues attributed to the Southern Renascence are valid", and whether they ever *were* valid. In fact, he questions whether the "Old South" as the modern Southerner views it ever really existed (*SS*, 165).

Percy says that the first writer to see through the façade of Southern immanence was William Faulkner, who led Quentin Compson in *The Sound in the Fury* to discover his "final solution, not in Yoknapatawpha County...a Southern locale drenched in history and tragedy, in placidness, but rather in a nonplace, wandering around the back streets of a bland Boston suburb, almost as faceless and featureless a place as a set of map coordinates" (*SS*, 163). Percy believes: "If Quentin Compson's suicide was the failure or refusal to live in a place and in time and in history, it was at least a recognition of the problem" (165).

Percy, then, takes Quentin Compson a step further. As mentioned earlier, he is interested in portraying the Quentin Compson that does not commit suicide. Percy does not believe in death-in-life, but he also does not believe in death—thus, Will Barrett, and Walker Percy, chooses life. The novelist's real challenge, Percy claims, is "to affirm life, not only the lives of poor white people and poor black people in the Georgia countryside and in Mississippi towns and hamlets...but even life in a condo on a golf course" (167). To Percy, there is "life" in all of these places, in Mississippi and in Georgia, but none of

them necessarily holds the answer to *the* Life, the Third Way, any more than Barrett's Trav-L-Air, Binx's Gentilly, or Allie's greenhouse. The answer to the "final solution" does not lie in the idyllic Old South, the "Southwest, the Dallas-Vegas-L.A. axis", or the consumerism of the New South—the "economic victory of the Sunbelt and the ongoing Los Angelization of the Southern community" (*SS*, 166). Percy evens the physical and racial playing field. It may be harder to find the Third Way in Santa Fe than in Mississippi--for out West, one becomes abstracted by lack of community and the temptation to fall into what Percy calls "scientism"--but it still may be found anywhere.

Secondly, the Percy protagonists must avoid the temptation to spend his entire life *balancing* these oppositions—like Sutter, trying to immanence *and* transcendence in one. As Rudnicki says, "Percy was very much interested in the *inadequacy* and *irreconcilability* of the two prevailing modern ontologies of mankind…the transcendent…and the immanent" (21, emphasis added). His characters, then, are left "confused when neither…suffices" (32), as well as when a *balance* of the two (i.e. sex in a non-place) proves insufficient and irreconcilable.[5] Forced to look elsewhere, the answer, then, lies in living the most ordinary life imaginable, with people and with God. As Scott Romine says, to Percy, "meaning has deserted the social (and physical) world and can be conceived only in otherworldly—specifically, religious—terms. Connection requires not a set of givens (or physical locations) but a leap of faith vehemently and explicitly objecting to the…sins of the fathers" (201, parentheses added). This quote perhaps best summarizes Percy's aims, for it combines horizontal and vertical searches as

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[5] Put another way, Rudnicki says, "Understandably, (W.B.) Yeats's claim in "The Second Coming" that 'the centre cannot hold' made an impression on Percy" (23). I have used this observation as the basis for my selection of this Yeats quote to introduce my thesis, as well as my choice of title for this concluding chapter.

well as a rejection of the temptation to look back. Always didactic, and always diagnosing, the lesson of the Percy novel may be summarized as follows: avoid ricocheting around the globe, thinking that finding a certain place on that globe will bring life. Moreover, avoid that globe's traps of transcendence and immanence; within them is life-in-death, not life. Settle down, bear with people, live a life and marry a wife, and demand God and love.

It may seem as if I have only said what other critics have said of Percy before: that his ultimate answers are "other-wordly". However, no author has ever undergone a thorough, novel-by-novel examination of the inadequacy of place, sense of place, and that place's geographical transcendence or immanence. Some have done so with regard to semiotics, such as Rudnicki, who concludes: "Thus ultimately the raison d' etre of Percy's interest in semiotics was not linguistic but spiritual" (32). Yet none have fully done so with regard to place. I believe that it is impossible to see Percy's final answers for what they are *without* doing so; for, again, the goal of his novels is to show everywhere that the Third Place is not and everything that the Third Way is not. Percy shows, repeatedly, where mankind goes wrong in order that he may convince the reader that he knows the way to put him "back together again". I close with quotations from two of Percy's novels, *Lancelot* and *Love in the Ruins*, the first of which fictionalizes the author's most radical example of searching in the wrong *places*. The protagonist, this time the antithesis of Binx-Will, says:

> It will all be settled...in Virginia, where it started...Don't you see? Virginia is neither North or South but both and neither. Betwixt and Between. An island between two disasters...The Virginian? He may not realize it yet, but he is the last

> hope of the Third Revolution. The First Revolution was won at Yorktown. The Second Revolution was lost at Appomatox. The Third Revolution will begin there, in the Shenandoah Valley (219-220).

In *Love in the Ruins*, Tom More, another Percy protagonist just like Binx and Barrett, "barely evades this temptation" to "wallow in nostalgia for a past that never existed" (Makowsky 7) and instead says to his lover:

> What needs to be discharged is the intolerable tenderness of the past, the past gone and grieved over and never made sense of…Start a new life, get a girl, look into her shadowy eyes, smile. Fix me a toddy, Lola, and we'll sit on the gallery…and you play a tune and we'll watch evening fall and lightning bugs wink in the purple meadow (321).

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