universität wien

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE AND MAJOR THEMES IN WALKER PERCY'S *THE MOVIEGOER* AND *THE LAST GENTLEMAN*

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2018 / Vienna 2018

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt / degree programme code as it appears on the student record sheet:	A 066 844
Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt / degree programme as it appears on the student record sheet:	Masterstudium Anglophone Literatures and Cultures
Betreut von / Supervisor:	Ass.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Dieter Fuchs

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1. INTRODUCTION

The target of this paper is to provide an analysis of Walker Percy's first two novels *The Moviegoer* (1961), and *The Last Gentleman (*1966). Although the particular interest is in the major themes and narrative techniques of both novels, substantial information on their settings, plots, and main characters will be presented as well.

The first section reveals the aim of this paper and summarizes its contents briefly.

Providing some information on the Percys, the second section depicts the Percy family tree and presents Walker Percy's life and personality. As Eric Voegelin's philosophy of scientism and Charles Saunders Peirce's philosophical study of signs are vital to understand Percy's motives, both these figures and their respective philosophies are presented in two different subsections. Besides, there is a subsection on stoicism since Percy was heavily influenced by his paternal uncle William Alexander Percy's stoic attitude. *The Origins of Walker Percy, Suicide and Transformation, Coming to Oneself and Scientism, Religion and Existentialism, Stoicism,* and *Percy's Works* are the subsections to introduce respectively.

The third section, then, focuses on the philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Descartes, and Freud and elucidates their philosophies since the analysis will be principally based on their philosophical concepts. In addition, a subsection on the author Dostoevsky presents some information on the confessional mode of writing to indicate the same style in both novels. Both in sections two and three, philosophers are introduced along with their philosophies and some of their analyses of the novels. Thus, all their findings mentioned in these sections are considered to constitute the part of the main analysis.

The fourth and fifth sections concentrate on both the novels respectively, e.g. their structures, plots, major and minor characters, and main themes. In light of the theoretical information under sections two and three, the findings will be presented during the analysis of the characters and themes. Besides, some new theoretical information will also be mentioned to introduce either the themes and some of the characters or an opposing view. As regards the minor characters,

only the most important and relevant ones will be the focus of attention for the sake of brevity.

The sixth section is the conclusion of this paper, in which the general overview of the entire paper is summarized concisely.

2. WALKER PERCY

This section is comprised of seven subsections providing some relevant information on Percy's biography, his personality and his philosophical conception of the world to make the reader understand the underlying logic and assumptions of the comprehensive analysis in this paper. Within the last subsection, the list of Percy's works will be mentioned briefly.

2.1 The Origins of Walker Percy

The following family tree depicts the known members of the Percy family (Tolson-Table of Contents).

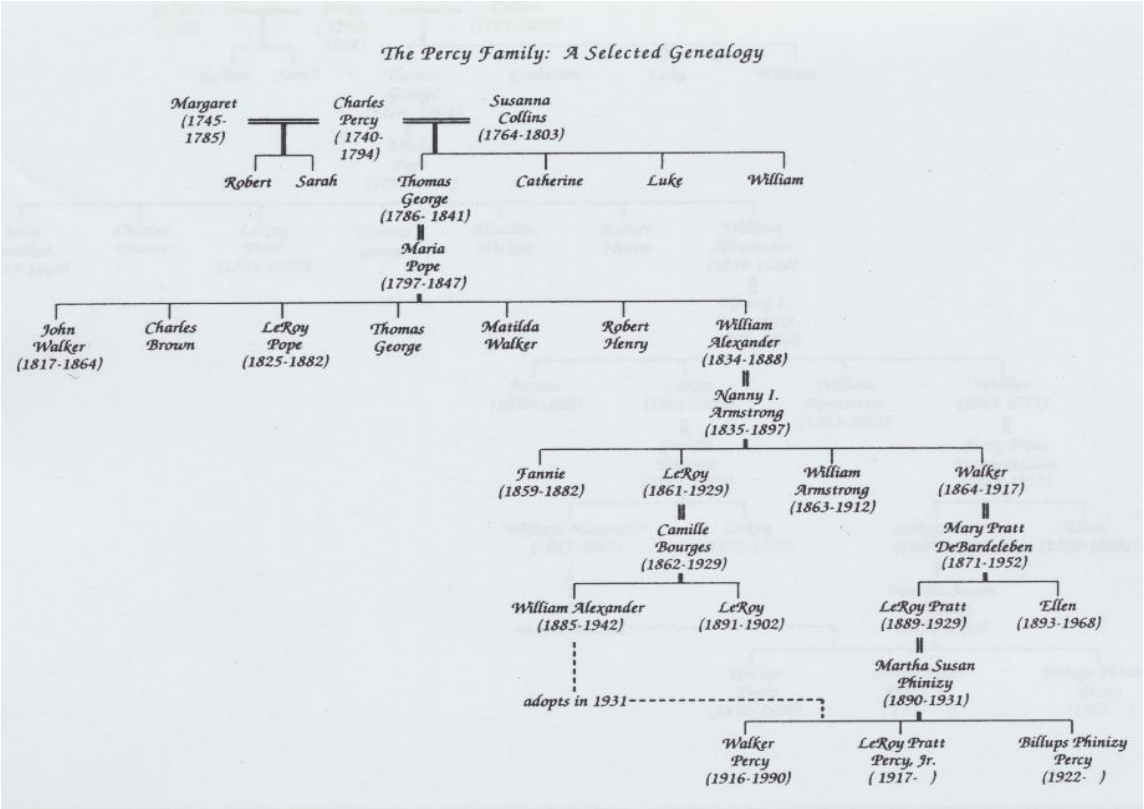

Fig. 1 depicts the genealogy of the Percy family

Having been making his fortune in the Deep South from 1776 onwards, Charles Percy, a former British Navy lieutenant[1], started the history of the Percy family in

[1]According to the information in *Old Families of Louisiana*, a compilation book to present the genealogical records of the foundation families of the State of Louisiana, it was not Charles Percy who was a naval lieutenant but his son Robert. Charles was an army officer and his son Robert was hailed by "the Right Honorable Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty" as a result of his successful career as commander (Arthur and Huchet de Kernion 183).

Mississippi, previously belonging to the Spanish. Soon this upper-class family became part of the landed nobility of the South with some Confederate leaders and a United States senator being its distinguished and reverent members. Walker Percy was born in 1916[2] to a wealthy family with such a rich and elite heritage. He was eleven years old when he had to endure the agonies of his father's suicide; two years later, his mother died in a tragic car accident, thereby leaving her three children orphaned. Upon losing both their parents, Percy and his two younger brothers were adopted and raised by William Alexander Percy, a confirmed bachelor and the U.S. senator's son. Although called "Uncle Will" by the orphaned Percy brothers, he was, in fact, a cousin of their deceased father's. Having received a degree from Harvard Law School, William Alexander Percy was not only a lawyer but also a gentleman planter; in addition, with his works being published, he was both a prominent essayist and a renowned poet. Frequently visited by acclaimed writers and poets in his Greenville, Mississippi home, he was a recognized figure of his time. One of his closest friends William Faulkner, who used to play tennis on his court from time to time, was amongst these well-known visitors.

As an undergraduate major studying chemistry "at the University of North Carolina," Walker Percy became involved in literary activity; in other words, he produced several articles for the university's literary magazine. Following his graduation in 1937, he entered the Columbia Medical School and received a medical degree in 1941. The same year, Dr. Percy started to work as an intern at Bellevue Hospital in New York; unfortunately, he caught pulmonary tuberculosis while doing a post-mortem on a tuberculous body. During the subsequent recovery period, Percy devoted himself to intensive reading and reflection; consequently, he shifted his direction from medicine towards writing (Dewey 101).

2.2 Suicide and Transformation

Melancholic disposition of the Percy family led to suicide in almost every generation:

[2] Walker Percy was born in Birmingham, Alabama on May 28, 1916 and died in Covington, Louisiana on May 10, 1990 (Edwards Online Review).

> One Percy man dosed himself with laudanum; another leaped into a creek with a sugar kettle tied around his neck. John Walker Percy – Walker Percy's grandfather – went up to the attic in 1917 and shot himself in the head. LeRoy Pratt Percy – Walker Percy's father – committed suicide in 1929 in precisely the same manner. […] Three years later Mrs. Percy[3] died in a car accident, driving off the road and into a creek, where she drowned. Walker Percy, now nearly sixteen, was riding in a car not far behind; he leaped out, but bystanders kept him from seeing the accident site firsthand. He and his brothers were now orphans – their mother's accident was a suicide, some said[4] – and William Alexander Percy adopted them (Elie 10).

After quoting some parts of the preceding paragraph, Kaplan states that Percy's fictional works reflect the tragic history of his family, because both his grandfather and his father committed suicide in the same way and because Percy believed that his mother's driving her car into a stream was by intention rather than by accident. Hence, in all of Percy's six novels, there exists at least one suicidal main character who attempts or commits suicide (340).

Likewise, in her review of Patrick Samway's book, Scullin uses the term "depressive, suicidal strain in the genes" to refer to the self-murder of Walker Percy's ancestors. Having lost both his parents when he was a teenager, Percy started to look for satisfactory answers to "life's large questions". Regarding science as the only precise way to devise a solution to his painstaking search, he majored in chemistry and finished medical school. Having contracted tuberculosis which could have killed him at a young age, he turned his attention to reading novels and philosophical writings.[5] Under the life-changing influence of Kierkegaard, he underwent a radical transformation: he understood that science could be a possible solution to the ongoing quests of human beings according as they formed a social group or became members of the same class. However, to understand the importance of being a self and to find a solution for living a meaningful life, a simple individual should not let any patterns shape his life. Such transformative ideas reshaped Percy's worldview, and so after some aimless years, he found out what he really had to do: in his first novel *The Moviegoer*, the language of the protagonist Binx Bolling demonstrates Percy's new duty as a talented human being in the following lines (31): "There is only one thing I can

[3] On July 9, 1929 LeRoy Percy committed suicide and Martha Susan Percy died on April 2, 1932. Lawson gives a detailed account of Percy's family history (58).
[4] According to Samway, Walker Percy had the impression that his mother committed suicide (Samway, qtd. in Scullin 31).
[5] See Pridgen 18-19 for the similar information.

do: listen to people, see how they stick themselves into the world, hand them along on their dark journey and be handed along, and for good and selfish reasons" (See *The Moviegoer* 233).[6]

Percy considered entering into a marriage, converting to the Catholic faith, and being a writer as the essential virtues so that he could hold on to his life. Having based his life upon such merits and having had allegiance to a stoic mindset[7], Percy not only resisted the genetic tendency toward suicide but also had the opportunity of living his own life (Scullin 31).

In 1947, Percy and his beloved spouse Mary Bernice converted to Roman Catholicism. It was very plausible that a man like Percy cannot remain indifferent to Catholicism because of the unfortunate events of his life. The rites of the Catholic church such as confession, penance, repentance and the prayer of absolution were some of the reasons for Percy's conversion. Because he underwent a tragic family history with apparent and possible suicides, he felt the urge to fight against active tuberculosis, he passionately wanted to find his life's mission, and he longed for more meaning in his life (Desmond 126-127).[8]

Scullin finalizes her article as follows: "One could view the conversion event as both the center of Percy's own life and the paradigm for his novels, in which not only the protagonist but also the readers are led toward a transformation of consciousness" (35).
The themes of marriage and religion[9] will be analyzed in the following pages of this paper under the appropriate heading.

2.3 Coming to Oneself and Scientism

Having contracted tuberculosis, Percy had a treatment in a sanatorium for three long years, making him lose his function as a doctor; subsequently, he regarded

[6] See Scullin 31 for the same quotation.
[7] That Percy supported Stoicism in the agrarian South in the 19th century is mentioned by Lawson in his article (5).
[8] *The difference between a Genius and Apostle* is an essay written by Kierkegaard. Influenced by this essay, Percy decided to convert to Catholicism (Cousineau 156).
[9] Towards the end of Percy's earlier novels, the anticipation of marriage of the male protagonists, which is supposed to save them from meaninglessness, serves as a critical moment in their pilgrimage (Dubus 1977: 86-88, qtd. in Grubgeld 60). One could suggest that marriage and religion could be regarded as inextricably intertwined themes.

reading as a means of expressing his existence. During his high school and college years, he had always read voraciously for diversion and tried some writing exercises to improve his writing skills. After contracting tuberculosis, however, he started to read widely again, so that he could understand the reason for his health condition caused by the disease. Satisfied though he was with scientific publications, Percy noticed that he, in fact, had not yet read such books whose findings had blended scientific reasoning into his personal experiencing of life. Thus, he engaged in reading the works of some existentialist authors and philosophers like "Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Heidegger, Marcel, Jasper, Bergson, Sartre, Camus and Buber".[10] Devotedly following the consensual rationalist views of these principal exponents of existentialism, Percy had mastered the art of observing every single thing in detail as if looking through a microscope. Owing to his life-threatening illness, Percy turned this imaginary microscope to himself, and therefore realized his objectivity. Furthermore, Percy understood the fact that he, in fact, was a suffering individual doomed to perish; consequently, he recovered his capacity for sound judgement, which can be paraphrased as ""coming to oneself,"" a philosophical notion existing in all his novels (Lawson 1985: 506).

Percy regarded scientific method as a series of systematic and orderly steps and sincerely trusted its precision; nevertheless, he underwent a change of ground, a widening of intellectual horizons, and a shift of focus during his long-term treatment in a sanatorium, settled in the Adirondack Mountains[11](Percy 1991: 188, qtd. in Rosenberg 216).

Percy was hospitalized at Trudeau Sanatorium with severe pneumonia. Figure 2 below, which was taken from the Internet, shows Percy with his friends.

[10] See Delaney 153, Rosenberg 216, Lacy 53, and Coles xvii for the similar information. Some of these philosophers and their philosophical approaches will be mentioned later in this paper under the appropriate heading.
[11] Percy was hospitalized at "Trudeau Sanatorium at Saranac Lake" (Pridgen 18).

Fig. 2 depicts Percy at Trudeau Sanatorium with his friends.

Reading the works of world-renowned philosophers and authors made him not only less absorbed in the pathological conditions and physiological functions of the human organism but also more involved in complex questions related to the human nature and eventual fate of the individual soul. Heidegger's portrait of the predicament of human beings driven into a technological community of modern world attracted Percy's attention (Percy 1991: 188, qtd. in Rosenberg 216). In his essay, *Signposts*, Percy writes as follows:

> If the first great intellectual discovery of my life was the beauty of the scientific method, surely the second was the discovery of the singular predicament of man in the very world which has been transformed by science. An extraordinary paradox became clear: that the more science progressed, and even as it benefitted man, the less it said about what it was like to be a man living in the world. Every advance in science seemed to take us further from the concrete here-and-now in which we live (Percy 188).[12]

[12] See Rosenberg 216 for the same quotation.

Influenced by Voegelinian philosophy, Percy challenged in his novels the maxims of scientism by incarnating the ideas of Voegelin; as a result, there exist close affinities between their writings (Kaplan 352). Scientism[13] is a philosophy by which the entire objective knowledge is acquired through empirical evaluation and therefore stems from "the modern scientific method." Eric Voegelin expressed his strong disapproval of this philosophy during his lectures at the University of Chicago in 1951. His trenchant criticism of this worldview could be traced back to a 1948 article, ""*The Origins of Scientism*,"" where he presented both the definition and the main principles of the term in the following lines:

> (1) The assumption that the mathematized science of natural phenomena is a model science to which all other sciences ought to conform; (2) that all realms of being are accessible to the methods of sciences of phenomena; and (3) that all reality is not accessible to sciences of phenomena is either irrelevant or, in the more radical form of the dogma, illusionary (Voegelin, *Essays 1940-1952* 168-69, qtd. in Kaplan 352).

For Voegelin, the philosophy of scientism as a worldview not only misconceived reality but also led to harmful and destructive political effects. With its extremely political tone, Voegelin, in his essay, states his warnings as follows: ""Once the scientistic pathos has penetrated the education institutions of a society, it has become a social force… a force that actively prevents the cultivation of human substance and corrodes the surviving elements of cultural tradition still further"" (Voegelin, *Essays 1940-1952* 193, qtd. in Kaplan 352). His complaints against "political scientists" and their scientific approach for the conduct of positivist inquiry are highly conspicuous in his lectures given in 1951 (Voegelin, *Essays 1940-1952*, qtd. in Kaplan 352).

Being successfully applied to the latest scientific innovations, technology established the modern doctrine whose principles should govern all types of inquiry; accordingly, the scientistic philosophy claimed other forms of knowing to be neither valid nor coherent. Not comprehended properly, however, this philosophy becomes a pernicious worldview since it harms both the essentials of human existence and humans' understanding of the individual in society. Although supposed to become a bridge for humanity to reach the Divinity via the

[13] Rosenberg defines scientism as the "exaggerated faith in science" (215).

"*eros* of knowledge", both positivism and scientism prevented humankind from achieving this goal (Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint* 90, qtd. in Kaplan 352-353). Voegelin explains the reason as follows:

> This situation was created through the positivistic conceit that only propositions concerning facts of the phenomenal world were "objective," while judgments concerning the right order of the soul and society were "subjective." Only propositions of the first type could be considered "scientific," while propositions of the second type expressed personal preferences and decisions, incapable of critical verification and therefore devoid of objective validity (*Modernity without Restraint* 90, qtd. in Kaplan 353).

The scientistic worldview values reason and fact above faith and belief. According to Voegelin, this major split started to become evident during the last third part of the nineteenth century; consequently, those "philosophical and theological" concepts, having previously contributed to the progress of natural science, began to lose their gravity and importance, resulting in a new worldview from which a substantial number of people of science started to receive their meaning (*Essays 1966-1985* 25, qtd. in Kaplan 353).

Though attempting to provide a solution for this thorny problem in their writings, Voegelin and Percy intended neither to doubt the accuracy nor to undermine the credibility of modern or natural science. After all, Percy was an educated medical doctor (Kaplan 352-53).

Percy considered neither science nor its adaptation to technology problematic. For him, the trouble was lying not only in the misunderstanding of the authentic purpose of science but also in its scope. Percy continues as follows: ""The scientist, in practicing the scientific method, cannot utter a single word about an individual thing or creature insofar as it is an individual but only insofar as it resembles other individuals. This limitation holds true whether the individual is a molecule of NaCl or an amoeba or a human being."" Having achieved enormous popularity, phrases such as ""personhood"" and ""self-realization"" cause problems for science in the present century because it has been impossible for science to say anything about ""what it is like to be an individual living in the United States in the twentieth century"" (Percy 1991: 210-11, qtd. in Kaplan 354-55).

Just like Voegelin, Percy claims that this problem has not been caused by science itself but by a worldview denying the relevance of any type of human knowledge that cannot be examined either in rigidly empirical or in mathematical terms (Kaplan 355). Mentioning the very same problem in depth during the Jefferson Lecture in 1989, Percy's last public conference, Percy describes the ""fault in the modern mind"" as follows: When a student, for example, attends the Psychology 101 classes, ""here is what one studies or at least hears about—and I mention only those items most familiar to sophomores: neurons, signals, synapses,… brain, mind, personality, self, consciousness."" While the set of the first four expressions refers to measurable or visible realities, the other set of last four consists of realities which are neither quantitative objects nor observable energy transfers. Having placed the gap between these two groups, Cartesian philosophy manifested itself with its own solution; however, many modern individuals remained indifferent not only to this gap but also to how to cross it. Quoting a statement from a psychology book, Percy writes as follows: ""What can a psychological psychology say about human self-awareness? We know that it is altered by changes in the structure or chemistry of the brain. We conclude that consciousness is a psychological function, just like behaviour."" Regarding the following remarks with despondency, Percy criticizes as follows: ""To say that mind is a property or function of the organization of the brain is like saying that Raphael's *Orleans Madonna* is a property of paint and color."" Unable to understand the limits of its engagement with science and unable to acknowledge the fact that other disciplines might describe the notions like "*self* and *mind*" in a different way, natural science is cursed to oversimplify physically unmeasurable realities. According to Percy, scientistic philosophy, unfortunately, regarded its shortcomings as a plausible way to explain reality, for its exaggerated universality cannot conceal its limited knowledge. (Percy 1991: 273-75, qtd. in Kaplan 355). Connecting scientism not only to modernity but also to the possibly destructive effects of scientistic reasoning, both Voegelin and Percy consider the scientistic philosophy as an obstacle preventing what they regard as more feasible comprehension of humankind in its self-conscious connection to the universe (Kaplan 355).

2.4 Religion and Existentialism

Percy, associating himself with the Catholic philosopher Gabriel Marcel, reports that he would not object to being seen as "a philosophical Catholic existentialist". Seeing that "the term existentialist" has been abused so much, Percy claims that it signifies now very little of its original meaning (Percy qtd. in Nagy 73). It could be said that straightforward as he is, Percy wants to emphasize an underlying aspect, i.e. the science-induced loss of philosophical meaning, which can be found in both *The Moviegoer* and *The Last Gentleman*.[14]

The existentialist philosophy from the 19th century onwards, characterized by its European, Christian, and secular features, caught Percy's undivided attention. To achieve expertise in this existentialist tradition, Percy spent many years scrutinizing the works of European philosophers and authors. Consequently, he transferred their ideas to the United States by incorporating them into his prose, so that he could show his readers how much does this tradition exert an effect on a day-to-day life anywhere in all fifty states. Not only did Percy occupy himself with evocative translation of philosophical masterpieces: as a scientist, Percy integrated a prevalent Christian existentialism into the traditions of American pragmatism and empiricism (Coles xvi-xvii).

While comparing Cormac McCarthy's *Suttree* to Percy's *The Last Gentleman*, Yarbrough states that by making references to *The Last Gentleman,* McCarthy' both introduces and develops "the concept of Christian existentialism" in his novel (116). Actually, Percy once argued that he preferred the fiction form to convey his ideas just like "Jean-Paul Sartre and Gabriel Marcel," for he had already arrived at a decision that his thoughts and ideas were along the same lines of the existentialist philosophy just like theirs (Westarp 1991: ix, qtd. in Yarbrough 106). Quoting Percy, Yarbrough writes about Percy's works and especially his novel *The Last Gentleman* as follows:

> Like other works by Percy, *The Last Gentleman* at least somewhat puts Kierkegaard's systematic response to existential malaise[15] into play. The protagonist Will Barrett stands, in some ways, for all of alienated, isolated

[14] On pages 29 and 30 of this paper, the devaluation of language is mentioned, e.g. words were emptied out, the vocabulary of Christianity is worn out.
[15] That Percy lost both his parents at a young age is the reason of his pervasive existential angst (Giemza 19).

> humankind; in an interview Percy tells us that Will is what Christian existentialist Marcel calls the "sovereign wayfarer" (II). Percy further points out Barrett's archetypal existentialist characteristics, noting that Will is "a man in a desperate quest in his own soul, for his own identity" (III) (106).

Having read the works of "Marcus Aurelius, Blaise, Pascal, Søren Kierkegaard, and others," Percy became much more interested in Christian existentialism, which equipped *The Moviegoer* with its driving force, therefore (Lacy 53).

As Christian authors, both Percy and Flannery O'Connor shared similar worries and concerns about the unpleasant modern world in which they had to live (Chesnick 6). Flannery O'Connor, living between 1925 and 1964, was regarded as not only one of America's most leading novelists but also one of the most passionate advocates of "Roman Catholicism" in the preceding century (www.georgiaencyclopedia.org).

Another distinguished American writer from the twentieth century is Eudora Welty[16] from Jackson, Mississippi. She produced both novels and short stories; in her literary works, she concentrated on the provincial manners of people living in a little Mississippi town such as her hometown and "the Delta country" (www.britannica.com). Both Welty and Percy[17] attended high school in Mississippi, "Welty in Jackson and Percy in Greenville". On May 26, 1988, Percy was given the literary award for *The Thanatos Syndrome* and Welty earned "the Lifetime Achievement Award" (Samway 1).

In an in-depth interview with Eudora Welty, Samway presents some relevant information on Percy's Catholicism and religious sensitivity:

> PS: I was thinking, too, in terms of Walker's Catholicism.
>
> EW: I know you were. Walker and I never talked about it.
>
> PS: Do you see his Catholicism coming through his works?
>
> EW: How do I know if I see it or not? I feel too ignorant to spot or honestly see that aspect of his work. I am certainly interested, but I do not know how

[16] Hobson regards O'Connor, Percy and Eudora Welty as the dominantly influential authors on the other "southern writers in the two last decades of the twentieth century" (Hobson qtd. in O'Gorman 97- 98).

[17] Whether Percy is a mainstream southern writer or not remains a difficult question to answer. Different from most of them, Percy is "much more than just a southern writer" due to his direct writing style and "nonsense kind of attitude" (Welty, qtd. in Samway 13).

to critique that.

PS: Maybe not his Catholicism as such, but his religious sensibility, which makes his writings a bit unusual, especially in a southern literary tradition.

EW: Of course it does, though Caroline and Allen and especially Flannery did something similar in their works. You know that Flannery wanted to shout to those who were deaf.

PS: Because Walker was not a cradle Catholic, I think he accepted his new-found religion in a strong, fervent way.

EW: That often happens, doesn't it? But weren't there Catholics in his family, though? In previous generations?

PS: Yes.

EW: Walker didn't grow up ignorant of Catholicism is what I meant.

PS: William Alexander Percy, his first-cousin-once-removed, had been baptized a Catholic.

EW: Yes, I knew that (9-10).

After reading the above excerpt of the interview, one could claim that just like O'Connor, Percy wanted to address his remarks to blasphemous and atheistic people; therefore, he doggedly attempted making them devout and true believers.

As an existentialist, psychologist, and devout Catholic not only does Percy focus on the mechanics of the human soul, but he also considers all those circumstances in which constant awareness of God's presence may occupy minds (Sykes, Jr. 2007: 118, qtd. in Rosenberg 211).

Analyzed in view of Buckley's influential masterpiece about the relentless ascent of modern atheism, Percy's works, indeed, offer a unique contribution to the debate on religious knowledge. Having mentioned the acquisition of characteristically religious types of knowledge, Buckley produced inquisitive and instructive literature through which one may discover and interpret the works of Walker Percy. What Buckley tried was prove the insufficiency of all those efforts to justify belief in God through science. Besides mentioning religious reasoning as the primary source of the human quest for "meaning and truth," Buckley has disclosed concrete, historical holiness, thereby providing his readers with a lens through which they can understand how much Percy contributed to "the question of religious intellectuality" in the present age (Rosenberg 211).

2.5 Stoicism

Emerging as an ancient Greek philosophy, Stoicism was first articulated in Athens by Zeno of Citium, present-day Cyprus, around the third century BCE. Exposed to the influences of both the Cynics and Socrates, it partook in heated discussions with “the Skeptics, the Academics, and the Epicureans.” The forerunners of this philosophical movement used to meet each other at “the Stoa Poikile,” i.e. the painted porch, where they explain their opinions to the folk; therefore, they identified as the Stoics. After having moved to Rome, where it thrived, Stoicism was received wholeheartedly by some Emperors like Marcus Aurelius, who wanted to live by this philosophical way of life; in contrast, Stoicism was suppressed by a few other Emperors such as “Vespasian and Domitian,” who clearly despised it. Throughout the centuries, not only did it influence Christianity but also some distinguished philosophers like “Thomas More, Descartes, and Spinoza.” When associated with “Cognitive Behavioral Therapy” and some analogous approaches as such, the ancient philosophy of Stoicism reappeared as a practical methodology at the beginning of the 21st century, thereby flourishing again. Eudemonic virtue theory that it was, Stoicism assumed the practice of virtues to be both essential and sufficient to experience true happiness in life. Yet the Stoics were also aware of the fact that there existed positive and negative “indifferents to eudemonia” like “health, wealth, education” on the one hand, and “sickness, poverty, ignorance” on the other hand. Having exerted positive or negative planning effects on the practice of virtues, these "indifferents" could either be preferred or be ignored by the individual. Considered as a philosophy regulating ordinary life, Stoicism concentrated on ethics, i.e. code of conduct, and taught people how to experience their lives. The ethical norms of Stoicism were alternately enlightened by ““physics”” and ““logic,”” which could be understood in the modern sense as a union of “natural science and metaphysics” and as a union of “modern logic, epistemology, philosophy of language, and cognitive science” respectively (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy).[18]

From early Christianity onward, Stoicism has influenced ethical thinking, including eminent philosophers like Immanuel Kant and, as a result, reached the twentieth

[18] See http://www.iep.utm.edu/ stoicism/

century. People, however, found it difficult to recognize and to appreciate its significant contribution sufficiently. Besides prompting severe criticisms, the Stoic creed has also inspired its fervent defenders. According to the Stoics, to live in harmony with nature represents the primary goal in one's life. Authorized by nature to enhance their understanding of life, human beings, contrary to all animals, metamorphose into adults who reshape not only their own comprehension of themselves but also their own moral values. As virtue was the only true good, so the Stoics considered it both essential and, counter to Aristotle's opinion, enough to achieve a pure and efficacious happiness, and by no means did it depend on luck. Unencumbered by all passions, which are inherently discomforting and hazardous to the human soul, the virtuous life opts for rational emotive behavior and the performance of all duties as to the person himself, society, profession, and community. Although exceedingly rare, the individual becomes a wise person once having attained flawless consistency in the performance of the mental faculty. However, to reach this exalted goal is the noble ideal for everybody; the Stoics find it both achievable and immediately vital to do so (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy).[19]

Defining William Alexander Percy as a man whose thoughts were occupied with the Stoic mindset, Phinizy Spalding writes that it is not difficult to trace "the Stoic trend" in both William Alexander Percy's essays and poems, e.g. his memorial *Lanterns on the Levee* was based on Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*. Spalding's text reads as follows:

> According to the poet Seneca, man's path on earth was one strewn with heartbreak and defeat. Hemmed in by fate, virtually helpless to help himself, and if not opposed by the Supreme Maker certainly not aided by Him, man staggered guidelessly through life. However, unlike Seneca, Percy did not believe in a kind of stoical resignation, but in accord with Aurelius, he felt that convictions should be molded into something practical, possible, and above all, workable. Percy observed as well as felt the pain and suffering in the path of humanity, and concluded that much of the sorrow and frustration was caused by human institutions which, with much effort, could be eventually righted. He considered the American system of democracy a valid, yet in many ways impotent, form of government which invited extremists and dishonesty. Fearful of the consequences which might ensue if unscrupulous men were allowed to come to power in his home town, he made strong efforts to ferret out and elect men of integrity and courage to local office. He worked entirely on the

[19] See http:// www.iep.utm.edu/stoiceth/

> local level, following the precedent handed down to him by his father, but observing as well the outstanding example set by Aurelius. The Emperor clearly construed man's duty to be one of continuing and never resting action, even in the unsmiling face of fate. Aurelius, in line with the classical beliefs, saw that man should attempt by gradual stages to improve humanity's lot in the world---the great strides toward perfection were destined to fail because by attempting overpowering reforms man opposes not only his own fate, but also interferes with the will of God and the destiny of others. Man's all enveloping aspirations will be met by opposition and hatred which he will be incapable of overcoming (Spalding 1958: 246, qtd. in Lawson 1970: 9-10).

William Alexander Percy, having generously offered his Stoic attitude with genuine earnestness and persuasive oratory, should have undoubtedly influenced all his adopted sons. Walker Percy so appreciated his paternal uncle's moral attitude that he naturally followed Uncle Will "into the profession of letters" in the South. Although not stating his late uncle's name just for once, Percy strikingly illustrated an exemplary southern stoic in his historical work ""*Stoicism in the South*,""as if Uncle Will was constantly in his mind. Having 'reasonably' regarded the white landowning class as the most reliable friend of Afro-American slaves up until then, Percy resembled his uncle in his determined efforts, since William Alexander Percy, too, wrote professionally in favor of the Afro-American community. Nevertheless, as one continues reading attentively, it becomes evident that the text, in fact, resolutely refuses the social validity of the Stoic trend (Lawson 1970: 12-13). According to Percy, the Stoic way was perfectly suited to the agricultural South of the previous century. The chief reason why the nobility scrupulously respected the fundamental rights of fellow men and particularly of social inferiors was not because they reflected "the image of God" and therefore deserved love, but because to do them wrong would undoubtedly mean to shoot oneself in the foot, for a deliberate insult or injustice would destroy one's own "inner fortress" which typically constituted the self (Percy 1956: 343, qtd. in Lawson 1970: 13). The text reads as follows:

> The greatness of the South, like the greatness of the English squirearchy, had always a stronger Greek flavor than it ever had a Christian. Its nobility and graciousness was the nobility and graciousness of the old Stoa. How immediately we recognize the best of the South in the words of the Emperor: 'Every moment think steadily, as a Roman and a man, to do what thou hast in hand with perfect and simple dignity, and a feeling of affection, and freedom, and justice.' Yet, like the Stoa of the Empire, the Stoa of the South was based on a particular hierarchical structure and could not

> survive . . . change. Nor did it wish to survive. Its most characteristic mood was a poetic pessimism which took a grim satisfaction in the dissolution of its values---because social decay confirmed one in his original choice of the wintry kingdom of self (Percy 1956: 343, qtd. in Lawson 1970: 13-14).

For Percy, what William Alexander Percy attempted was precisely a final effort to sustain the Stoic trend in the South; thus, Percy reasonably regarded Uncle Will's published poetry as ""poetic pessimism"" and understood the ""unassailable wintry kingdom of Marcus Aurelius"" as the ""wintry kingdom of self."" Having decisively rejected Southern Stoicism, Percy, therefore, carefully directed his attention to another reasonable possibility, i.e. Christianity. In the South, the viable alternative of the Stoa had always been the coexisting Church, yet it became impossible to rely on both philosophies selectively because the winds of change blew over the South. After losing his sense of submission and respect, the Afro-American, who was previously the grateful recipient of considerable help from his former white aristocratic master, started to make demands of the white lower class. Since it became almost impractical to apply the established rules of *noblesse oblige* (emphasis added), the white aristocrats became less and less interested in the fundamental problems of the Afro-American and more and more attracted to the redneck perspective of the outnumbering white lower class. Disgraced that it was, the Stoic conduct left its place to the Christian mindset.[20] (Lawson 1970: 14). Percy considered the Christian faith and its ethical implications to be precisely the most convenient modus vivendi for the social conditions of his time since the Christian attitude was precisely optimistic when the Stoic conduct was pessimistic in tone (Percy 1956: 344, qtd. in Lawson 1970: 14). To highlight the underlying difference between these two schools of thought, one could say that as the Stoic praised "his view of another", the Christian treasured "the self of another". Different from the Stoic, the Christian was able to cope adequately with the hectic uncontrolled changes, which was so characteristic of those times. Yet, the existing Christianity had to die together with its established practices and be reborn if it was to thrive positively in the South.[21] Its ardent devotees must promptly stop seeing it solely as a moral code against

[20] This kind of reasoning would be considered racist nowadays, and one needs to historicize the arguments presented in Lawson's article.

[21] On page 30 of this paper, it is stated that Barrett does not follow the path of Christianity in his search. One could say that the historic creeds of Christianity are already meaningless for Barrett.

“sexual misconduct, drinking, and gambling” and must willingly admit it as the revolutionary faith. Though admiring the Stoic attitude embraced by both Uncle Will and his social class, Percy resolutely rejected the very same attitude since it was completely irrelevant to his own generation, thereby creating a dialectic that is present in both *The Moviegoer* and *The Last Gentleman*.[22] In these remarkable novels, the dialectic as such forms the emotional core of the protagonists' direct relationship with their deceased fathers, who undoubtedly stand for the past[23] (Lawson 1970: 14-15).

2.6 Semiotics and Language

> “In the beginning was Alpha,” he tells us. “The end is Omega,” he reminds us. Then staking out other territory, he gives us this: “But somewhere in between came Delta, man himself. Man becomes man by breaking into the daylight of language—whether by good fortune or bad fortune, whether by pure chance, the spark jumping the gap because the gap was narrow enough, or by the touch of God, it is not for me to say here” (Percy qtd. in Coles 4-5).

According to Samway, Percy’s cultural identity as a notable philosopher and semiotician shines through his progressive career as a distinguished novelist. In his comprehensive work, *Walker Percy: A Life*, Samway lists three outstanding traits of Percy’s unique character: First, his active interest in language acquisition theories and in the scholarly works of Charles S. Peirce, both of which were partly prompted by the fact that his daughter Ann was hearing-impaired[24](404). Second, his interest in semiotic studies, his social activities and helping poor people (311-312). Finally, his increasing interest in becoming an elitist defender of the genuine faith, for he visited the Pope John Paul II in 1988 (398) (Westarp 1998/99: 151).

For C.S. Peirce, meaning in a discourse is also dependent upon subjectivity. In his canonical work ““*Logic As Semiotic: The Theory of Signs,*”” Peirce formulates

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[22] Brownlee states the same information as well. Will Barrett has to reject the stoic attitude if he does not want to face the same fate, i.e. suicide, like his father. On the other hand, if he follows the path of Christianity, he might at least have a chance of finding himself, he can therefore “reclaim his own name” which signifies himself (101).

[23] More information on this topic is available under sections 5.2.2 and 5.3.1, especially during the analysis of the character Will Barrett.

[24] After adopting a ten-month-old girl, baptized as Mary Pratt, in 1948, Percy and his wife had their biological daughter Ann in 1954, whom was found out to be congenitally deaf; therefore, Percys hired a speech teacher, Doris Mirrilees, to teach Ann how to use and speak sign language (Wood 25).

his views as follows: A sign, i.e. a representamen, is anything that communicates a meaning to someone in some respects. It creates a corresponding sign, also called the interpretant of the first sign, which typically denotes something, i.e. the object in the mind of the addressee (99). Here, the term “interpretant” plays an important role because it emphasizes the salient fact that whenever people use a language to communicate with each other, a clearer grasp of the meaning relies not only on the first sign or the signified object but also on the addressee who reproduces and tries to understand the subsequent sign or interpretant. In Peirce’s theory, signs fall into three distinctive categories: “icons, indices, and symbols,” the last of which comprises ““words, sentences, books, and other conventional signs”” (112). In contrast to icons and indices, the meaning of symbols arises from ““acquired law.”” In practice, symbols are associated with their meaning by the two participants in a conversation, i.e. the speaker and hearer by means of “the symbol-using mind,” and without such a mind, no association would be possible (114). (Brownlee 98).[25]

Figure 3 below, taken from the Internet, introduces Peirce’s Triadic Model

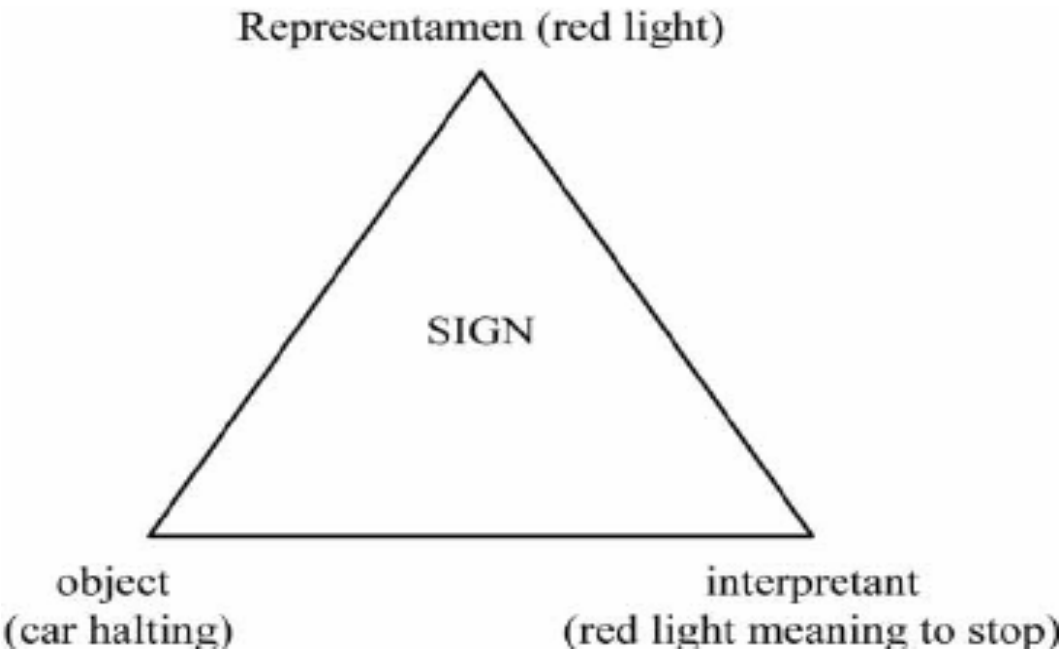

Fig. 3 introduces Peirce’s Triadic Model.

Percy based his doctrine on both Peirce’s theory and his own observations, and thereafter emphasized the strong link between the named object, the name of

[25] See also Majeres 585- 86 for Peirce’s semiotics.

that object and the person who named the very same object. Consequently, the authority to name a thing or an object, apart from its power to shape our understanding of the world, brings real existence and incorporates genuine mindfulness into our lives. In addition, the perceptive faculties of the individual depend on the self-same authority. In his essay, *Message*, Percy writes as follows: ""Naming is unique in natural history because for the first time a being in the universe stands apart from the universe and affirms some other being to be what it is"" (Percy 1975: 154, qtd. in Brownlee 98).

Peirce's triadic concept requires a conscious agent and conversation participants who should connect a referent with a symbol that represents the referent. At this point,however, the concept faces the absolute crisis of its own dilemma because the existence of clear consciousness is open to question due to one's own relationship to oneself. If it becomes necessary to name oneself, to what degree can someone stand in relationship to himself? (Brownlee 99). In another essay, *Lost in the Cosmos*, Percy supports the same opinion and elucidates his ideas along the following lines:

> The self of the sign-user can never be grasped because, once the self locates itself at the dead center of its world, there is no signified to which a signifier can be joined to make a sign. The self has no sign of itself. No signifier applies. All signifiers apply equally. From the moment the signifying self turned inward and became conscious of itself, trouble began as the sparks flew up…. The exile from Eden is, semiotically, the banishment of the self-conscious self from its own world of signs (Percy 1983: 107-08, qtd. in Desmond 2013: 133).
>
> The fateful flaw of human semiotics is that: that of all the objects in the entire Cosmos which the sign-user can apprehend through the conjoining of the signifier and signified (word uttered and thing beheld), there is one which forever escapes his comprehension—and that is the sign user himself. Semiotically, the self is literally unspeakable to itself (Percy 1983: 109, qtd. in Brownlee 99).

In the triadic model, there should be a particular conceptual space between the object named and the person who assigns a name to it. Yet the question arises as to whether it could be possible for "the self" to occupy the different vertices of the triangle at the same time. One's own capacity to name provides him with the means to construct a world for himself and establish a self; nevertheless, since it is impossible for anyone to name himself, no one can exist in the world of signs. As will be analyzed later on, Percy marks this problem within *The Last Gentleman*

in two noticeable ways: Firstly, through the protagonist Williston Bibb Barrett's obvious namelessness; secondly, through Barrett's lack of ability to discover his own voice among the various conversation groups he encounters. Barrett's namelessness emphasizes modern man's predicament concerning language in use and selfhood; moreover, it tacitly affirms the trouble with one's incorporeal identity. At the beginning of the novel, the term "young man" is used to describe Barrett. As the novel unfolds, however, not only the readers but also most of the other characters come to realize that it is extremely difficult to have a grasp of Barrett's identity. Sometimes, Barrett is named through his family, but rarely is he named as an independent and autonomous individual per se. Generic terms, mostly professions, are used to describe his personality. Further evidence revealing his identity problem can be observed with respect to his proper name, which is found troublesome by the great majority of the characters in the novel, by the protagonist Will Barrett himself, by the readers and also by the narrator. For instance, Rita Vaught, Sutter's former spouse, prefers to call him ""Lance Corporal"" without any reasonable explanation as to what she means by that. He is simply ""the patient"" for his psychoanalyst Dr. Gamow; his classmates in Princeton calls him ""old buddy"". The black domestic servants in the Vaught mansion use the "generic and nonspecific" pronoun ""he""; therefore, as the illiterate and less advantaged members of the society, they ironically give much more precise information about his identity crisis. Also, some other designators, which are more like role-descriptions than proper names, are noticeable all through the novel to stress his identity problem: "the tutor, the hitchhiker, the student, the doctor, the technician, and the janitor." As has already been mentioned, the narrator finds it troublesome to assign a name to Barrett. Having used his proper name only twice throughout the novel, the narrator highlights Barret's identity crisis (Brownlee 99): "For another month or so the young man, whose name was Williston Bibb Barrett or Will Barrett or Billy Barrett, sat rocking on the gallery with six women. . ."(*The Last Gentleman* 17).[26] The doubtful quality of Barrett's proper name is emphasized through the indifferent, varied and brief manner of the narrator. Again, and as mentioned earlier, even Barrett himself has difficulty assigning a name to himself. Upon being asked, Barret usually struggles

[26] See Brownlee 99 for the same quotation.

and thinks about his own name,[27] e.g. *The Last Gentleman* 12, 17, 66, 294, and 324.[28] At one point, he has to look through his wallet for identification, e.g. *The Last Gentleman* 151.[29] As he sometimes becomes miserably unaware of his own name, so the apparent absence of his self-consciousness and fixed subjectivity becomes more prominent. The narrator informs the reader that once, ""he had fallen into a fugue state and wandered around northern Virginia for three weeks, where he sat sunk in thought on old battlegrounds, hardly aware of his own name.""[30] When he meets the Vaughts in New York City for the first time, he introduces himself through association with his ancestry, which therefore stresses the questionable and non-denotative character of his proper name. Both Mr. and Mrs. Vaught do try to have a grasp of the young man not because they are meeting him for the first time, but because he is not introducing himself in the current interpersonal context. Referring to his deceased uncle and father, Fannin Barrett and Ed Barrett respectively, he is alluding not only to the past but also to the old South; therefore, the Vaughts name and place him through a context which is far distant both in historical and geographical terms. Keeping their distant manner throughout the novel, the Vaughts, thus, often refer to him as ""Ed Barrett's boy,"" e.g. *The Last Gentleman* 51, 53, 77, and 324 (Brownlee 99-100). The problem of naming is further elucidated in Brownlee as follows:

> This inexact and multiple quality of his designation both highlights the central place that naming holds in defining the self and calls attention to Barrett's problem of gaining an understanding of who he is. At one point he finds himself mixed up with a strange group of people from Hollywood who call him things like "Merle" or "Baby," and the question is asked: "Why couldn't these people call him by his name-" (321). Indeed, why do the narrator and most of the characters have so little confidence in his name? Use of his proper name is minimized, of course, simply because it signifies very little to most people---and through this uncertain naming Percy highlights modern man's predicament with language. In effect, the most essential component of his own discourse---his name---is elusive (100).

The reason why his given name signifies not much lies in his family history. As a confident man, who could also become violent at times, Barrett's great-

[27] See Humphries 561 for the same information.
[28] The pages are actually 12, 17, 67, and 295. Page 324 should be a typo. On that page, there is no problem with Will's remembering his own name; he refers to himself both as "Will Barrett" and as "Mister Ed Barrett's boy".
[29] The example sentences, located by Brownlee, will be presented during the analysis.
[30] Cf. *The Last Gentleman* 12

grandfather ““knew what was what and said so”” and took a strong stand against the Ku Klux Klan. In time, as the culture started to change and new generations came of age, the family gradually lost its self-confidence and became more and more unsure as to what to do in the developing new South. This confusion continued until Ed Barrett's suicide, which made the young Will Barrett have too little certainty: ““As for the present young man the last of the line, he did not know what to think. So he became a watcher and a listener and a wanderer. He could not get enough of watching.””[31] When the members of his family lost their self-determination and self-assurance and when the aggressive disposition of the succeeding generations turned inward at themselves, the family name lost its significance and became less and less prominent. Three generations before Will, to be a Barret typically meant to stand up to racism stiffly and often violently. However, this noble stance of the family weakened gradually until Ed Barrett, who committed suicide as a practical solution since he was keenly disappointed by his apparent failure to aid miserable black people and make it possible for them to experience an ordinary life. Besides losing their ability for action, the members of the family also lost their joie de vivre; therefore, the family name became insignificant. According to Brownlee, when in the novel, the proper name of the protagonist is intentionally used for the second and last time, Will attempts to connect himself with the cultural traditions, values, and social roles of the old South, particularly with those of his great-grandfather:

> My name is Williston Bibb Barrett, he said aloud, consulting his wallet to make sure, and I am a returning to the South to seek my fortune and restore the good name of my family, perhaps even recover Hampton plantation from the canebrakes and live out my days as a just man and little father to the faithful Negroes working in the fields (*The Last Gentleman* 151).[32]

However, it is a vain attempt to do so, for all those traditions and values already died out (Brownlee 100).

In an interview with Percy held in 1989, Percy draws attention to the style of the Catholic author: ““The Catholic novelist has to be very careful. He has to be underhanded, deceitful, and damn careful how he uses the words of religion,

[31] Cf. *The Last Gentleman* 9-10. The same quotation also exists in Rodeheffer 92.
[32] The same quotation exists also in Brownlee 100.

which have all fallen into disuse and almost become obscenities, thanks to people like Jimmy Swaggart"" (Lawson and Kramer 1993: 228, qtd. in Brownlee 96).

Having already expressed the same opinions on the same subject almost two decades earlier in two of his previous essays, *""Notes for a Novel About the End of the World""* and *"Message,"* Percy, again, offered the similar solution to the self-same dilemma, which was evocative of Flannery O'Connor's style. In a world of inefficacious morality and discourse, it should be the mission of a religious novelist to resort to deceit, evasive craft and cunning intelligence he can summon up from the darker parts of his soul to communicate Christian values in an indirect way.[33] "The fictional use of violence, shock, comedy, insult, the bizarre are the everyday tools of his trade. How could it be otherwise?" In a society in which holding Christian ceremonies is generally considered insignificant and making visits together with the children to see Santa Claus at a department store is found much more important, it would make no sense to write about the Christian practice of baptism in a serious tone. For this reason, in one of Flannery O'Connor's novels, the manifestation of baptism is exaggerated by presenting it as a brutal death from drowning (Percy 1975: 118, qtd. in Brownlee 96).[34]

Percy considers using sacred language in its long-established traditional sense to be neither reasonable nor effective, for the linguistic currency of such a distinct language had become less convincing and less acceptable.[35] However, it would also make no sense to retreat from the religious discourse; therefore, he resorted to a cunning style of using the unusual and even the violent to make the words signify what they are supposed to transmit. Unlike Percy, O'connor employs grotesque and violent language in her works; nevertheless, it does not mean Percy has crafted neither indirection nor distortion in his novels. *The Last Gentleman*, for example, displays a baptism scene similar to the one in *The Violent Bear It Away* by O'connor, where the unusual practice of baptism is presented, thus serving as the denouement of the novel. In Santa Fe, which

[33] "His attacks upon the cheap cliches of popular culture are both funny and precise. He is skillful at seeing through foolishness: the tiresome self-analysis of people like Kate and the distorted demands for reality of people like Sutter" (Chesnick 5).
[34] "Percy's religious arguments are enigmatic and realized allegorically" (Grubgeld 58).
[35] As a realistic writer, Percy writes about mankind in a society which has lost its moral principles and has not been able to replace them with the new ones (Dubus 1977: 15, qtd. in Grubgeld 59).

literally means the place of holy faith, the protagonist Will Barrett attends the baptism of an almost moribund young boy; however, he cannot totally comprehend or properly grasp the possible implications of this sacred ceremony. This key scene is vital to the novel since Percy can positively assert both his unshakable faith in the effectiveness of ecclesiastical truth and his opinion that it is difficult to properly hear this divine truth in the modern era (Brownlee 96).

While dealing with the devaluation of religious language, Percy, in fact, deals with a linguistic conundrum concerning the modern man. By exaggerating this conundrum via the protagonist Will Barrett's unusual character traits, Percy points to the fact that Barrett's problem of unclear identity and his personal life lacking purpose are inextricably intertwined with his linguistic conundrum. Not only does Percy express his own opinions on language and religion in the novel, but he also examines the possible influence of linguistic and religious discourse on modern subjectivity (Lawson and Kramer 1985: 225, qtd. in Brownlee 96-97).

Percy wrote a letter to literary critic and editor Lewis A. Lawson and diagnosed his effort as follows:

> A semiotic investigation of the self, the stranded consciousness, which is left over after a man (scientist or consumer) has fallen prey to immanentism of science, that is to say, after he has acquiesced in the standard propositions that man (and he) has been dethroned from (1) the center of the universe (Copernicus), (2) the lordship of creation (Darwin), and (3) even the sovereignty over himself (Freud and the behaviourists), what options are open to him? This would be a sort of phenomenology of the stranded self (Tolson 430, qtd. in Desmond 2013: 128).

All the options available for the ""stranded self"" and its ill-judged attempts to overpower the modern sense of estrangement by taking on mistaken identities to cloak "its existential nakedness" have constituted the source of Percy's satirical writings about the modern man in his work *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book*, where Percy examined the unfortunate condition and destiny of the self-determining individual. In such a system, having renounced his belief in the Judeo-Christian[36] worldview, the modern man considers his self-ruling mind and willpower to be the only criteria for his identity and actions. That a self-determining man is still God's beloved child is impossible to claim any more. Man, on the

[36] O'Gorman states "Percy's orthodox Catholic faith" in his article (115). Therefore, it could be stated that the term Judeo-Christian refers to the orthodox Catholic faith.

contrary, undoubtedly gains his ultimate freedom and can radically shape his own future as well as create his own meaning without recognizing divine laws. According to Percy, the more the level of self-awareness increases in the modern Western civilization, the worse becomes the trouble of "the stranded and alienated self." The fact that extreme self-awareness adopts a solipsistic stance is inherited from the Cartesian philosophy, which not only separates the mind and body, but also regards them as ontologically distinct substances. When both "scientism and behaviorism" started dominating modern ways of thinking, the Cartesian mind-body split deepened. Humans were not assumed to be unique and incarnate creatures of God any longer. Instead, humans were seen as self-conscious mental beings imprisoned in their inferior bodies, i.e. ""ghosts in the machine."" Percy's critical opinions on alienation and self-awareness of the modern individual carry considerable implications both for the feasibility of making sincere confessions on the whole and for producing his narratives in *"the confessional mode"* (emphasis added) in specific. The main reason why Percy became interested in confession and the confessional mode of writing can be found in his description of language, since Percy believed that words were, in fact, simply *emptied out* (emphasis added) both in their religious and secular senses in the modern Western world.[37]According to Percy, language went bankrupt, that is, words have become so corrupted that they can never express the same traditional values which they possessed in the past.[38] With the destructive influence of "scientism, relativism, abstractionism and linguistic nominalism," words became evacuated of their former meanings.[39]Although linked by a unique bond based on shared values, human beings started to fall prey to social fragmentation, social isolation, and solipsism. Hence, they turned into such citizens that they lost their authentic identities and became isolated from one another as well as from any kind of meaning and order emanating from a divine source (Desmond 2013: 129). In a dialogue with Marcus Smith, Percy said that "People say words, and words have become as worn as poker chips, they don't mean anything. Particularly religious words: baptism, sin, God" (Lawson

[37] See Cousineau 155 for the similar information.
[38] According to Sutter, "things, persons, relations emptied out, not by theory but by lay reading of theory" (*The Last Gentleman* 279, qtd. in Desmond 2006: 199).
[39] This is not Peirce's approach to language, which claims that meanings are constructed by signs and not inherent in language.

and Kramer 1985:140, qtd. in Desmond 2013: 129). The article proceeds as follows:

> Percy's novels and essays focus repeatedly, and often humorously, on breakdowns in communication, while also expressing the modest but real hope for intersubjective communion—and love—between two persons. It is not difficult to see how these two primary concerns of Percy—the "loss of the self" and the devaluation of language—would radically affect the idea of confession and the challenges of writing in the confessional mode (Desmond 2013: 129-130).

The fact that words were emptied out is dealt with also throughout *The Last Gentleman*. During the baptism scene, the character Jamie Vaught on his deathbed, for example, hears the good news of salvation when, on the contrary, Barrett can only hear words (Pindell 1986: 74, qtd. in Brownlee 107). Having quoted Pindell, Brownlee states that "Barrett hears words only as a language system and does not attend to the propositional content—event has been separated from meaning" (Brownlee 107).

At this point, one could suggest that language and religion cannot be separated from each other since religious belief should be expressed by uttering words. It has already been mentioned that Barrett has to follow the path of Christianity if he wants to succeed in discovering himself. However, Percy states in an interview that Barrett is, indeed, not interested in Christianity during his search; that is, religion is not the part of Barrett's quest since it does not offer any meaningful answers to him (Lawson and Kramer 1985: 66-67, qtd. in Brownlee 107).[40] It is certainly noteworthy that Percy writes as follows: "Christendom seems in some sense to have failed. Its vocabulary is worn out…. The old words of grace are worn smooth as poker chips and a certain devaluation has occurred, like a poker chip after it is cashed in" (Percy 1975: 116, qtd. in Brownlee 108).[41]

With regard to *The Moviegoer*, Desmond mentions the use of the confessional mode in the novel, e.g. as a religious doubter, the protagonist Binx Bolling has a conversation with his half-brother Lonnie Smith, who is a faithful Catholic. According to Desmond, this conversation revolves around Lonnie's most recent confession, around his harbouring an interest in the act of sin, around moral or ethical standards, and around forgiveness (2013: 127).

[40] See also Cousineau 155- 56 for the same information.
[41] See Popescu 18 for the similar information.

The following excerpt presents the analysis of the last points mentioned in this section:

> Lonnie appears to reconsider. But he is really enjoying the talk. A smile plays at the corner of his mouth. Lonnie's monotonous speech gives him an advantage, the same advantage foreigners have: his words are not worn out. It is like a code tapped through a wall. Sometimes he asks me straight out: do you love me? and it is possible to tap back: yes, I love you.
>
> "Moreover, I do not think you should fast," I tell him.
>
> "Why not?"
>
> "You've had pneumonia twice in the past year. It would not be good for you. I doubt if your confessor would allow it. Ask him."
>
> "He is allowing it."
>
> "On what grounds?"
>
> "To conquer an habitual disposition." Lonnie uses the peculiar idiom of the catechism in ordinary speech. Once he told me I needn't worry about some piece of foolishness he heard me tell Linda, since it was not a malicious lie but rather a "jocose lie."
>
> "What disposition is that?"
>
> "A disposition to envy."
>
> "Envy who?"
>
> "Duval." [42]
>
> "Duval is dead."
>
> "Yes. But envy is not merely sorrow at another's good fortune: it is also joy at another's misfortune."
>
> "Are you still worried about that? You accused yourself and received absolution, didn't you?"
>
> "Yes."
>
> "Then don't be scrupulous."
>
> "I'm not scrupulous.
>
> "Then what's the trouble?"
>
> "I'm still glad he's dead."
>
> "Why shouldn't you be? He sees God face to face and you don't."

[42] Lonnie's elder brother Duval was drowned last summer (*The Moviegoer* 137).

Lonnie grins at me with the liveliest sense of our complicity: let them ski all they want to. We have something better. His expression is complex. He knows that I have entered the argument as a game played by his rules and he knows that I know it, but he does not mind.

“Jack, do you remember the time Duval went to the field meet in Jackson and won first in American history and the next day made all-state guard?”

“Yes.”

“I hoped he would lose.”

“That’s not hurting Duval.” “It is hurting me. You know what capital sin does to the life of the soul.”

“Yes. Still and all I would not fast. Instead I would concentrate on the Eucharist. It seems a more positive thing to do.”

“That is true.” Again the blue eyes engage mine in lively converse, looking, looking away, and looking again. “But Eucharist is a sacrament of the living.”

“You don’t wish to live?”

“Oh sure!” he says laughing, willing, wishing even, to lose the argument so that I will be sure to have as much fun as he.

It is a day for clouds. The clouds come sailing by, swelled out like clippers. The creamy vapor boils up into great thundering ranges and steep valleys of cloud. A green snake swims under the dock. I can see the sutures between the plates of its flat skull. It glides through the water without a ripple, stops mysteriously and nods against a piling.

“Jack?”

“Yes?”

“Are we going for a ride?” […]

After I kiss him good-by, Lonnie calls me back. But he doesn’t really have anything to say.

“Wait.”

“What?”

He searches the swamp, smiling.

“Do you think that Eucharist—”

“Yes?”

He forgets and is obliged to say straight out: “I am still offering my communion for you.”

“I know you are.”

> "Wait."
>
> "What?"
>
> "Do you love me?"
>
> "Yes."
>
> "How much?"
>
> "Quite a bit."
>
> "I love you too." But already he has the transistor in the crook of his wrist and is working at it furiously (*The Moviegoer* 162-166).

In the above excerpt, the narrator says that Lonnie's "words are not worn out," which could therefore be associated with his devout Christianity. It has hitherto been mentioned that Percy complains about the devaluation of language. One could claim that a Cartesian self like Binx[43], who is existentially naked and therefore accustomed to using devaluated language, could hardly engage in a religious conversation. Binx as a religious doubter, however, seems to enjoy holding a religious conversation with Lonnie. It could be claimed that just because of his love for his half-brother, Binx prefers to take on the role of a sincere believer and therefore disguises his existential nakedness. However, one could also claim that being next to his half-brother does not necessarily force him to pretend but, in fact, influences him so positively that he, rather than Lonnie, sees the green snake in the lake, therefore associating himself with this sinful creature that was thrown out of heaven. It could be considered a positive sign because he becomes aware of his immoral life.[44] Finally, the end of the conversation positively affirms Percy's earnest hope for intersubjective love between two people, either of the same or of the opposite sex, e.g. here it is a brotherly love between Binx and Lonnie.[45]

Another essential point to mention is Binx's use of language like a clinician while describing people. Having spent a summer holiday at the college for a research project, Binx has both a scientific background and a marked tendency to describe the familiar people around him as if an experienced clinician gives information

[43] Nash writes that Binx makes "repeated references to himself as a ghost" (2013: 119). Moreover, Nash also mentions Binx's Cartesian mind in another article (2011: 154).
[44] Towards the end of the novel Binx changes and becomes a devout believer. This point will be reintroduced again under the appropriate heading.
[45] Desmond claims that the reason why Binx is engaged in a religious dialogue is ambiguous (2013: 135).

about his patients. (Nash 2013: 117). The following passage can be presented as an example: “It comes to me again how formidable Walter was in college, how much *older* he seemed then. Walter is a sickly-looking fellow with a hollow temple but he is actually quite healthy. He has gray sharklike skin and lidded eyes and a lock of hair combed across his forehead in the MacArthur style" (*The Moviegoer* 33).[46]

2.7 Percy’s Works

In *The Walker Percy Project* website, not only the published books written by Percy himself but also the interviews and correspondences written by different notable writers are introduced as follows:

Novels by Percy: (1) *The Moviegoer* (1961) is the winner of the 1962 National Book Award. The protagonist is Binx Bolling, a young stockbroker from New Orleans. (2) *The Last Gentleman* (1966) with the 25-year-old protagonist Will Barrett from the South who lives in New York City. (3) *Love in the Ruins* (1971) with the protagonist Tom More, who has created a miraculous stethoscope to diagnose and cure mankind’s vibrational flu. (4) *Lancelot* (1977). The protagonist Lancelot Lamar is a lawyer detained in a psychiatric hospital because of his memories which are not worth remembering. (5) *The Second Coming* (1980). Again, Will Barrett is the main character in this work of fiction. Being a lonely widower leads Barrett to depression; therefore, he does not want to live any more. (6) *The Thanatos Syndrome* (1987). The protagonist of *Love in the Ruins* reappears as the main character in this novel. Though resembling a crime novel, *The Thanatos Syndrome* can be seen as a brilliant comedy and “an intriguing philosophical novel.”[47]

Non-fiction by Percy: (1) *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with the Other* (1975). In this work, Percy compiled his essays what he defined as a ““theory of man for a new age.”” (2) *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (1983). As a mock narrative text, the book introduces semiotic theories and discusses the Western

[46] See also Nash 2013: 117.
[47] Desmond writes that “each of Percy’s six novels dramatizes the workings of the sensuous-erotic spirit” (2006: 196).

individual's disposition to higher levels of abstraction. (3*) Signposts in a Strange Land* (Appeared posthumously in 1991). Having passed away in in 1990, Percy left a substantial amount of non-fiction prose works. His legacy focusing on "language, literature, philosophy, religion, psychiatry, morality, and life" exists in this book.

Interviews: *Conversations with Walker Percy* (1985) and *More Conversations with Walker Percy (*1993) were both edited by Victor A. Kramer and Lewis Lawson.

Correspondence: (1) *A Thief of Peirce: The Letters of Kenneth Laine Ketner and Walker Percy* (1995). Having been interested the semiotic studies and the philosophical theories of Charles Sanders Peirce, Percy exchanged letters with Kenneth Laine Ketner, an expert on Peirce at Texas Tech University. Samway collected their complete correspondence in this book. (2) *The Correspondence of Shelby Foote and Walker Percy* (1996). Having been good friends since they were teenagers, Walker Percy and Shelby Foote started to exchange letters towards the end of 1940s. Jay Tolson edited their correspondence (*The Walker Percy Project*).[48]

During the 1950s, Percy wrote two novels, one of which was *The Charterhouse*. He published neither of them (Lawson 1985: 507). Similarly, Samway states that though writing two novels before *The Moviegoer,* Percy burned one of them and preferred not to publish the other (10).

3. PHILOSOPHERS & THEIR APPROACHES

In the previous sections of this paper, the philosophical approaches of Eric Voegelin and C.S. Peirce have been mentioned in considerable detail. The analysis of both novels will be based mainly on the thoughts of Kierkegaard; therefore, the next subsection will focus on his philosophy; in addition, some brief information on Sartre's philosophy will be presented also in this subsection. Subsections 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4 will introduce vital information on the Cartesian philosophy, Freud, and Dostoevsky respectively.

[48] (See https://www.ibiblio.org/wpercy/books/books-percy.html#gsc.tab=0).

3.1 Kierkegaard

Søren Kierkegaard so influenced Percy that *The Moviegoer* opens with the following lines: "…the specific character of despair is precisely this: it is unaware of being despair" (See *The Moviegoer*).

Søren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher living between 1813 and 1855, tried to define three different forms of living in his philosophical works. Analyzing all these three forms, Mason tries to introduce Kierkegaardian philosophy in his online article. Why do people get up every day in the morning? Should they get up for themselves, for other people, or for the Christian deity? Those who get up for themselves experience an aesthetic life. They are delighted to enjoy their lives and interests, but reluctant to experience boredom. Those getting up for other people follow universally accepted moral values; therefore, they live an ethical life. Lastly, those who get up for the Christian deity live for the all-powerful God and follow the path of Christianity living a religious life. Which of these three options is the best to choose, and what consequences might arise if someone prefers one form over the others reflect some of the questions which occupied Kierkegaard's mind during his life. Though dying young in age, Kierkegaard left large quantities of written works. Having been written under many different aliases, his legacy consisting of various styles and literary genres includes "philosophical tracts, novellas, aphorisms, sermons and journals," all of which consider the modern Christianity to be both "spiritless and despairing." That the modern Christians relapsed into Paganism without even noticing it is the argument in his works. For him, neither self-interest nor good works are the ingredients of faith. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard, under the alias Johannes de Silentio, understands the true Christian to be an austere citizen who must avoid poetry, since poetry is the realm of imagination occupied by those living for themselves. Having his loyalty to the Christian God, a self as such cannot be tied by rules imposed by human ethical values. It is his allegiance to God, which enables him to become aware of "an Eternal or True Self." The rejection of this Self results in despair. Under the alias of Anti-Climacus, Kierkegaard wrote *Sickness Unto Death* where he asserts that only the religious life is the key to a perfectly satisfactory life. From this point of view, it appears that neither the aesthetic nor the ethical ways of living can offer real happiness,

and they turn people either into too frivolous or into too serious subjects. Disturbed by a vague sense of unease, blameworthiness, or discontentment, they sink into despair. The problem is that they might not even notice that they are in despair. Those who are immersed in their thoughts start to develop an ever-increasing awareness of their desperate condition. Being aware of his desperate condition, the aesthete might resort to short-term reliefs. Pleasures of such reliefs, however, are destined to dwindle due to recursive experiences, i.e. the intensity and charms of pleasure dissipate because of repetition. Just as the aesthete fears boredom, so he fears pain. As soon as memory and self-awareness stretch back to the past and predict "increasingly repetitive and limited future," boredom gradually subsides. Unable to share a common interest and commitment, the aesthete cannot become a Self. In *Purity of Heart*, a book appeared under his real name, Kierkegaard writes as follows: "Purity of heart is to will one thing." To become Oneself is to have a direct relation to God, to cease being double-minded or self-deceived." Not interested in ethical vocabulary, the aesthete does not care whether something is right or wrong; on the other hand, anything interesting or boring captures his attention. The article proceeds as follows:

> An aesthete cultivates distance and irony, and finally gets so far away from ordinary reality as to become, in Anti- Climacus' view, an imaginary self. The ethical life fares hardly better than the aesthetic. Obedience to duty brings no relief from anxiety. Duty and inclination pull in opposite directions, and we learn what duty is by contrast with what we want to do. Guilt belongs to the ethical life, and one never does one's duty perfectly. Even in success, thoughts of extraneous pleasures or desires cloud ethical motives. The ethical person lives to serve others. The rewards of living this way are a sense of self-worth and nights of blameless sleep, though neither are assured. Living the ethical life can end in 'infinite resignation' and a despairing sense of the gap between 'what is' and 'what ought to be'. The ethical person appeals to an absolute standard of conduct and identifies with it absolutely. This gives her or him a solid and predictable ethical self. In *Sickness Unto Death*, Anti-Climacus identifies this state of affairs as the despair of finitude or necessity. The self is bound by morality to act rightly, but living an ethical life does not prevent anxiety about death or about the ultimate goodness of one's motives (Mason).[49]

Having read the above-mentioned passage, one can claim that man can be aware of his existence if only he chooses the third form of living, i.e. the religious

[49](See https://philosophynow.org/issues/24/Soren_Kierkegaard)

life. Living either of the other two forms will bring neither happiness nor existential awareness. The existential philosophy is deeply rooted in the works of Kierkegaard. During the analysis of the characters such as Binx and his suicidal cousin Kate, Aunt Emily, Will Barrett, and Sutter Vaught, this philosophical approach will be used widely.

Due to word limits, Sartre's influence on Percy will be introduced briefly also in this subsection, for it supports the above-mentioned philosophical views of Kierkegaard. Quoting Daigle and Craib, Wang mentions Sartre's famous saying ""Existence precedes essence,"" which emphasizes the fundamental freedom of the individual whereby neither God nor other forms of being can exercise control over him and he can live his own life on his own terms. Absolute freedom, and independent will thereof, are the key points of Sartrean existentialism. Empowered with freedom and independent will, the individual is required to engage in both personal and public relationships. "Existentialism is a philosophy for the actual individual in the real world, a concrete practical philosophy" (Daigle 2009:1 and Craib 1976:4, qtd. in Wang 139).

3.2 Cartesian Philosophy

Moviegoing is a metaphor for being a Cartesian self since prominent experts on Descartes assume the Cartesian self to be an individual who can think purely and whose mind resembles a theatre. While sitting in that theatre existing in his own mind, the Cartesian self begins contemplating ideas, or rather "mental objects." Rising like a "solid screen," those mental objects stand between the individual and the physical world beyond the mind. (Nash 2011: 153). Descartes, having alerted his readers to an ambiguity in the term ""idea,"" wrote that in its material sense, an idea refers to the workings of intellect, that is to say, "a mental act." However, having been represented as the thing resulting from those workings of the intellect, an idea, when taken objectively, should be understood as "a mental object" (Descartes 1988, qtd. in Nash 2011: 154). Having introduced the ambiguous nature of the term idea, Nash states two different readings of *The Moviegoer* as follows: "(1) every idea is some combination of both a mental act and a mental object, and (2) every idea is only a mental object." The fact that there are two possible readings of the novel is trivial since in either of them, the

individual first comes into contact with the mental objects which are similar to a screen rising between the Cartesian self and the non-mental things in the external world (Nash 2011: 154). To explain Descartes' conception of an idea in more detail, Nash first of all quotes Descartes' definition of a thing, i.e. a Cartesian self who thinks, in the following lines:

> a thing that doubts, affirms, understands a few things, is ignorant of many things, [loves, hates,] is willing, is unwilling, and also which imagines and has sensory perceptions; for as I have noted before, even though the objects of my sensory experience and imagination may have no existence outside me, nonetheless the modes of thinking which I refer to as cases of sensory perception and imagination, is so far as they are simply modes of thinking, do exist within me—of that I am certain (Descartes 1988, qtd. in Nash 2011: 154).

Second, he explains the two senses of idea, i.e. idea as a mental act and idea as a mental object, by using a mountain scenario: if someone sees Mt. Everest, for example, the sensory perception of Mt. Everest would be the mental act. The corresponding image which is connected with the mental act exists objectively in the mind and forms the mental object (Nash 2011: 154). A significant detail to note here is Descartes' mention of the thing which does not exist in the outside world. Quoting Descartes, Nash seems to explain this dilemma: idea ""can be taken objectively, as the thing represented by that operation; and this thing, even if it is not regarded as existing outside the intellect, can still, in virtue of its essence, be more perfect than myself"" (Nash 2011: 154). Having read Descartes' explanations, one can claim that the thing that is not existing in the outside world should be God.

Binx's moviegoing should be understood as a metaphor because he narrates his real-life experiences as if they are movie scenes, thereby permitting his thoughts to rise between himself and the world outside (Nash 155). In light of the all the above-mentioned explanations it could be claimed that Percy might have used moviegoing in its metaphorical sense. Supporting the same opinion Nash illustrates an example from the novel: When Binx takes a bus in Chicago to go to New Orleans, he has a conversation with a ""young romantic."" Interestingly, Binx narrates his observation as follows: "He is a moviegoer, though of course he does not go to movies" (*The Moviegoer* 217, qtd. in Nash 2011: 155). However, if his

moviegoing cannot be taken literally, why does Binx narrate it to the reader? Quoting Binx, Nash (2011: 155) answers this question as follows:

> Two things I am curious about. How does he sit? Immediately graceful and not aware of it or *mediately graceful* and *aware of it*? How does he read *The Charterhouse of Parma*? Immediately as a man who is in the world and who has an appetite for the book as he might have an appetite for peaches, or mediately as one who finds himself under the necessity of sticking himself into the world in a certain fashion, of slumping in an acceptable slump, of reading an acceptable book on an acceptable bus? (*The Moviegoer* 217).

Concluding that "the young man reads and slumps *mediately,*" Binx narrates as follows: "He is a romantic. His posture is the first clue: it is too good to be true, this distillation of all graceful slumps" (*The Moviegoer* 215, qtd. in Nash 2011: 155). The reason why this young man should be regarded as a Cartesian self relates to the perspective how one analyzes the accompanying context, gestures, the way he is sitting, why he is behaving in a certain manner, etc. The young man slumps as a result of the image in his mind. With his relaxed and carefree manner accompanied by his acceptable actions, this young man is not immediately connected to his surroundings. It could be said that the key terms in this situation are mediacy or immediacy. To be not immediately immersed in the world is simply to be a Cartesian self in that the ideas, namely, mental objects, e.g. images separate the self from the outside world. In the case of the young man, the term moviegoer is metaphorically used to imply the young man's Cartesian selfhood. Referring to the conversation between Binx and Kate, Nash mentions Binx's ""vertical search"" which started years before his ongoing ""horizontal search."" In that conversation Binx explains his vertical search as follows:

> During those years I stood outside the universe and sought to understand it. I lived in my room as an Anyone living Anywhere and read fundamental books….Certainly it did not matter to me where I was when I read such a book as The Expanding Universe. The greatest success of this enterprise…came one night when I sat in a hotel room in Birmingham and read a book called The Chemistry of Life. When I finished it, it seemed to me that the main goals of my search were reached or were in principle reachable…The only difficulty was that though the universe had been disposed of, I myself was left over. There I lay in my hotel room with my search over yet still obliged to draw one breath and then the next (*The Moviegoer* 69-70, qtd. in Nash 2011: 156).

Asked about his search, Binx states that he found the vertical search exciting

since “as you get deeper into the search, you unify. You understand more and more specimens by fewer and fewer formulae….Of course you are always after the big one, the new key, *the secret leverage point*, and that is the best of it” (*The Moviegoer* 82-83, qtd. in Nash 2011: 156).

Lawson points out that the phrase “‘secret leverage point’” is important here since it relates to the Archimedean point, a hypothetical vantage point, to move the world far away in that one can watch the world like a movie (Lawson 1988: 92, qtd. in Nash 2011: 156). Lawson, in addition, mentions that “‘leverage point’” was also sought by Descartes, which is a well-known fact by Percy as well (Ibid. 105-106, qtd. in Nash 2011: 156). Referring to Norman Kemp Smith’s interpretation of Descartes’ book *Second Meditation*, Lawson quotes Descartes as follows: “Archimedes, that he might displace the whole earth, required only that there might be some one point, fixed and immovable, to serve in leverage; so likewise I shall be entitled to entertain high hopes if I am fortunate to find some one thing that is certain and indubitable” (Ibid. 106, qtd. in Nash 2011: 156). Therefore, the connection between Descartes and Binx’s moviegoing can be established: His vertical search should be understood as an attempt to find “an Archimedean-Cartesian point,” which is a remote perspective far away from the world to enable him watch the world like a movie, so that he can understand the world better (Ibid. 92, qtd. in Nash 2011: 156). Moreover, although claiming to have given up his vertical search long ago, Binx keeps holding his interest in the extraterrestrial viewpoint as a Cartesian ideal. (Nash 2011: 156).

Howland writes that ““for most of the novel, Binx clings to his objective-transcendental viewpoint. He assumes that he can look at his life from the outside, as if he were Descartes’s disembodied *cogito*, cut off from the world it would know”” (Howland 1990: 26, qtd. in Nash 2011: 156). Desmond highlights Binx’s stereotypical Cartesian selfhood and writes that he is ““prone to taking a detached observer’s stance toward the world, to formulating, experience reductively, and to abstracting and categorizing others---a form of alienation….”” (Desmond 2004: 42, qtd. in Nash 2011: 156). As a final point, Nash emphasizes the fact that at the end of the novel, Binx seems to have given up his moviegoing and his former Cartesian attitude keeping him aloof and objective throughout the novel (Nash 2011: 156).

3.3 Freud

“I happened to get excited about Jackson Valley’s Campaign or Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams*, it was not her way to oppose me” (*The Moviegoer* 139).

The above-mentioned quotation from the novel can be understood as an evidence of Freud’s impact throughout the work of fiction.

Bertram Lewin interprets ““nyctophilla””[sic] as a term defining the erotically satisfied individual enjoying darkness wherein he can cherish his wishful fantasies of being in the mother’s womb (Lewin 1968: 40, qtd. in Lawson 1994: 27). With reference to Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis, Lawson writes that Binx, in need of regressing to the incestuous desire for the mother, resorts either to dreaming or to moviegoing (Freud 1953: 350, qtd. in Lawson 1994: 27).

The Sanskrit word “anhus” means ““narrowness or constriction.”” Flugel, having established a connection between anxiety and the Sanskrit word “anhus,” proceeds that during the birth, a baby passing through the narrow vagina feels fear of “pressure and shortness of breath” (Flugel 1960: 70, qtd. in Lawson 1994: 27).

“Only once in my life was the grip of everydayness broken: when I lay bleeding in a ditch” (*The Moviegoer* 145).

In light of Flugel’s connecting the words anxiety and anhus, Lawson states that the above quotation relates to Binx’s birth trauma (27).

> I was shot through the shoulder—a decent wound, as decent as ever inflicted on Rory Calhoun or Tony Curtis. After all it could have been in the buttocks or in genitals—or nose. Decent except that the fragment nicked the apex of my pleura and got me a collapsed lung and a big roaring empyema. No permanent damage, however, except a frightening-looking scar in the hollow of my neck and in certain weather a tender joint (*The Moviegoer* 126).[50]

“It is noteworthy that Binx’s wounding results in a lung condition, for there is a long tradition of suspecting nostalgia as a cause of some lung conditions’” (Rosen 1972: 448-50, qtd. in Lawson 1994: 28).

[50] See also Lawson 1994: 28 for the same quotation.

Though representing his birth trauma, the war wound is used in relation to three women with psychosexual roles in Binx's life, e.g. Sharon, his mother and Kate (Lawson 1994: 28).

Upon seeing the scar Sharon says: "Come on now, son, where did you get that?" (*The Moviegoer* 126). In saying so, Sharon becomes the mother figure (Lawson 1994: 28).

"It was not my conscience that bothered me. What I am trying to tell you is that nothing seemed worth doing except something I couldn't even remember" (*The Moviegoer* 158). The quotation indicating the conversation between Binx and his mother at the fishing camp illustrates Binx's feelings whereby he tries to make his mother discern the way he has felt throughout his entire life by referring to the wounding episode in his past. "In other words, through the screening process he represses any recognition of the primal wound and therefore regresses in fantasy and in acted-out Don Juan behaviour" (Lawson 1994: 28).

Finally, realizing that he is falling for Kate Binx says: "There I see her plain, see plain for the first time since I lay wounded in a ditch and watched an Oriental finch scratching around in the leaves…" (*The Moviegoer* 206). "Binx implies that his mental visualization is finally free of the parent in the percept. His ability to choose an appropriate mate enables him to transcend his yearning for the mother who will not nurture" (Lawson 1994: 28).

It is noteworthy mentioning that in Freud's theory, "the sea and the shore" stand for unceasing sexual union between a male and female. In its unconscious symbolic sense, the sea, standing for the mother giving her birth onto the shore, becomes the body of the mother, and so the mother and now independent baby can start to be familiar with each other (Muensterberger 1978: 5-6, qtd. in Lawson 1994: 38).

With regard to *The Last Gentleman*, since the narrator Will Barrett suffers from disconcerting attacks of déjà vu, Freud's definition of the term is of considerable importance (Lawson 1996: 72):

> In some dreams of landscapes or other localities emphasis is laid in the dream itself on a convinced feeling of having been there once before. (Occurrences of déjà vu in dreams have a special meaning!) These places

> are invariably the genitals of the dreamer's mother; there is indeed no other place about which one can assert with such conviction that one has been there once before (Freud 1958:399, qtd. in Lawson 1996: 72).

The reader witnesses that all through the novel, the protagonist Will Barrett suffers from many instances of déjà vus, which are triggered either by all those settings resembling Central Park or by Kitty and Rita, each of whom embodying a different facet of “the mother image” (Lawson 1996: 72).

In another article, Lawson (1994: 62) introduces the fact that between chapters one and three, the protagonist Will Barrett experiences ten different déjà vus, e.g. pages 12, 14, 45, 68, 90, 99, 129, 128, 152, and 161. Furthermore, Lawson states that in these instances, the way Pacella describes déjà vu, which is “based upon object-relationship theory,” is of considerable importance, and he presents Pacella’s description as follows:

> The *déjà vu* thus involves a controlled regression in the service of the ego as a consequence of the defensive and frantic search of the ego for the symbiotic and the nonsymbiotic good, omnipotent mother, rapidly scanningthe phases of life in a descent historically to the composite primal-preobject-early libidinal object-representations of mother.... This composite maternal representation, dressed in the cloak of only a familiar feeling (deja vu) is superimposed upon the reality perception of the landscape of situation, and ultimately serves two purposes: (1) the recapture of the omnipotent and all-embracing mother (primal love-object), thereby achieving infantile gratification and protection; and (2) warding off castration anxiety through "encapsulation" with the love object, while at the same time insuring "distancing" (Pacella 1975: 312, qtd. in Lawson 1994: 62).

In the same article, Lawson highlights the maternality attributed to Central Park by referring to the second sentence of the novel: “His head was propped on his jacket, which had been folded twice so that the lining was outmost, and wedged into a seam of rock.”[51] Lawson claims that Will’s jacket could be seen as a “metonomy for the ego” because the wedging of the jacket into a seam manifests Will’s wish of being enclosed “within the seam” (Lawson 1994: 62-63).

While comparing Harrison’s view of awe to that of Freud, Lawson quotes Harrison’s contention on the subject matter as follows:

> Presumably the infant's earliest fluctuating awareness of his own cold,

[51] Cf. *The Last Gentleman* 3.

> wet, or hungry self alternates with a loss of self when a symbiotic merging occurs. Thus a complex situation normally evolves. During the developmental phase of the nursling, a gradual differentiation between self and breast regularly alternates with the loss of boundaries as the infant sinks into contented sleep, paradigmatically at the mother's breast. With good mothering and other fortunate circumstances, the infant's needs do not rise to the point of trauma in this process. Later, usually in the early oedipal phase, the mother's body gains object meaning as potential receptacle or womb. I suggest that the initial recognition of mother's breast and, later, of her body customarily gives rise to wondrous awe (Harrison 1975:188, qtd.in Lawson 1994: 64).

According to Harrison, it is precisely the mother who is the reason of awe, whereas for Freud, it is not the mother, but the father who causes the awe (Lawson 1994: 64).

3.4 Fyodor Dostoevsky

In his article, William Delaney draws attention to the great influence of Dostoevsky on Percy's personality. After being strongly affected by the character Ivan in Dostoevsky's famous novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, Percy decided to convert from Protestant to Catholic (153).

Making reference to an interview between Percy and Rebecca Presson, Desmond highlights the overwhelming influence of Fyodor Dostoevsky on Percy's writing:

> I suppose my model is nearly always Dostoevsky, who was a man of very strong convictions, but his characters illustrated and incarnated the most powerful themes and issues and trends of his day. I think maybe the greatest novel of all time is *The Brothers Karamazov* which…almost prophesies and prefigures everything—all the bloody mess and the issues of the 20th century. These three brothers, incarnate in themselves very deep religious themes, atheism. Ivan Karamazov says: 'If God does not exist, all things are permitted.' All that explains so much of what has happened in this century. Dostoevsky forecast communism and what would take place with the rise of all the ideologies (Percy qtd. in Desmond 2012: 88).

Percy's producing his novels in the confessional mode has been mentioned previously. Both Albert Camus and Fyodor Dostoevsky influenced Percy concerning the confessional narrative. Having published *Lancelot*, Percy drew attention to Camus's confessional novel, *The Fall*, and declared its undeniable influence on his own work. However, Dostoevsky started influencing Percy

profoundly from the very beginning of his writing career (Desmond 2013: 132). Coetzee, underlined the fact that confessional writing can be found in Dostoevsky's every major novel, e.g. "*Notes from Underground, Crime and Punishment, The Idiot, Demons, The Brothers Karamazov*," and in his other works (Coetzee 1992: 275, qtd. in Desmond 2013: 132). It is a well-known fact that Dostoevsky's influence is present in "*The Moviegoer, The Last Gentleman, Lancelot, and The Thanatos Syndrome*," and even Percy himself made this fact public (Lawson and Kramer 1985: 5, 272, 293, qtd. in Desmond 2013: 132).[52]

4. *THE MOVIEGOER*

Under influence of two significant "confessional works in the Catholic tradition," namely, "Pascal's *Pensées* and St. Augustine's *Confessions*," Percy has created *The Moviegoer*, which partly has its origin in the first draft of *Diary of the Last Romantic*, of which the first chapter entitled ""Confessions of a Moviegoer."" Having evolved into a novel, that chapter eventually became *The Moviegoer* (Desmond 2013: 127).

Below is the map of New Orleans Neighborhoods taken from the Internet, which depicts the areas where the events in *The Moviegoer* take place.

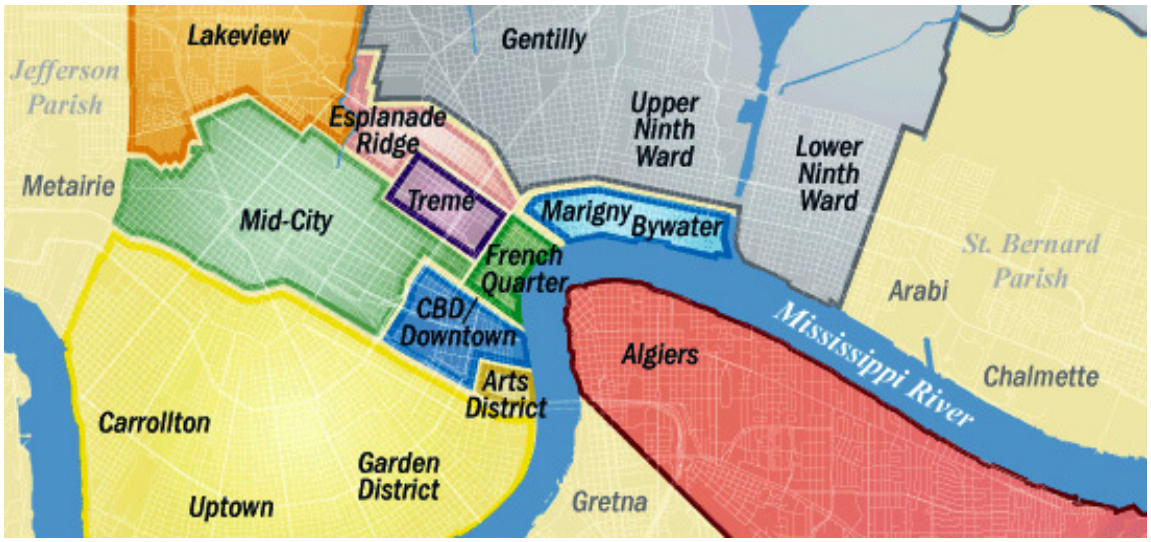

Fig.4 depicts the map of New Orleans Neighborhoods.

[52] Hooten introduces some similarities between Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* and Percy's *The Second Coming*, e.g. the toothache of the protagonists and their boredom (178-179).

> For the past four years now I have been living uneventfully in Gentilly, a middle-class suburb of New Orleans. 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. Most of the houses are either old-style California bungalows or new-style Daytona cottages. 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. I lived in the Quarter for two years, but in the end I got tired of Birmingham businessmen smirking around Bourbon Street and the homosexuals and patio connoisseurs on Royal Street. My uncle and aunt live in a gracious house in the Garden District and are very kind to me. 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 the ceiling of my bedroom (*The Moviegoer* 6).

4.1 Structure

Apart from five major chapters, there is an epilogue in the novel; in addition, all these major chapters have some subchapters. Chapter 1, pages 3-63, consists of seven subchapters. Chapter 2, pages 64 -116, contains twelve subchapters. Chapter 3, pages 117-166, consists of seven subchapters. Chapter 4, pages 167-218, consists of four subchapters. Chapter 5, pages 219- 235, contains two subchapters. The epilogue starts on page 236 and ends on page 242. After reading the novel, it could be said that each subchapter either focuses on different characters or continues explaining the previously mentioned events.

4.1.1 Plot

In his article, Nash presents the summary of the plot in the following lines: Binx Bolling, a stockbroker and bachelor from New Orleans, suddenly wakes up from his drowsy existence and becomes involved in an unclear ""horizontal search."" He asks himself about the nature of his search and answers as follows: "The search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life" (*The Moviegoer* 13, qtd. In Nash 2013: 114). It is the Wednesday just before Mardi Gras which constitutes the remaining part of the story. Except for the epilogue, the story covers only a week and on Ash Wednesday, also his thirtieth birthday, reaches its climax. Early in the story, Binx promises his Aunt Emily, as she understands so, his ultimate decision on his future plans exactly on his birthday (Nash 2013: 114-15):

> “Now. I want you to make me a promise.”
>
> “Yes ma’am.”
>
> “Your birthday is one week from today.”
>
> “Is that right?”
>
> “You will be thirty years old. Don’t you think a thirty year old man ought to know what he wants to do with his life?”
>
> “Yes.”
>
> “Will you tell me?”
>
> “Then?”
>
> “Yes. Next Wednesday afternoon—after Sam leaves. I will meet you at this spot. Will you promise to come?”
>
> “Yes ma’am.” […] (*The Moviegoer* 55-56).

It is unfortunate that he does not have the slightest idea how to plan his future. The following six days, he frequently goes to the movies, tries to entice his secretary into bed, and unbosoms himself to his step-cousin Kate Curter. Troubled as she is, Kate both drinks heavily and takes sedatives. Though undergoing therapy, she does not feel well and cannot benefit from the targeted treatment of her psychiatrist. Nash proceeds as follows:

> If there is any medical theme in the novel, it would seem to be here: What is ailing Kate, and how might she get well? But Binx, too, is sick—sick unto death with the humdrum “malaise” of his life—and, in recognition of their mutual need, he proposes marriage to Kate. She eventually accepts, and Binx, apparently following his aunt’s advice, says that he is willing to go to medical school. In the epilogue, we learn that Binx has completed a year of medical training, no longer seems interested in movies, and is consistent in caring for Kate, giving her courage to face each day’s simple tasks (Nash 2013: 114-15).

4.1.2 The Narrative Technique

Though offering an enticing ““virtual present,”” *The Moviegoer*, indeed, represents some selected past events. The protagonist Binx Bolling narrates his experiences taking place during an eight-day-time span at some point over a year ago. In doing so, he enables himself to re-experience all those feelings which he had not been able to express before. C.S. Peirce’s theory of consciousness illuminates the technique of the novel as follows: “the self-which-is silently, converses with the self-which-is-just-coming-to-be.” Lawson proceeds that a

theory as such has been alluded to in Percy's essay "From Facts to Fiction" along these lines:

> When I sat down to write *The Moviegoer*, I was very much aware of discarding the conventional notions of a plot and a set of characters, discarded because the traditional concept of plot-and-character itself reflects a view of reality which has been called into question. Rather would I begin with a *man* who finds himself in a *world*, a very concrete man who is located in a very concrete place and time. Such a man might be represented as *coming to himself*...(Percy 1966: 9, qtd. in Lawson 1994: 25).

Having come to himself, the protagonist Binx Bolling of *The Moviegoer* begins narrating the story using a set of images whereby he can convey, represent and name his own feelings to himself. Since the images and their form are shaped and affected by dreams, dreams as well as dreaming are undeniably significant throughout the narrative. The teenaged Binx, having read *Interpretations of Dreams* by Freud[53], becomes excited; however, he gets disappointed by his mother's disinterested demeanor. Unwittingly driven by those dreams, the adult Binx, a thirty-year-old man, starts ""acting out"" due to his mother's disdain. Finally, the Binx in the epilogue can now realize and name his former problems as a result of his adherence to Christianity. During the narration of the eight-day-time span, Binx has been to the movies for four times and mentions a large number of movies, twelve of which are identified and several of which are unidentified (Lawson 1994: 25-26).[54]

4.2 Themes

There are four themes in this chapter: alienation, religion, stoicism, and sexuality.

4.2.1 Alienation

Quoting Kierkegaard's *Sickness Unto Death*, Lawson states in his 1984 article as follows:

> "the specific character of despair is precisely this: it is unaware of being despair." The alienated person, like the despairer, may not be aware of or, if aware, able to give voice to his alienation. In that case, what he says

[53] Cf. *The Moviegoer* 139.
[54] "Binx references at least twelve films, thirty-seven actors, and eight actresses in the novel" (Nash 157).

> about another person's alienation offers a clue to the condition from which he suffers, but cannot name (70).

It could be suggested that Binx became aware of his alienation, whenever he started his horizontal search. On pages forty and forty-one of this paper, a direct quotation concerning his vertical search, which started years before his ongoing horizontal search, has already been given. So it could be claimed that the moment he became aware of the fact that his ongoing search started, he also became aware of his alienation, since he narrates as follows:

> The only difficulty was that though the universe had been disposed of, I myself was left over. There I lay in my hotel room with my search over yet still obliged to draw one breath and then the next. But now I have undertaken a different kind of search, a horizontal search. As a consequence, what takes place in my room is less important. What is important is what I shall find when I leave my neighborhood (*The Moviegoer* 70).

One can also claim that the moment he became aware of his alienation, he started to question everydayness, of which the inescapable outcome is the existential malaise.[55]

Examples of everydayness are as follows:

> The search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life. This morning, for example, I felt as if I had come to myself on a strange island. And what does such a castaway do? Why, he pokes around the neighborhood and he doesn't miss a trick. To become aware of the possibility of the search is to be onto something. Not to be onto something is to be in despair (*The Moviegoer* 13).

Interestingly, the narrator Binx mentions everydayness for the first time on page thirteen in the novel; however, the fact that he started his ongoing horizontal search is stated for the first time on page seventy. Because dreams and dreaming are undeniably significant throughout the novel, as mentioned earlier in this paper, it could be said that the reader should not expect the narrated facts to follow a chronological order.

Other quotations from the novel about everydayness are as follows: "Am I, in my search, a hundred miles ahead of my fellow Americans or a hundred miles behind

[55] On pages 14 and 49 of this paper, the term malaise has already been introduced.

them? That is to say: Have 98% of Americans already found what I seek or are they so sunk in *everydayness* [emphasis added] that not even the possibility of a search has occurred to them" (*The Moviegoer* 14).

> But, good as it is, my old place is used up (places get used up by rotatory and repetitive use) and when I awake, I awake in the grip of everydayness. *Everydayness* [emphasis added] is the enemy. No search is possible. Perhaps there was a time when everydayness was not too strong and one could break its grip by brute strength. Now nothing breaks it—but disaster. Only once in my life was the grip of *everydayness* [emphasis added] broken: when I lay bleeding in a ditch. In a sudden rage and, as if I had been seized by a fit, I roll over and fall in a heap on the floor and lie shivering on the boards, worse off than the miserablest muskrat in the swamp. *Nevertheless I vow: I'm a son of a bitch if I'll be defeated by the everydayness* [emphasis added]. (The *everydayness* [emphasis added] is everywhere now, having begun in the cities and seeking out the remotest nooks and corners of the countryside, even the swamps. […] I don't know what either of them are talking about. Really I can't make head or tail of it. The best I can do is lie rigid as a stick under the cot, *locked in a death grip with everydayness* [emphasis added], sworn not to move a muscle until I advance another inch in my search (*The Moviegoer* 145-146).

4.2.2 Religion

The fact that "one could view the conversion event as both the center of Percy's own life and the paradigm for his novels, in which not only the protagonist but also the readers are led toward a transformation of consciousness" was already mentioned on page eight of this paper. In addition, quoting Dubus and Grubgeld, it was stated that "towards the end of Percy's earlier novels, the anticipation of marriage of the male protagonists, which is supposed to save them from meaninglessness, serves as a critical moment in their pilgrimage." Therefore, one could suggest that marriage and religion could be regarded as inextricably intertwined themes.

> *What do you seek—God?* [emphasis added] you ask with a smile. I hesitate to answer,[56] since all other Americans have settled the matter for themselves and to give such an answer would amount to setting myself a goal which everyone else has reached—and therefore raising a question in which no one has the slightest interest. Who wants to be dead last among one hundred and eighty million Americans? For, as everyone knows, the polls report that 98% of Americans believe in God and the remaining 2% are atheists and agnostics—*which leaves not a single*

[56] It could be indicated as the proof of Binx's religious skepticism.

> *percentage point for a seeker* [emphasis added].[57] For myself, I enjoy answering polls as much as anyone and take pleasure in giving intelligent replies to all questions (*The Moviegoer* 13-14).
>
> REMEMBER TOMORROW Starting point for search: It no longer avails to start with creatures and *prove God* [emphasis added]. Yet it is *impossible to rule God out* [emphasis added]. The only possible starting point: the strange fact of one's own invincible apathy—that if the proofs were proved and God presented himself, nothing would be changed. Here is the strangest fact of all. Abraham saw signs of God and believed. Now the only sign is that all the signs in the world make no difference. Is this God's ironic revenge? *But I am onto him* [emphasis added] (*The Moviegoer* 146- 147).

During the character analysis of Kate, it will also be indicated that only Binx can save her from her existential angst. As with Binx, she is onto something, i.e. she is searching for meaning and purpose in life, for she says to him "You're like me, but worse. Much worse" (*The Moviegoer* 44). In the following dialogue, it could be stated that Kate considers Binx first as her God, but later on as God's representative:

> "What are you?"
>
> "I'll gladly tell you because I just found out and I never want to forget. Please don't let me forget. *I am a religious person* [emphasis added]."
>
> "How is that?"
>
> "Don't you see? What I want is to believe in someone completely and then do what he wants me to do. If God were to tell me: Kate, here is what I want you to do; you get off this train right now and go over there to that corner by the Southern Life and Accident Insurance Company and stand there for the rest of your life and speak kindly to people—you think I would not do it? You think I would not be the happiest girl in Jackson, Mississippi? I would."
>
> I have a drink and look at her corner. The moonlight seems palpable, a dense pure matrix in which is embedded curbstone and building alike.
>
> She takes the bottle. "*Will you tell me what to do?* [emphasis added]"
>
> "Sure."
>
> "You can do it because you are not religious. God is not religious. You are the unmoved mover. You don't need God or anyone else—no credit to you, unless it is a credit to be the most self-centered person alive. I don't know whether I love you, but I believe in you and I will do what you tell me. Now if I marry you, will you tell me: Kate, this morning do such and such, and if

[57] Though there is no single percentage point for a seeker, he is onto something, i.e. he is searching for meaning and purpose in life.

> we have to go to a party, will you tell me: Kate, stand right there and have three drinks and talk to so and so?
>
> Will you?"
>
> "Sure" (*The Moviegoer* 197-98).

As mentioned earlier, marriage and religion could be regarded as inextricably intertwined themes. It could be claimed that Kate's marriage with Binx helps her partly get rid of her existential angst. Dependent on Binx, she seems to live contentedly as the reader learns from the epilogue of the novel.

4.2.3 Stoicism

Since Aunt Emily serves as the perfect example of a southern lady, who strictly follows the Stoic ethical doctrines, one can say that Stoicism is one of the themes in the novel, which opens with Aunt Emily's stoic advice. Upon learning his brother Scotty is dead, Binx hears Aunt Emily advising him to become brave and act like a soldier:

> "you and I have always been good buddies, haven't we?" "Yes ma'am." My heart gave a big pump and the back of my neck prickled like a dog's. "I've got bad news for you, son." She squeezed me tighter than ever. "Scotty is dead. Now it's all up to you. It's going to be difficult for you but I know you're going to act like a soldier." This was true. I could easily act like a soldier. Was that all I had to do? (*The Moviegoer* 4).

In addition, the first subchapter of the last chapter ends with a dialogue between Binx and Aunt Emily, in which her deep commitment to Stoic philosophy is emphasized. Much information on Stoicism is presented under Aunt Emily's character analysis.

4.2.4 Sexuality

As Binx is an aesthete leading a licentious life, it could be said that sexuality is another theme in the novel. Following passages present the theme of sexuality: "Naturally I would like to say that I had made conquests of these splendid girls, my secretaries, *casting them off one after the other like old gloves*, [emphasis added] but it would not be strictly true" (*The Moviegoer* 8).

> Her roommate watched us from an upper window. "Wave to Joyce," Sharon commands me. […] *If only I could be with both of them* [emphasis added], with a house full of them, an old Esplanade rooming house full of

> strapping American girls with their silly turned heads and *their fine big bottoms* [emphasis added] (*The Moviegoer* 123).

During the analysis of Binx, more passages will be introduced.

As mentioned earlier, being aware of his desperate condition, the aesthete might resort to short-term reliefs. Pleasures of such reliefs, however, are destined to dwindle due to recursive experiences, i.e. the intensity and charms of pleasure dissipate because of repetition. After asking the question what a repetition is, the narrator describes a successful repetition as follows: “A repetition is the re-enactment of past experience toward the end of isolating the time segment which has lapsed in order that it, the lapsed time, can be savored of itself and without the usual adulteration of events that clog time like peanuts in brittle” (*The Moviegoer* 80). In light of the narrator’s description, one can say that Binx’s having sex with different women is a perfect example of repetition. The narrator also describes a related term, i.e. rotation: “A rotation I define as the experiencing of the new beyond the expectation of the experiencing of the new” (*The Moviegoer* 144). Therefore, one can state that a rotation is a type of repetition which gives pleasure. It is not boring like a repetition. Every new sexual intercourse with a different girl can be seen as a rotation as long as it gives pleasure. According to the definitions of both terms, however, every rotation is destined to become a repetition.

According to Freud’s theory, one can suggest that whenever Binx has sexual affairs with different women, he, in fact, yearns for his mother.

4.3 Characters and Character Analysis

In this section, characters will be analyzed in accordance with the theoretical information given so far.

4.3.1 John Bickerson “Binx” Bolling

Earlier in this paper, much theoretical information such as Heidegger’s portrait of the predicament of human beings driven into a technological community of modern world, Voegelin’s scientistic philosophy, Percy’s dramatization of the workings of the sensuous-erotic spirit, Kierkegaard’s description of aesthetic, ethical and religious forms of life, Descartes’ Cartesian selfhood and mind-body

split were presented. To indicate all this theoretical information, the protagonist Binx will be analyzed in a larger context, i.e. through passages presenting his character traits and his scientistic worldview:

> I am a model tenant and a model citizen and take pleasure in doing all that is expected of me. My wallet is full of identity cards, library cards, *credit cards* [emphasis added]. […] I own *a first-class television set*, *an all but silent air conditioner and a very long lasting deodorant* [emphasis added]. My armpits never stink (*The Moviegoer* 6-7).

One could claim that the above passage reflects Binx's scientistic worldview since he owns a television set, a silent air conditioner and a long-lasting deodorant. Binx likes enticing his secretaries into bed. It could be said that the following passage indicates the workings of his sensuous-erotic spirit since he confesses that he has had three female secretaries. Moreover, advances in nuclear science and technology could be said to be reflecting the scientistic worldview: "I have *had three secretaries* [emphasis added], girls named Marcia, Linda, and now Sharon. Last night I saw a TV play about *a nuclear test explosion"* [emphasis added] (*The Moviegoer* 7-8).

> The car itself is all-important, I have discovered. When I first moved to Gentilly, *I bought a new Dodge sedan,* [emphasis added] […] here was I, a healthy young man, a veteran with all his papers in order, *a U.S. citizen driving a very good car* [emphasis added]. […] I discovered to my dismay that my fine new Dodge was a regular incubator of malaise.[58] Though it was comfortable enough, though it ran like a clock, though we went spinning along in perfect comfort and with a perfect view of the scenery like the American couple in the Dodge ad, the malaise quickly became suffocating. […] *Either would have died for the other. In despair I put my hand under her dress* […]. *If I were a Christian I would make a pilgrimage by foot*[59], [emphasis added] for this is the best way to travel. But girls do not like it. *My little red MG* [emphasis added], however, is an exception to the rule. It is a miserable vehicle actually, with not a single virtue save one: *it is immune to the malaise. You have no idea what happiness Marcia and I experienced as soon as we found ourselves spinning along the highway in this bright little beetle* [emphasis added] (*The Moviegoer* 121-22).

According to Underwood "Speeding around Louisiana in his red MG, makes Percy equally plausible as the antidote to the anti-modern authors who dominated

[58] The term malaise refers to his alienation.

[59] Binx's rejection of Christianity. It could be said that he does not really know whether he is a Christian or not. In a conversation with his half-brother Lonnie, presented on pages 31-33 of this paper, Binx seems to believe in God since he enjoys having a religious conversation with Lonnie. Until the end of the novel, Binx can be seen as a religious doubter who comes to himself in the end.

the first Southern Literary Renaissance" (141). Therefore, one could claim that Binx, as a modern aesthete, enjoys driving his car as a kind of short-term relief. However, the narrator informs the reader that Binx's search was triggered by a dung beetle during the Korean war: "My shoulder didn't hurt but it was pressed hard against the ground as if somebody sat on me. Six inches from my nose a dung beetle was scratching around under the leaves. As I watched, there awoke in me an immense curiosity. I was onto something. I vowed that if I ever got out of this fix, I would pursue the search" (*The Moviegoe*r 10-11). It could be suggested that the narrator refers to Binx's car as a bright little beetle to indicate that Binx is on search whenever he drives his car. Since Binx states that the reader cannot imagine his and Marcia's happiness in his car, three interpretations could be made as follows: First, driving his car reminds him of his search, namely, as soon as he is in his car, he remembers the fact that he is onto something and therefore becomes happy because becoming onto something makes his life more meaningful and not to be onto something means to be in despair. Second, driving a car with his girlfriend sitting next to him might imply the possibility of sexual intercourse and therefore makes him happy. Lastly, it was previously mentioned that Binx visits the movies so that he could cherish his wishful fantasies of being in his mother's womb. The reason why he describes his car as a little beetle could be its reference to his mother's womb if a female womb is seen as a little cave.

The following passage can be presented as another example:

> *We looked at each other in astonishment: the malaise was gone![60]* [emphasis added] […] *It was nevertheless with some apprehension that I set out with Sharon.[61]* [emphasis added] What if the malaise had been abated simply by the novelty of the MG? For by now the MG was no novelty. What if the malaise was different with every girl and needed a different cure? (*The Moviegoer* 122).

The last statement of the narrator in the above passage, i.e. the question beginning with *What if* can be seen as the explanation of a repetition.

> Either very great happiness lay in store for us, or malaise past all conceiving. *Marcia and Linda were as nothing to this elfin creature, this sumptuous elf from Eufala who moved like a ballerina*[62][…] [emphasis

[60] The possibility of sexual intercourse kills the sense of alienation because experiencing pleasures makes an aesthete like Binx happy for a short period. One can consider this statement as an example of a rotation.

[61] Binx suddenly embarks on a new relationship with a different girl without presenting a reasonable explanation. Therefore, it could be said that Binx, as an aesthete, is running after new pleasures.

[62] The new girl means excitement. This statement can be seen as an example of a rotation.

> added]. *With her in the bucket seat beside me I spin along the precipice with the blackest malaise below and the greenest of valleys ahead*[63] [emphasis added] (*The Moviegoer* 122).

The following passages are the specific examples of his Cartesian selfhood, i.e.

he sees himself as *a ghost* [emphasis added] due to the mind-body split.

In a dialogue with Kate:

> "A proper Bolling. Jules thinks you're a go-getter. But you don't fool me." "You know."
>
> "Yes."
>
> "What kind?"
>
> "You're like me, but worse. Much worse." [64]
>
> She is in tolerable good spirits. It is not necessary to pay too much attention to her. I spy the basket-arm of a broken settee. It has a presence about it: *the ghost* [emphasis added] of twenty summers in Feliciana (*The Moviegoer* 43-44).

"There is a danger of slipping clean out of space and time. It is possible *to become a ghost* [emphasis added] and not know whether one is in downtown Loews in Denver or suburban Bijou in Jacksonville" (*The Moviegoer* 75).

"As for hobbies, people with stimulating hobbies suffer from the most noxious of despairs since they are tranquillized in their despair. I muse along *as quietly as a ghost* [emphasis added]" (*The Moviegoer* 86).

"What is the malaise? you ask. The malaise is the pain of loss. The world is lost to you, the world and the people in it, and there remains only you and the world and you no more able to be in the world than Banquo's *ghost* [emphasis added]" (*The Moviegoer* 120).

"Lonnie is beside himself, doesn't know whether to watch Clint Walker or me), *this ghost of a theater* [emphasis added], a warm Southern night, the Western Desert and this fine big sweet piece, Sharon" (*The Moviegoer* 144).

---

[63] Sexual intercourse with a new girl would give Binx pleasure and therefore saves him from his existential malaise. This sentence can be seen as an example of a rotation.

[64] The proof that Kate is onto something like Binx, i.e. she is also searching for meaning and purpose in life.

“A young man am I, twenty nine, but I am as full of dreams as an ancient. At night the years come back and perch around my bed *like ghosts* [emphasis added]” (*The Moviegoer* 145).

“Knowing all about genie-souls and living in haunted places […] where *the ghosts of heroes* [emphasis added] walk abroad by day and are more real than people, *he knows a ghost* [emphasis added] when he sees one […]” (*The Moviegoer* 203).

All the above-mentioned information until this point could be considered as ample evidence of both Binx’s having a Cartesian mind and his leading an aesthetic life. Therefore, one can say that Binx is not only an aesthete but also a Cartesian self. Binx uses medical vocabulary like a doctor while describing Sharon: “She is a good-sized girl, at least five feet six and a hundred and thirty-five pounds—as big as a majorette—and her face is a little too short and pert, like one of those Renoir girls, and her eyes a little too yellow. Yet she has the most fearful soap-clean good looks” (*The Moviegoer* 65).[65]

> But when she puts her hand to her hair, you see that it is quite an arm. *The soft round muscle goes slack of its own weight* [emphasis added]. […] I can see the line of her cheek with its whorl of down and *the Slavic prominence under the notch of her eye and the quick tender incurve, shortening her face like a little mignon* [emphasis added] (*The Moviegoer* 67).[66]

“Today Kate has her brown-eyed look. Sometimes her irises turn to discs” (*The Moviegoer* 31-32).[67]

In light of the Voegelin’s explanations about the scientistic philosophy, one can say that Binx has the characteristics of a scientist.

4.3.2 Kate Cutrer

Kate is Aunt Emily’s stepdaughter and therefore Binx’s step-cousin by marriage: The fact that there is at least one suicidal character in each of Percy’s novels was mentioned hitherto; thus, it should be admitted that Kate represent the suicidal character in the novel. She is five years younger than Binx. Because she lost her

[65] See also Nash 118.
[66] An incurve is “a crowding of the cheekbone into the eye socket” (Nash 118).
[67] See also Nash 118.

fiancé, Lyell, in a car accident she is in despair. Indeed, it could be said that her existential angst starts even when she was a teenager: “When Kate was ten and I was fifteen, my aunt became worried about her. Kate was a good girl and made good grades, but she had no friends. Instead of playing at recess, she would do her lessons and sit quietly at her desk until class began” (*The Moviegoer* 32).

Kate is Aunt Emily’s stepdaughter: “Since I go there every Sunday for dinner and today is Wednesday, it can mean only one thing: she wants to have one of her serious talks. It will be extremely grave, either a piece of bad news about her *stepdaughter Kate* [emphasis added] or else a serious talk about me, about the future and what I ought to do” (*The Moviegoer* 3).

One of the reasons for Kate’s existential angst is: “Eddie tells me how much he admires my aunt and my cousin Kate. Several years ago Kate was engaged to marry Eddie’s brother Lyell. On the very eve of the wedding *Lyell was killed in an accident, the same accident which Kate survived*” [emphasis added] (*The Moviegoer* 20).

The following dialogue between Binx and Aunt Emily can be presented as the exigency of Kate’s wretched condition. It indicates that the car accident affected her so badly that she now fears “a general catastrophe.” She is simply vulnerable and suicidal, and even her psychiatrist Dr. Mink cannot aid her:

> “Do you see these whisky bottles?”
>
> “Yes ma’am.”
>
> “And this kind?”
>
> She gives me an oblong brown bottle.
>
> “Yes.”
>
> “Do you know where they came from?”
>
> “No’m.”
>
> “Mercer found them on top of an armoire. That armoire.” She points mysteriously to the very ceiling above us. “He was setting out rat poison.”
>
> “In Kate’s room?”

"Yes. What do you think?"

"Those are not whisky bottles."

"What are they?"

"Wine. Gipsy Rose. They make wine bottles flat like that." "Read that." She nods at the bottle in my hand.

"Sodium pentobarbital. One and one half grains. This is a wholesaler's bottle." "Do you know where we found that?"

"In the box?"

"In the incinerator. The second in a week."

I am silent. Now my aunt does take her seat at the desk.

"I haven't told Walter. Or Jules. Because I'm not really worried. Kate is just fine. She is going to come through with flying colors. And she and Walter are going to be happy. But as time grows short, she is getting a little nervous."

"You mean you think she is afraid of another accident?"

"She is afraid of *a general catastrophe* [emphasis added]. But that is not what worries me."

"What worries you?"

"I don't want her moping around the house again."

"She's not working downtown with you?"

"Not for two weeks."

"Does she feel bad?"

"Oh no. Nothing like that. But she's a little scared."

"Is she seeing Dr Mink?"

"She refuses. She thinks that if she goes to see a doctor she'll get sick." (*The Moviegoer* 27-28).

It could be claimed that the passage below refers to two facts: First, the word "analytic" can be interpreted as the influence of the scientistic philosophy on Kate. Second, the devaluation of language can be inferred since Binx explains the meaning of Kate's utterances:

> When Kate calls me, she takes her *analytic tone* [emphasis added]. […] When I answer the phone, instead of hearing "Hello, this is Kate," there comes into my ear a low-pitched voice saying something like: *"Well, the knives have started flying," which means that she and her mother have been aggressive toward each other; or: "What do you know? I'm celebrating the rites of spring after all," which turns out to mean that she has decided, in her ironic and reflected way, to attend the annual supper given for former queens of the Neptune ball* [emphasis added] (*The Moviegoer* 65-66).

The second example: "Sharon turns not one hair as I talk with my aunt about Kate in our old Feliciana style of talking and as I talk to Kate *in our analytic style of talking* [emphasis added]" (*The Moviegoer* 70).

Kate attempts suicide and Dr. Mink lavages her stomach (*The Moviegoer* 172-173). The passage below indicates that Kate sinks within herself, yet as an aesthete Binx, without deeper insight and understanding of the situation, returns her capsules only a day after she took an overdose of sleeping pills.

> Kate, who has been fumbling in her purse, becomes still. I feel her eyes on my face. "Do you have my capsules?"
>
> "What?"
>
> "My capsules."
>
> "Why yes, I do. I forgot that I had them."
>
> Not taking her eyes from my face, she receives the bottle, puts it in her purse, snaps it.
>
> "That's not like you."
>
> "I didn't take them."
>
> "Who did?"
>
> "Sam gave them to me. It was while I was in the hammock. I hardly remember it."
>
> "He took them from my purse?"
>
> "I don't know" (*The Moviegoer* 186-87).

Binx and Kate together go to Chicago without saying anything to Aunt Emily. Below is the conversation between Binx and Kate on the train, indicating that only Binx can save her:

> "Are you all right?"

She nods slowly to the window, but her cheek is against me. […]

"I am all right. *I am never too bad with you*." [emphasis added]

"Why?"

"No thanks to you. On the contrary. The others are much more sympathetic than you, especially Mother and Sam" (*The Moviegoer* 192).

4.3.3 Aunt Emily

Serving as the perfect example of a southern lady in the novel, Aunt Emily follows the Stoic ethical doctrines. She is, in fact, Binx's great-aunt and has been a surrogate mother to him. The narrator, Binx introduces her paternal aunt as follows:

> My aunt has done a great deal for me. When my father was killed, my mother, who had been a trained nurse, went back to her hospital in Biloxi. My aunt offered to provide my education. As a consequence much of the past fifteen years has been spent in her house. *She is really my great aunt* [emphasis added]. Yet she is younger by so many years than her brothers that she might easily be my father's sister—or rather the daughter of all three brothers, since it is as their favorite and fondest darling that she still appears in her own recollection, the female sport of a fierce old warrior gens and no doubt for this reason never taken quite seriously, even in her rebellion—as when she left the South, worked in a settlement house in Chicago and, like many well-born Southern ladies, *embraced advanced political ideas* [emphasis added]. After years of being the sort of "bird" her brothers indulged her in being and even expected her to be—her career reached its climax when she served as a Red Cross volunteer in the Spanish civil war, where I cannot picture her otherwise than as that sort of fiercely benevolent demoniac Yankee lady most incomprehensible to Spaniards—within the space of six months she met and married Jules Cutrer, widower with child, settled down in the Garden District and became as handsome and formidable as her brothers (*The Moviegoer* 26-27).

Other examples of Aunt Emily's clear commitment to Stoicism are as follows: "I made up the kind of spiel I thought my aunt had in mind. "Kate," I said in *my aunt's Socratic manner* [emphasis added], "you think you are the only person in the world who is shy. Believe me, you are not" (*The Moviegoer* 32).

> My aunt's letter makes a stronger demand upon me. She thinks constantly of other people—she is actually unselfish, the only person I know who is. When she reads something or thinks of something which may be useful to others, she is likely as not to write it down on the spot and mail it to them. Yes, it is a memo. There is no salutation or signature, only a single fat paragraph in a bold backslanted hand.

> Every moment think steadily *as a Roman* [emphasis added] and a man, to do what thou hast in hand with perfect and simple dignity, and a feeling of affection and freedom and justice. These words of *the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus* [emphasis added] strike me as pretty good advice, for even the orneriest young scamp (*The Moviegoer* 78).

Kate and Binx travel to Chicago without informing Aunt Emily. Disappointed by Binx's actions, Aunt Emily wants to speak to him after their return. The conversation shows how firmly she is committed to her duties and responsibilities as a genuine southern stoic:

> "One last question to satisfy my idle curiosity. What has been going on in your mind during all the years when we listened to music together, read the Crito, and spoke together—or was it only I who spoke—good Lord, I can't remember—of goodness and truth and beauty and nobility?"
>
> Another cry and the *ramoneur* is gone. There is nothing for me to say.
>
> "Don't you love these things? Don't you live by them?"
>
> "No."
>
> "What do you love? What do you live by?"
>
> I am silent.
>
> "Tell me where I have failed you.
>
> "You haven't."
>
> "What do you think is the purpose of life—to go to the movies and dally with every girl that comes along?"
>
> "No" (*The Moviegoer* 226).

Lawson states that Aunt Emily is also alienated like Binx or Kate since she was seeking for a meaningful way of living life. For this reason, she did not miss the chance of serving as a war nurse in the Spanish Civil War (Lawson 1984: 75). Having read all the information mentioned hitherto, Stoic ethics seems to make Aunt Emily's life more meaningful. Towards the end of the novel, there is no implication of her having adopted Kierkegaard's third form of living, i.e. religious life.

All these characters analyzed so far are the major characters. In the theory section, a long passage between Binx and his stepbrother Lonnie has already been introduced.[68]Since the story revolves mostly around these major

[68] See pages 31-33 of this paper.

characters, other minor characters of little importance will not be analyzed for the sake of brevity. However, it is also important to read the following paragraph as a final explanation about Binx and Lonnie.

With varying degrees of religiosity of Binx and Lonnie, the unique relationship between them is difficult for Percy to handle. Being a skeptic, Binx represents the demoniac self; in contrast, Lonnie is a devout Catholic. Besides exploring the experiences of Binx's inner world, Percy has to devise a solution to dramatize Lonnie's influence on Binx, so that he can show the reader the requisite amelioration of the protagonist through the ascension of Jesus Christ. Binx's marriage to and his love for Kate start to heal his riven self and keep him away from leading a licentious life which is the reason for his spiritual ruin (Desmond 2006: 199). Nevertheless, one should not underestimate Lonnie's undeniable influence on Binx's conversion. With regard to his conversion, Chesnick's opinion appears to be significant:

> "Percy himself in later comments has tried to point up the intended religious endings of his novels. Binx, we are to understand, underwent a spiritual conversion while witnessing the death of his half-brother Lonnie. He jumped, as Percy explains it, from the aesthetic mode of disinterested contemplation clear over the ethical mode and right into the religious mode" (Percy qtd. in Chesnick 5).

One can still claim that since the narrator is Binx himself, he could be assumed to be lying to the reader especially in the epilogue. Stating that Percy, indeed, hates "easy happily-ever-after" endings, Chesnick confirms this claim (5).

5. *THE LAST GENTLEMAN*

"If a man cannot forget, he will never amount to much" (*The Last Gentleman*)

An episodic narrative that it is, *The Last Gentleman* was interrupted in its writing process by President Kennedy's assassination. "At any rate, Percy's sense of life is of a growing collective insanity, and his comedy turns toward broad satire" (Chesnick 4).

5.1 Structure

There are five major chapters in the novel, and all these major chapters have

some subchapters. Chapter 1, pages 3-41, consists of seven subchapters. Chapter 2, pages 43-123, contains fourteen subchapters. Chapter 3, pages 125-183, consists of seven subchapters. Chapter 4, pages 185-289, consists of fifteen subchapters. Chapter 5, pages 291-409, contains twelve subchapters.

5.1.1 Plot

> *The Last Gentleman* (1966) followed Walker Percy's first published novel, *The Moviegoer* (1961). Their plots are broadly similar. Both follow an intelligent, but dislocated, male protagonist as he embarks on a search for meaning apart from his family's past; both novels end with the death of a teenage boy. *The Last Gentleman* differs, however from its predecessor and even its sequel (*The Second Coming*, 1980) in its examination of labor and leisure—an examination illuminated by reading Percy's novel alongside *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*. […] a homeless wayfarer whose peculiar perspective on reality makes him unusually receptive to both people and things (Humphries 554).

5.1.2 The Narrative Technique

The novel opens with the narrator's introduction of the twenty-five-year old protagonist Will Barrett, who is ready to look through his telescope in the Great Meadow, an area in New York City's Central Park, in early summer, 1964. Though occasionally informing how other characters think, the omniscient narrator does not share any details of importance. Narrating not only Barrett's subjective experience but also his objective behavior, the narrator uses voiceover narration, whereby he can add his own personal commentary. Such introspection reflects the thoughts of a person from the next generation. It is possible to make interpretation as such only after the introspection at a time too far in the future, i.e. a generation later. Therefore, the young Barret, aged twenty-five, is being viewed through the eyes of the old one, who is forty-seven years of age. Another reason why Percy does not use a first-person narrator is that the narrator gives a medical history of his younger self when he was a child (Lawson 1988: 16-17):

> As a child he had had 'spells,' occurrences which were nameless and not to be thought of, let alone mentioned, and which he therefore thought of as lying at the secret and somehow shameful heart of childhood itself. There was a name for it, he discovered later, which gave it form and habitation. It was *déjà vu*, at least he reckoned it was. What happened anyhow was that even when he was a child and was sitting in the kitchen watching D'lo snap beans or make beaten biscuits, there came over him as it might come over a sorrowful old man the strongest sense that it had all happened

> before and that something else was going to happen and when it did he would know the secret of his own life. Things seemed to turn white and dense and time itself became freighted with an unspeakable emotion. Sometimes he “fell out,” and would wake up hours later, in his bed, refreshed but still haunted (*The Last Gentleman* 11, qtd.in Lawson 1988: 17).

That his adult condition has improved is impossible to claim: "To be specific, he had now a nervous condition and suffered spells of amnesia and even between times did not quite know what was what" (*The Last Gentleman* 11, qtd.in Lawson 1988: 17). The narrator summarizes his adult condition in the following lines: "A German physician[69] once remarked that in the lives of people who suffer emotional illness he had noticed the presence of Lucken or gaps. As he studied the history of a particular patient he found whole sections missing, like a book with blank pages" (*The Last Gentleman* 12, qtd. in Lawson 1988: 17).

In another article, again Lawson states as follows:

> The older Will Barrett who narrates the adventures of his younger self is obviously a close student of psychoanalysis. Thus the case history of his younger self that he presents contains apparently disparate symptoms that fundamentally correlate: Will’s existence has been shattered by the loss of his father[70] and mother. The loss of the mother causes the worst trauma, so painful that Will cannot even personify her, but thinks symbolically of her as Eden. The South, a gold course, a park: thus he haunts Central Park. But his attempt to regain that lost object is impeded by the fact that when he is in the park, he hallucinates the image of the other lost object, the father, who confuses Will with his absolute distinction between ladies and whores. Not coincidentally a young man sidles up (98-99)[71] as a reminder to Will that one version of sexuality precludes the difficult distinction of ladies from whores (Lawson 1994: 60).

While introducing the character Sutter Vaught, some more information on the narrative technique, i.e. ““double-voiced discourse””[72] will be presented.

5.2 Themes

Religion, romantic nostalgia, and sexuality will be presented as the main themes.

---

[69] “The German physician was Sigmund Freud“(Lawson 1988: 17).
[70] “Will must have been, like Dostoevsky, about eighteen when his father died” (Lawson 1988: 19).
[71] *The Last Gentleman* 98-99.
[72] See Brownlee 106.

Under the themes of religion and romantic nostalgia, other related themes will be clarified as well.

5.2.1 Religion

The fact that Barrett is not interested in Christianity has been mentioned before.[73] Lawson shares the same opinion since Will cannot decipher the symbolic meaning of the peregrine, i.e. “a statement of the man’s wayfaring condition.” Will, therefore, does not leave the park and continues looking through the telescope. Thus, he sees Kitty Vaught and falls in love with her (Lawson 1988: 26-27).

According to Dubus, the last pages of the novel should be understood as “victory of love over death, hope over despair, dialogue over silence” (Dubus qtd. in Rodeheffer 105).

It has previously been stated that the philosophical notion of “coming to oneself” exists in all Percy’s novels.[74] Should page twenty-five of this paper be revised, the following could be repeated: “The Catholic novelist has to be very careful. He has to be underhanded, deceitful, and damn careful how he uses the words of religion, which have all fallen into disuse and almost become obscenities, thanks to people like Jimmy Swaggar. [...] In a world of inefficacious morality and discourse, it should be the mission of a religious novelist to resort to deceit, evasive craft and cunning intelligence he can summon up from the darker parts of his soul. The fictional use of violence, shock, comedy, insult, the bizarre are the everyday tools of his trade. How could it be otherwise? In a society in which holding Christian ceremonies is generally considered insignificant and making visits together with the children to see Santa Claus at a department store is found much more important, it would make no sense to write about the Christian practice of baptism in a serious tone.” It is important to repeat all this information because what Dubus presents as the themes of the novel can be seen as the different interpretation of the theme of religion. The reader witnesses a weird baptism scene, for – in his moribund condition in hospital – the baptized young boy Jamie, surrounded with kindness and loving care of his brother Sutter and Will Barrett, soils himself on his death bed; therefore, the entire baptism scene

[73] See page 30 of this paper.
[74] See page 7 of this paper.

could be understood as Percy's employment of deceit, evasive craft, and cunning intelligence to emphasize the insignificance of faith in a postmodern world. Below is the baptism scene which could be assumed to be bringing the story gradually to its both heart-warming and poignant climax:

> "Hold it, son" Sutter stopped Jamie fondly and almost jokingly, as if Jamie were a drunk, and motioned the engineer to the cabinet. "Jamie here wants to move his bowels and doesn't like the bedpan. I don't blame him." The priest helped Sutter with Jamie. After a moment there arose to the engineer's nostrils first intimation, like a new presence in the room, a somebody, then a foulness beyond the compass of smell. This could only be the dread ultimate rot of the molecules themselves, an abject surrender. *It was the body's disgorgement of its most secret shame* [emphasis added]. Doesn't this ruin everything, wondered the engineer (if only the women were here, they wouldn't permit it, oh Jamie never should have left home). He stole a glance at the others. Sutter and the priest bent to their tasks as if it were nothing out of the ordinary. The priest supported Jamie's head on the frail stem of its neck. When a nurse came to service the cabinet, the engineer avoided her eye. The stench scandalized him. Shouldn't they leave? […]
>
> The priest nodded and leaned on the bed, supporting himself on his heavy freckled fists. He looked not at Jamie but sideways at the wall.
>
> "Son, can you hear me?"---addressing the wall. The engineer perceived that at last the priest had found familiar territory. He knew what he was doing.
>
> But Jamie made no reply.
>
> "Son, can you hear me?" the priest repeated without embarrassment, examining a brown stain on the wall and not troubling to give his voice a different inflection.
>
> Jamie nodded and appeared to say something. The engineer moved a step closer, cocking his good ear but keeping his arms folded as the sign of his discretion.
>
> "Son, I am a Catholic priest," said Father Boomer, studying the yellow hairs on his fist. "Do you understand me?"
>
> "Yes," said Jamie aloud. He nodded rapidly.
>
> "I have been asked by your sister to administer to you the sacrament of baptism. Do you wish to receive it?"
>
> The engineer frowned. Wasn't the priest putting it a bit formally?
>
> "Val," whispered Jamie, goggling at the engineer.
>
> "That's right," said the engineer, nodding. "I called her as you asked me to."

Jamie looked at the priest.

“Son,” said the priest. “Do you accept the truths of religion?”

Jamie moved his lips.

“What?” asked the priest, bending lower.

“Excuse me, Father,” said the sentient engineer. “He said ‘what.’”

“Oh,” said the priest and turned both fists out and opened the palms. “Do you accept the truth that God exists and that He made you and loves you and that He made the world so that you might enjoy its beauty and that He himself is your final end and happiness, that He loved you so much that He sent His only Son to die for you and to found so much His Holy Catholic Church so that you may enter heaven and there see God face to face and be happy with Him forever.”

Without raising his eyes, the engineer could see the curled-up toe of Sutter’s Thom McAn shoe turning to and fro on the radiator trademark.

“Is that true?” said Jamie clearly, opening his eyes and goggling. To the engineer’s dismay, the youth turned to him.

The engineer cleared his throat and opened his mouth to say something when, fortunately for him, Jamie’s bruised eyes went weaving around to the priest. He said something to the priest which the latter did not understand.

The priest looked up to the engineer.

“He wants to know, ah, why,” said the engineer.

“Why what?”

“Why should he believe that.”

The priest leaned hard on his fists. “It is true because God Himself revealed it as the truth.”

Again the youth’s lips moved and again the priest turned to the interpreter.

“He asked how, meaning how does he know that?

The priest sighed. “If it were not true,” he said to Jamie, “then I would not be here. That is why I am here, to tell you.”

Jamie, who had looked across to the engineer (Christ, don’t look at me!), pulled down the corners of his mouth in what the engineer perceived unerringly to be a sort of ironic acknowledgment.

“Do you understand me, son?” said the priest in the same voice.

There was no answer. Outside in the night the engineer saw a Holsum bread truck pass under the street light

“Do you accept these truths?”

After a silence the priest, who was still propped on his fists and looking sideways like a storekeeper, said, “If you do not now believe these truths, it is for me to ask you whether you wish to believe them and whether you now ask for the faith to believe them.”

Jamie’s eyes were fixed on the engineer, but the irony was shot through with the first glint of delirium. He nodded to the engineer.

The engineer sighed and, feeling freer, looked up. Sutter hung fire, his chin on his knuckles, his eyes half-closed and gleaming like a Buddha’s.

Jamie opened his mouth, it seemed, to say something bright and audible, but his tongue thickened and came out. He shuddered violently. Sutter came to the bedside. He held the youth’s wrist and, unbuttoning the pajamas, laid an ear to the bony chest. He straightened and made a sign to the priest, who took from his pocket a folded purple ribbon which he slung around his neck in a gesture that struck the engineer as oddly graceless and perfunctory.

“What’s his name?” the priest asked no one in particular.

“*Jamison MacKenzie Vaught*,”[emphasis added] said Sutter.

“Jamison MacKenzie Vaught,” said the priest, his fists spread wide.

“What do you ask of the Church of God? Say Faith.”

Jamie said something.

“What does Faith bring you to? Say Life Everlasting.”

Jamie’s lips moved.

The priest took the bent sucking tube from Jamie’s water glass. “Go fill that over there.”

“Yes sir,” said the engineer. But surely it was to be expected that the priest have a kit of some sort, at least a suitable vessel. He half filled the clouded plastic glass.

As he returned with the water, Jamie’s bowels opened again with the spent schleppen sound of an old man’s sphincter. The engineer went to get the bedpan. Jamie tried to lift his head.

“No no,” said Sutter impatiently, and coming quickly across simply bound the dying youth to the bed by folding the counterpane into a strap and pressing it against his chest. “Get on with it, Father,” he said angrily.

The priest took the plastic glass. “I baptize you in the name of the Father—” He poured a trickle of water into the peninsula of fried dusty hair. “And of the Son—” He poured a little more. “And of the Holy Ghost.” He poured the rest.

> The three men watched as the water ran down the youth's bruised forehead. It was dammed a moment by the thick Vaught eyebrows, flowed through and pooled around the little red carbuncle in the corner of his eye.
>
> The priest bent lower still, storekeeper over his counter, and took the narrow waxy hand between his big ruddy American League paws. "Son," he said in the same flat mercantile voice, looking first at the brown stain on the wall and then down at the dying youth. "Today I promise you that you will be with our Blessed Lord and Savior and that you will see him face to face and see his mother, Our Lady, see them as you are seeing me. Do you hear me?"
>
> The four white vermiform fingers stirred against the big thumb, swollen with blood (did they, thumb and fingers, belong to the same species?).
>
> "Then I ask you to pray to them for me and for your brother here and for your friend who loves you."
>
> The fingers stirred again.
>
> Presently the priest straightened and turned to the engineer as blank-eyed as if he had never laid eyes on him before.
>
> "Did you hear him? He said something. What did he say?"
>
> The engineer, who did not know how he knew, was not even sure he had heard Jamie or had tuned him in in some other fashion, cleared his throat.
>
> "He said, 'Don't let me go.'" When the priest looked puzzled, the engineer nodded to the bed and added: "He means his hand, the hand there."
>
> "I won't let you go," the priest said. As he waited he curled his lip absently against his teeth in a workaday five-o'clock-in-the-afternoon expression.
>
> After several minutes Sutter let go the sheet which he still held as a strap across Jamie.
>
> "All right, Father," said Sutter in an irritable voice when the priest didn't move. "On the way out, would you send in the nurse and the resident?"
>
> "What?" said the priest, bracketing his glasses with his free hand. "Oh, yes. Certainly." He started for the washstand, thought better of it, turned and left the room. Pausing in the doorway, he turned again. "If you need me for anything else, I'd be glad to—"
>
> "We won't," said Sutter curtly, managing to embarrass the engineer after all (*The Last Gentleman* 401-06).

As can be seen in the long passage presented above, only in the baptism scene Jamie's full name is mentioned for the first time in the entire narration. Since naming plays a significant role throughout the novel, the revealing of Jamie's full

name for the first time in the baptism scene[75] in particular could be interpreted as the emphasis on the importance of the Catholic faith. It could be said that only by practicing religious duties and following the path of the Catholic faith one can get rid of the postmodern sickness of namelessness and acquire his true identity. The fact that right after the baptism scene, the protagonist uses his name confidently while pointing to himself at the same time could be said to support this claim.

Having lost his brother Jamie, Sutter is inclined to commit suicide; therefore, Will does not want to leave him alone in his difficult moment:

"Dr. Vaught, I want you to come back with me.

"Why? To make this contribution you speak of?"

"Dr. Vaught, I need you. I, Will Barrett—" and he actually pointed to himself lest there be a mistake, "—need you and want you to come back. I need you more than Jamie needed you. Jamie had Val too."

Sutter laughed. "You kill me, Barrett."

"Yes sir." He waited (*The Last Gentleman* 409).

As Sutter agrees on driving away from the hospital together with Will, one can say that Sutter, as the suicidal character in the novel, also took the message conveyed through the baptism scene and therefore got rid of his suicidal thoughts.

Much can be written on the theme of religion; however, due to page restrictions this section ends here.

5.2.2 Romantic Nostalgia

> As with so many of the destructive father figures in Percy's fiction, the elder Barrett was a victim of romantic nostalgia, of a certain inordinate fascination with the past and his own perceived inability to live up to its standards of heroism. Certainly such a theme is not new to southern fiction […] What is new is Will Barrett's tentative response to the despairing vision of his father. In what is perhaps the most crucial passage of the novel, Will

[75] Baptism is a ritual in which the child to be baptized is given a name: the symbolic death and resurrection. Accompanied by giving the child his name, it is enacted by symbolically dipping the child into the cleansing element of water. Having not baptized before, Jamie is given a new identity, i.e. his Christian identity.

> stands outside his old house and ----as he recalls his father's suicide---- simply touches "the warm finny whispering bark" where an oak tree has grown around a hitching post, and he notices something not old but, it seems, eternally new (O'Gorman 106).

Having read the above quotation, one could claim that since Will cannot escape the troublesome burden of his family history, he becomes the victim of his past and is therefore haunted by the ghosts of his ancestors:

> The fall afternoon glittered outside, a beautiful bitter feierlich Yankee afternoon. It was the day of the Harvard-Princeton game. He felt as if he had seen them all. The ghost of his grandfather howled around 203 Lower Pyne. He knew his grandfather occupied room 203 because he had seen the number written in the flyleaf of Schiller's Die Räuber, a dusty yellow book whose pages smelled like bread (*The Last Gentleman* 15).

The following quotation from the novel proves that even the déjà vus result from his family history: "Nothing, but his memory deteriorated and he was assaulted by ghostly legions of déjà vus and often woke not knowing where he was. His knee leapt like a fish. It became necessary to unravel the left pocket of his three pairs of pants in order to slip a hand down and keep his patella in place" (*The Last Gentleman* 187).

As mentioned earlier, in time, as the culture started to change and new generations came of age, the family gradually lost its self-confidence and became more and more unsure as to what to do in the developing new South. This confusion continued until Ed Barrett's suicide, which made the young Will Barrett have too little certainty.[76] According to Yarbrough, Will was "alienated from what was once his life" (107). Will lost his mother when he was so young that he cannot personify her. In the novel, it is not mentioned when his mother died, but the reader learns that when he was a boy he used to live together with his father and stepmother: "Once when he was a boy his father and stepmother put him in a summer camp and went to Europe. Now here was one group, the campers, he had no use for at all" (*The Last Gentleman* 13).

In their article Niewiadomska-Flis and Budzynska present significant information on Barrett's father Ed Barrett: "Depression and sentimentalism resonated in Ed Barrett's artistic interests: he admired Arnold's poetry, read Montaigne's writings,

[76] See page 26 of this paper.

and listened to Brahms's music. Lawyer Barrett also liked nocturnal strolls with his son, during which he convinced the boy to use his trust selectively in the future" (87).

In light of the above quotation, it could be said that whenever the young Barrett hears Brahms's music or Montaigne's quotations, he is haunted by the memory of his father's suicide. One could claim that the theme of romantic nostalgia could be considered to be inextricably intertwined with the themes of alienation, watcher, listener and wanderer. The reason why he became an alienated self is his father's killing himself. The reason why his father killed himself is that the new generations came of age and the family members lost their self-confidence. Johnson states that "searching for a place in the world" is one of the major themes that Percy used in his novels (56). Even this theme could be seen as the result of the theme of romantic nostalgia. Like Binx, Will is onto something. Flaherty states that "Will, the Telemachus character, must return to his home town of Ithaca, Mississippi in order to fulfill the Kierkegaardian adage that every man has to stand in front of the house of his childhood in order to recover himself, […] and by confronting the trauma resulting from his father's death, exorcise that trauma" (Flaherty 1987: 30[77], qtd. in Yarbrough 110).

When he visits the house of his childhood he recovers himself:

> Wait. While his fingers explored the juncture of iron and bark, his eyes narrowed as if he caught a glimmer of light on the cold iron skull. Wait. I think he was wrong and that he was looking in the wrong place. No, not he but the times. The times were wrong and one looked in the wrong place. It wasn't even his fault because that was the way he was and the way the times were, and there was no other place a man could look. It was the worst of times, a time of fake beauty and fake victory. Wait. He had missed it! It was not in the Brahms that one looked and not in solitariness and not in the old sad poetry but—he wrung out his ear—but here, under your nose, here in the very curiousness and drollness and extraness of the iron and the bark that—he shook his head—that—(*The Last Gentleman* 332).

At this point, it is also important to mention Lawson's statements in relation to the scientistic philosophy:

> Then, in Central Park, as he waits to observe a peregrine (p. 5), a representative of the natural world explicable by the "vertical search,"(5) he accidentally looks through the telescope when "the barrel dropped to

[77] It should be a typo. In the bibliography page numbers do not match.

> the horizontal": "Being of both a scientific and superstitious turn of mind and therefore always on the lookout for chance happenings which lead to great discoveries, he had to have a last look ..." (p.5). Thus he glimpses the woman and waits to discover the recipient of the woman's secret message -- who turns out to be a beautiful young girl (Lawson 1996: 70).

In light of the above quotation, it could be said that Will's "vertical search" starts when he buys a telescope. In a dialogue between the young Barrett and his psychiatrist Dr. Gamow, the narrator says that the young Barret wants to be a scientist: "After spending almost five years as an object of technique, however valuable, he thought maybe he'd go over to the other side, become one of them, the scientist"[78] (*The Last Gentleman* 35).

The phrase "the barrel dropped to the horizontal," could be assumed to emphasize the fact that the moment he sees Kitty through the telescope, his horizontal search starts; therefore, he becomes a wayfarer. It could also be claimed that the telescope signifies Barret's Cartesian selfhood, i.e. the mind-body split.[79]

5.2.3 Sexuality

On page 44 of this paper, it was stated that between chapters one and three, the protagonist Will Barrett experiences ten different déjà vus, e.g. pages 12, 14, 45, 68, 90, 99, 129, 128,152, and 161. Following are the examples: "He had a way of turning up at unlikely places such as a bakery in Cincinnati or a greenhouse in Memphis, where he might work for several weeks assaulted by the déjà vus of *hot growing green plants* [emphasis added]" (*The Last Gentleman* 12).

In light of the philosophical theories mentioned under the heading 3.3, the phrase "hot growing green plants" could be interpreted as Will's "recapture of the omnipotent and all-embracing mother." Settings resembling Central Park trigger

déjà vus.

While in the dormitory of the college, which was attended also by his ancestors, he experiences a déjà vu, which might be understood as his longing for the

[78] See also Lawson 1996: 70.
[79] On page 29 of this paper, it was stated that when both "scientism and behaviorism" started dominating modern ways of thinking, the Cartesian mind-body split deepened.

mother. Because he envies the janitors, one can also claim that the young Barrett, in fact, envies his mother from his father:

> One beautiful fall afternoon of his junior year, as he sat in his dormitory room, he was assaulted by stupefying déjà vus. An immense melancholy overtook him. It was, he knew, the very time of life one is supposed to treasure most, a time of questing and roistering, the prime and pride of youth. But what a sad business it was for him, this business of being a youth at college, one of many generations inhabiting the same old buildings, joshing with the same janitors who had joshed with the class of '37. *He envied the janitors* [emphasis added]. (*The Last Gentleman* 14).

Since Kitty represents the mother image, it could be said that the dialogue below shows Will's longing for his mother:

> "Let's go." He started straight out, not waiting on her.
>
> "That's the wrong subway," she said, catching up with him. "I'm taking the IRT." "Right."
>
> It was like a déjà vu: he knew what she was going to say as soon as she said it. They rode in silence. When the train came to the first lights of the Columbus Circle platform [next to Central Park!], he rose. "This is it," he said (*The Last Gentleman* 68).

Due to word limits, other examples will not be presented here.

As mentioned earlier "he hallucinates the image of the other lost object, the father, who confuses Will with his absolute distinction between ladies and whores." After a nocturnal stroll in Central Park, Barrett hears Brahms's music on the street, making him hallucinate his father and have a conversation with him:

> The boy waited for the scratch in the record. He knew when it was coming. The first part of the scratch came and he had time to get up and hold the tone arm just right so the needle wouldn't jump the groove.
>
> "Watch them."
>
> "Yes sir."
>
> "You just watch them. You know what's going to happen?"
>
> "No sir."
>
> "One will pick up the worst of the other and lose the best of himself. Watch. One will learn to fornicate in public and the other will end by pissing in the street. Watch."
>
> The man stayed, so the boy said, "Yes sir."
>
> "Go to whores if you have to, but always remember the difference.

> Don't treat a lady like a whore or a whore like a lady."
>
> "No sir, I won't."
>
> The record ended but the eccentric groove did not trip the mechanism. The boy half rose.
>
> "If you do one, then you're going to be like them, a fornicator and not caring. If you do the other, you'll be like them, fornicator and hypocrite."
>
> He opened his eyes. Now standing in the civil public darkness of the park, he snapped his fingers softly as if he were trying to remember something (*The Last Gentleman* 100-101).

However, having visited Kitty directly after this conversation, Will takes her to Central Park to make love with her. Upon entering a cleft, "a womb-like enclosure," Will notices a yin-yang symbol, which signifies the re-experiencing of "wondrous awe." On seeing Kitty naked, he experiences "the astounding and terrific melon immediacy of nakedness" (*The Last Gentleman* 110). When Kitty starts stroking his cheek, which is an action activating "a newborn baby's reflex to suck." However, instead of having sexual intercourse with her, Will focuses his eyes her melons, i.e. breasts, which "awakens the anxious experience of suffocation," and therefore they cannot make love[80]:

> "Do you feel bad," she asked suddenly and touched his face. "If it is not possible now to—" she broke off
>
> He felt just bad enough—his head was caulked, the pressure turning him ever away into a dizzy middle distance—and so it was just possible.
>
> "Lover," said Kitty as they hugged and kissed.
>
> "Darling," said the engineer, not to be surpassed—was this it at last, the august secret of the Western world?
>
> "My sweet," said Kitty, patting his cheek at the corner of his mouth.
>
> But is love a sweetnesse or a wantonnesse, he wondered (*The Last Gentleman* 110).

Though warned by his father in his hallucination, Will does the opposite; therefore, one could suggest that Will is still an alienated self. The reason why he is a wayfarer is that he wants not only to visit different places like Alabama or Santa Fe but also to live in the past like his father Ed Barrett. He wants to live in the past and that is why, when he meets the Vaughts in New York City for the

[80] See also Lawson 1994: 63-65.

first time he introduces himself through association with his ancestry. However, by opposing his father's advice he proves to be alienated.

In addition, homosexuality can be analyzed as the subcategory of the theme of sexuality. Rodeheffer underscores the relationship between Uncle Fannin and his servant Merriam and states that their intimacy "suggest a genuine loving relationship" because they go hunting together and "argue over TV programs from matching recliners." Their intimacy does not reflect the Old South in which masters maintained complete control over their slaves (98):

> (Captain Kangaroo: Uncle Fannin and Merriam cackled like maniacs at the doings of Captain K. and Mr. Greenjeans, and the engineer wondered, how is it that uncle and servant, who were solid 3-D persons, true denizens of this misty Natchez Trace country, should be transported by these sad gags from Madison Avenue? (*The Last Gentleman* 346).

It could therefore be suggested that, their intimacy might be related to homosexual intercourse between them.

5.3 Characters

5.3.1 Williston Bibb (Will) Barrett

Will, the twenty-five-year old protagonist is a humidification engineer at Macy's and lives in an Y.M.C.A. in Manhattan, New York:

> Once again he found himself sitting in the television room of the Y.M.C.A. in Manhattan, a room done in Spanish colonial motif with exposed yellow beams and furniture of oxidized metal […] For the past two years he had been employed as humidification engineer at Macy's, where he presided over a console in a tiny room three floors below street level (*The Last Gentleman* 18).

It was previously mentioned that Heidegger's portrait of the predicament of human beings driven into a technological community of the modern world attracted Percy's attention. Having read the passage above, one could claim that suffering spells of amnesia, Will's predicament become even worse. Earlier in this paper, Barrett's problem with assigning a proper name to himself was presented. The following are the quotations indicating his problem:

"Most of this young man's life was a gap. The summer before, he had fallen into a fugue state and wandered around northern Virginia for three weeks, where he

sat sunk in thought on old battlegrounds, hardly aware of his own name" (*The Last Gentleman* 12).

"For another month or so the young man, whose name was Williston Bibb Barrett or Will Barrett or Billy Barrett, sat rocking on the gallery with six women" (*The Last Gentleman* 17).

"It was then that he caught sight of Kitty coming from the hospital, head down, bucking the eternal gale of the side streets. He knew only that he knew her. There were meltings of recognition about his flank and loin. He wished now that he had looked in his wallet, to make sure of his own name and maybe find hers" (*The Last Gentleman* 67).

> My name is Williston Bibb Barrett, he said aloud, consulting his wallet to make sure, and I am a returning to the South to seek my fortune and restore the good name of my family, perhaps even recover Hampton plantation from the canebrakes and live out my days as a just man and little father to the faithful Negroes working in the fields (*The Last Gentleman 151*).

"He did not dare examine the contents of his pockets, for fear he would not recognize what he found there, or for fear rather that, confronted with positive proof of himself, he still would not know and would lose the tenuous connection he had" (*The Last Gentleman* 295).

"This is Will Barrett, Beans," said the engineer, holding out his hand. "Mister Ed's boy" (*The Last Gentleman* 234).

In a dialogue with Mr. Vaught: "You are Ed Barrett's boy." "Yes sir" (*The Last Gentleman* 51).

In a dialogue with the Vaughts:

> "And listen to this," said Mr. Vaught, still holding him tightly. "He didn't say Gadsden and he didn't say Birmingham, he said halfway between."
>
> "Actually I didn't say that," began the engineer.
>
> "This is Ed Barrett's boy, Mama," he said after pointing the engineer in several different directions (*The Last Gentleman* 53).

In another dialogue, Mr. Vaught calls him Bill:

> The engineer was sure he was in for a scolding—all at once the telescope seemed folly itself. But Mr. Vaught only took out his fried-up ball of a handkerchief and knocked it against his nose.
>
> "Bill"
>
> "Yes sir."
>
> "How would you like to work for me?" (*The Last Gentleman* 77).

In another dialogue: "This is Will Barrett, Beans," said the engineer, holding out his hand. "Mister Ed's boy" (*The Last Gentleman* 324).

5.3.2 Sutter Vaught

Rodeheffer states that both Will and Sutter are "castaways, but neither has found a satisfactory way out of his predicament" (100). Sutter is the suicidal character in the novel; in addition, it is possible to consider him as a Cartesian self since he is an educated doctor.[81] Written in the confessional mode, his casebook, in which he writes down his thoughts, plays an important role throughout the narration. He invites Will to join him in his suicide; however, the end of the novel proves that Will persuades him to keep living. Brownlee makes the explanation of ""double-voiced discourse"" and states that it is a text placed in the text of the narrative, where at least two voices interact. Appearing four times in the novel, Sutter's notebook, mostly consisting of indirect discourse, discusses the topics of morality and religion. "The basis for these moral/spiritual discussions are conversations Stutter has had with his sister Val about religion, especially the "scandal" of the Gospel" (106). The passage below indicates one of Sutter's notes in his casebook:

> I do not deny, Val, that a revival of your sacramental system is an alternative to lewdness (the only other alternative is the forgetting of the old sacrament), for lewdness itself is a kind of sacrament (devilish, if you like). The difference is that my sacrament is operational and yours is not.
>
> The so-called sexual revolution is not, as advertised, a liberation of sexual behavior but rather its reversal. In former days, even under Victoria, sexual intercourse was the natural end and culmination of heterosexual relations. Now one begins with genital overtures instead of a handshake, then waits to see what will turn up (e.g., we might become friends later). Like dogs greeting each other nose to tail and tail to nose.

[81] On page 29 of this paper, it was stated that when both "scientism and behaviorism" started dominating modern ways of thinking, the Cartesian mind-body split deepened.

> But I am not a pornographer, Val, like the optician, now a corpse, i.e., an ostensible liver of a "decent" life, a family man, who fancies conventions with smokers and call girls. I accept the current genital condition of all human relations and try to go beyond it. I may sniff like a dog but then I try to be human rather than masquerade as human and sniff like a dog. I am a sincere, humble, and even moral pornographer. I cultivate pornography in order to set it at naught. […]
>
> The only difference between me and you is that you think that purity and life can only come from eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ. I don't know where it comes from (*The Last Gentleman* 281-82).

5.3.3 Kitty Vaught

Kitty, a pretty woman of twenty-one with whom Barrett instantly falls in love, is Sutter's younger and Jamie's elder sister. Here is a dialogue between Barrett and Kitty:

> "Aren't you coming to my birthday party Monday?"
>
> "Oh yes. In Jamie's room. I thought it was Jamie's birthday."
>
> "We're two days apart. Monday falls between. I'll be twenty-one and Jamie sixteen."
>
> "Twenty-one." His eyes had fallen away into a stare (*The Last Gentleman* 74).

Two more points could be indicated about Kitty as follows: First, as mentioned earlier, embodying a different facet of "the mother image," Kitty triggers Will's déjà vus.[82] Second, she is not narrated to get married to Will at the end of the novel, which could be considered as being against the expectation, since it has already been stated on pages eight and fifty-two of this paper that "towards the end of Percy's earlier novels, the anticipation of marriage of the male protagonists, which is supposed to save them from meaninglessness, serves as a critical moment in their pilgrimage."

5.3.4 Jamison MacKenzie Vaught

Like Binx's stepbrother Lonnie, sixteen-year old Jamie is sick and dies at the end of the novel, thereby helping Will's recovery. Having witnessed Jamie's death,

[82] See page 44 of this paper.

Will uses his full name, which infers the resolution of Will's identity crisis. As mentioned earlier, Jamie's baptism scene at the end of the novel brings the story to its climax which is both heart-warming and poignant.[83]

5.3.5 Valentina Vaught

Valentina Vaught, the elder sister of Jamie Vaught and a true believer, could be said to play an important role in the novel since she is the one who insists that Jamie should be baptized before he dies. The dialogue between Kitty and Will informs the reader on her unshakeable faith: "Oh Lord. I'll tell you. You hear about people being unselfish. She actually is—the only one I know. The nearest thing to it is my sister Val, who went into a religious order, but even that is not the same because she does what she does for a reason, love of God and the salvation of her own soul" (*The Last Gentleman* 73).

In his article Brownlee (106) presents some significant information on Valentina Vaught as follows:

> The importance of Christianity in Percy's project here is also echoed through the character of Val Vaught, the only character in the entire novel who has no trouble with Will Barrett's name. She calls the engineer by his given name from the time they first meet, and uses it confidently. She is also aware through the children at her school of the importance of naming and defining the world semiotically. These children were raised in silence and are thus dumb, unable to speak when they first arrive at the school. But they then suddenly discover language much as Helen Keller does---a discovery that fascinated Percy and one he discusses at length in *The Message-in the Botte.* Of the children Val says:
>
> When they do suddenly break into the world of language, it is something to see. They are like Adam on the First Day. What's that? they ask me. That's a hawk, I tell them, and they believe me. I think I recognized myself in them. They were not alive and then they are and so they'll believe you. Their eyes fairly pop out at the Baltimore catechism (imagine). I tell them that God made them to be happy and that if they love one another and keep the commandments and receive the Sacrament, they'll be happy now and forever (*The Last Gentleman* 301-302, qtd. in Brownlee 106).

Having read the above passages, one could claim that it is only the religious way of living which can overcome the problems of silence and namelessness.

[83] See pages 68-71 of this paper.

5.3.6 Father Boomer

Appearing only in the baptism scene, Father Boomer, though a minor character, plays an important role since the baptism scene transmits the entire message Percy wants to convey to the reader. He is a Catholic priest and admits to baptize Jamie at Sister Val's request, Jamie's elder sister. The baptism scene has been presented under the subsection 5.2.1.

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I presented an analysis of the first two novels, *The Moviegoer* (1961) and *The Last Gentleman* (1966), written by Walker Percy.

After the introduction, detailed information on Walker Percy was presented: his genealogy, career, sickness, treatment at the Trudeau Sanatorium and so on. In the same section, philosophical thoughts of some renowned philosophers such as Eric Voegelin and Charles S. Peirce were summarized as succinctly as possible. Since the analysis of a world-renowned author and philosopher like Walker Percy requires great care and attention, also in this section some analysis of the novels made by other scholars were presented while introducing philosophical concepts.

In the third section, important information on the philosophers and authors Søren Kierkegaard, Descartes, Freud, and Dostoevsky were presented; in addition, their philosophical thoughts were emphasized with great attention and accuracy since they were used during the analysis.

In the following two sections, section four and five, both novels were introduced and analyzed respectively, e.g. structure, plot, themes and characters. Due to word limits, mostly the major characters were presented and some secondary important characters were either not analyzed or paid less attention.

Finally, the brief summary of the paper is presented in the conclusion.

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8. ABSTRACT

8.1 Abstract English

Walker Percy, defender of the faith, tried to defend the religious way of living in a postmodern world, where 98 percent of the U.S. Americans claim to be true Christians, though the overwhelming majority do not practice religious duties in their ordinary lives. In a society where humanity was debased to having credit cards, cars, and other material objects as such, Percy tried to defend his faith in an ironic way, thus attacking the clichés of the popular culture by exercising his sense of irony skillfully. Impressed by what Percy attempted to achieve, I should state that he deserved the title that Pope Jean Paul II bestowed on him. In 1988 during his visit to the Vatican, the Pope anointed him as the defender of the Catholic faith. If he were still alive, I would want to meet him and have a conversation on religion, life and culture. In this paper, I will analyze the major themes and the narrative techniques in his first two novels, *The Moviegoer* (1961) and *The Last Gentleman* (1966).

8.2 Zusammenfassung Deutsch

Walker Percy, Verteidiger des Glaubens, versuchte die religiöse Lebensweise in einer solchen postmodernen Welt, in der 98 Prozent der US-Amerikaner behaupten, echte Christen zu sein, dessen Großteil jedoch im täglichen Leben ihren religiösen Pflichten nicht nachkommen, zu verteidigen. In einer Gesellschaft, in der die Menschheit auf materielle Werte, wie zum Beispiel den Besitz von Kreditkarten und Autos reduziert wurde, versuchte Percy seinen Glauben auf einer ironischen Art und Weise zu verteidigen, indem er die Klischees der weit verbreiteten Kultur durch Anwendung seiner ausgeprägten ironischen Fähigkeiten attackierte. Beeindruckt durch das, was Percy versuchte zu erreichen, möchte ich an dieser Stelle zum Ausdruck bringen, dass Papst Jean Paul II ihm den Titel „Verteidiger des katholischen Glaubens“ mehr als zurecht verliehen hat. Diesen Titel bekam Percy von dem Papst im Jahre 1988 während seiner Reise nach Vatikan. Wäre Percy heute noch am Leben, würde ich Ihn gerne kennenlernen und mich mit Ihm über Religion, Leben und Kultur unterhalten. In diesem Werk möchte ich die Hauptthemen und Erzähltechniken

in seinen ersten zwei Romanen *The Moviegoer* (1961) und *The Last Gentleman* (1966) analysieren.