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WALKER PERCY AND THE MAGIC OF NAMING: THE SEMEIOTIC FABRIC OF LIFE

by

KAREY PERKINS

Under the Direction of Thomas McHaney

ABSTRACT

Walker Percy thought a paradigm for the modern age, human beings, and life does not exist, and no paradigm vying for supremacy (religion, scientism, new age physics and philosophies) succeeds. He sought to create a “radical anthropology” to describe human beings and life. His anthropology has existential roots and culminates in the philosophy and semeiotic of American pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce. Unlike any other creature, humans have symbolic capacity, first manifested in a child’s naming and demonstrated in human being’s unique language ability, the ability to communicate through symbol and not just sign. Percy conveyed his anthropology in his last three novels through a number symbolism corresponding to the theme of each novel based on Peirce’s Cenopythagoreanism, viewing the world through the paradigm of number. In *Lancelot*, Percy uses the symbol of the inverted three to illustrate Lancelot’s inverted search for evil. In *The Second Coming*, he uses diamonds and squares and fours to illustrate community and authentic communication in the novel. In *The Thanatos Syndrome*, he uses twos and sixes to represent the search for dyadic solutions to triadic problems. Percy sees a synechistic and synchronistic interconnected “fabric of life” to the universe, enabled by human symbolic capacity, or Peirce’s concept of relations.

INDEX WORDS: Walker Percy, Charles Sanders Peirce, Kenneth Laine Ketner, Radical anthropology, Symbol, Semeiotic, Semiotics, Naming, Language theory, Susanne Langer, Thirdness, Dyad, Triad, Tetrad, Scientism, The Thanatos Syndrome, The Second Coming, Lancelot, The Moviegoer, Paradigm, Sacrament, Intersubjective, Community, Synechism, Synchronicity, Fabric of life, Pragmaticism, The Message in the Bottle, A Thief of Peirce, Coupler, Interpretant, Cenopythagoreansim

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by

KAREY PERKINS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2011

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by

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August 2011

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the most meaningful triad in my life: my parents, Rex and Ann Perkins, who made it all possible; and my daughter, Colleen Anne Donnelly, who makes it all worthwhile.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have many people to thank for making this dissertation possible, especially Thomas McHaney, my dissertation advisor, and Kenneth Laine Ketner, whose name appears frequently within these pages, who served on my committee with insightful editing, and whose correspondence with Walker Percy set off a light bulb within me. I would like to also thank my family, whose encouragement and belief in me along the way have kept me going. Last but not least, I would especially like to thank my friend Ken Denney, who patiently listened to and read bits and pieces of the dissertation while it was in progress and offered his considered opinions.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

THE NOVELS

MG = *The Moviegoer* (1961)

LG = *The Last Gentleman* (1966)

LR = *Love in the Ruins* (1971)

L = *Lancelot* (1977)

SC = *The Second Coming* (1980)

TS = *The Thanatos Syndrome* (1987)

NON-FICTION

MB = *Message in the Bottle* (1975)

LC = *Lost in the Cosmos* (1983)

SSL = *Signposts in a Strange Land* (1991)

SE = *Symbol and Existence: A Study of Meaning* (Percy's unpublished manuscript in the UNC-Chapel Hill archives)

LETTERS AND INTERVIEWS

Con I = *Conversations with Walker Percy* (1985)

Con II = *More Conversations with Walker Percy* (1993)

KK = Ketner, Kenneth Laine. Letter to author. 21 June 2011.

TP = *A Thief of Peirce: The Letters of Kenneth Laine Ketner and Walker Percy* (1995)

1 THE PROBLEM: PARADIGM LOST

1.1 THE MYSTERY OF HUMAN BEINGS

Juliet:

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose

By any other name would smell as sweet."

Romeo and Juliet (II, ii, 1-2), William Shakespeare

* * *

I believe that an impartial empirical analysis of the extraordinary act of symbolization will bridge the gap between the behavioristics of Mead and the existentialia of Marcel. (MB 272)

* * *

What's in a name? For Walker Percy (1916-1990) – American scientist, philosopher, novelist, and medical doctor – naming was the secret to unlocking the mystery of human beings. Arising from the uniquely human capacity for “symbol-mongering,” naming is the crossing of the symbolic threshold from animal to human. Naming is a joyful, powerful event – from our first naming to every symbolic activity thereafter. Naming is an encounter and affirmation of the named, of the “other.” For Percy, naming is magical and even divine.

While Percy would agree with Shakespeare that a rose may smell as sweet no matter what it is named, he believed that, unless it has a name, it can never be known, never experienced. Naming (specifically) and symbolization (more generally) make us qualitatively different from our animal cousins. It is the doorway to our humanity.

Walker Percy wanted to find a cohesive and decisive explanatory theory for humans. He observed that our culture is riddled with conflicting and competing theories resonating through our social fabric and our confused and divided American consciousness – both individual and group. We no longer have an accepted coherent or adequate view of humankind or the universe. Percy found human language ability to be the key to his search:

...time ran out and the old modern world ended and the old monster theory no longer works. Man knows he is something more than an organism in an environment, because for one thing he acts like anything but an organism in an environment. Yet he no longer has the means of understanding the traditional Judeo-Christian teaching that the “something more” is a soul somehow locked in the organism like a ghost in a machine. What is he then? He has not the faintest idea.... When man doesn’t know whether he is an organism or a soul or both, and if both how he can be both, it is good to start with what he does know. This book [*The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with the Other*, Percy’s study of language] is about two things, man’s strange behavior and man’s strange gift of language, and about how understanding the latter might help understanding the former. (MB 9)

Percy felt current anthropological theories had failed, and so he sought to create a “radical anthropology,” based on human capacity for language, and beginning with the magical act of naming.

He had twin kings to depose – kings that had ruled over Western culture since the Enlightenment – Newtonian science and Cartesian dualism. In Percy’s academic world, the scientific paradigm took precedence over Descartes’ “ghost in a machine” and certainly over the conservative Christian view. But it was inadequate when it came to describing human beings, Percy discovered. The cause-and-effect model of an organism responding to stimuli is linear and dyadic. While dyadic science had dominated the world view of Western culture since the medieval church and was certainly competent for describing the rest of the world, Percy realized that this kind of science alone could not fully explain many characteristics of humans, especially those described by the existentialists, including consciousness, symbolic capacity (language, art, culture), and the human need for meaning.

Yet as a scientist himself, he was skeptical of how well pure philosophy and art could explain human beings, and so he found himself reluctant to abandon entirely the *scientific method* as a tool for investigation, even though he now found *scientism*¹ an inadequate philosophy to explain the nature of humanity. He sought a new science – one that could provide an explanation for human behavior

¹ “Scientism” refers not to the method of science – testing an hypothesis to determine if evidence supports it – but to science as a worldview – in which any theory or view outside the realm of dyadic science is considered irrelevant or inaccurate. In this case, science functions as a philosophy or religion would. Or, as Percy says in the preface to *Symbol and Existence*, his unpublished manuscript and sequel to his first book on language: scientism is “the conscious or unconscious elevation of the scientific method to a total all-construing worldview, the tacit conviction that all reality is an expression of certain underlying principles and relationships which are discoverable by the scientific method and that there is no remainder” (7-8). Peirce scholar Kenneth Laine Ketner says scientism is not only “an inadequate philosophy, but most importantly, it is an inadequate and misguided SCIENCE. It works in neither place” (KK).

through the method of science, yet one that, ironically, disproved scientism as the singular explanation for the nature of man. “A theory of man must account for the alienation of man. The modern age began to come to an end when men discovered that they could no longer understand themselves by the theory professed by the age.... The scientists and humanists were saying one thing, but the artists and poets were saying something else.... Someone was wrong” (MB 23, 25). Dyadic science could not account for humans when it came to such things as existential alienation. Bodily processes, brain chemicals, yes; consciousness, existential longings, no. The existential dilemma had no satisfactory answer.

In mid-life, Percy found an answer, a quite traditional one; he returned to the old reigning paradigm of thousands of years – Catholicism – as the best for understanding and describing human beings, as the best guide by which to live life.

Still he wanted some kind of science involved. He became an apologist for the faith – he wanted a rational and intellectual defense of his solid religious faith, of his observation that humans were more than biological creatures; they were creatures that sought meaning, a search manifested in language, art, and culture, but ultimately satisfied by God. And he wanted it through the scientific method. It was his admiration of science as well as the dominance of science in the mid-twentieth century that compelled him to seek to understand humans through an at least partially scientific means – language theory – rather than a purely philosophical or religious means, even as he rejected scientism and the solely dyadic cause-effect principles of behaviorism to describe humans.

Percy was not just disillusioned with scientism as a world view (one of any numbers of world-views and one usually mistaken for the more accurate, self-correcting method of science), he also concluded Descartes’ philosophy had to go – Descartes separated mind from body, creating a rift inside of the individual, who is now a “mind” in a “body” or a ghost in a machine. Individuals become too abstracted or too materialistic, and ultimately, solipsistic, isolating their consciousness from the rest of

the world. The Cartesian individual is an overly rational, overly independent being, rather than a communal being. The Cartesian rift also is a social rift, having created a spiritual, philosophical, and scientific split which led to numerous other schisms, including, according to Percy, the psychological, political, and social split in America today. In fact, no paradigm for understanding humans escapes his criticism, especially the newer ones; the new psychology of self-actualization as well as new age philosophies are also rejected by Percy. Even the new physics, quantum mechanics (which is *not* a dyadic science), is questioned by traditional Percy, who was skeptical of using quantum findings as a new paradigm for understanding humans. Science, psychology, *and* anthropology all fail to construct a competent modern theory of humankind. The era has lost its reigning paradigm. Catholicism has lost its supremacy while its successor, the dyadic scientific worldview, proves inadequate to understand human consciousness.

These two most prevalent paradigms – traditional Christianity and traditional science – battle for power ideologically, politically, socially, morally, scientifically. Neither can claim to dominate the world view as universally and summarily as the Catholic Church did in the first millennium after Christ. Neither have full explanatory power to describe humans or the universe, and the two conflict to boot.

Percy's third novel, *Love in the Ruins*, presciently characterizes these conflicts in America: "The scientists, who are mostly liberals and unbelievers, and the businessmen, who are mostly conservative and Christian... make much of their differences – one speaking of outworn dogmas and creeds, the other of atheism and immorality, etcetera etcetera – to tell the truth, I do not notice a great deal of difference between the two" (LR 15). The paradigm indecision is mirrored in present-day political partisanship – which Percy predicted in the 1970s with his Knothead and Leftpapas parties in *Love in the Ruins*.²

Respective believers adhere belligerently to their chosen view, each blindly ignoring the anomalies that

² Today, the paradigm absence is no longer national but global. The United States' most important international problem is an attack against Western culture by adherents to fundamentalist religious values who use terrorism - fighting due to paradigm conflict and for paradigm supremacy. As American capitalism and pop culture infiltrate their traditions, they seek to assert, through power and force, their paradigm on the rest of the world. Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way.

are clearly present in each. Religious beliefs run the gamut, even within denominations, as Percy parodies with his three branches of the Catholic Church. In addition, dozens of other competing worldviews vie for attention. The paradigm vacuum has allowed all kinds of competing theories, religions, splits, and philosophies to surface, which Percy illustrates throughout his novels, especially in this third novel, *Love in the Ruins*, that ends in an out-and-out civil war between cultural groups and ideologies.

The problem has only become worse in the 21st century, though Percy would hardly have been surprised. Today, court cases are tried over whether to teach “creationism” or evolution in the schools – with each side equally adamant that the other side is in grave error. Gay marriage is repeatedly debated in the courts, with conservative Christians finding the idea immoral and abhorrent, and liberal scientists espousing civil liberties and individual freedoms. Conservatives would like to dismiss global warming dangers rather than challenge established business practices; however, scientists are sure the world is in imminent danger. (Republicans have even sprouted an off-shoot - “tea partiers” - more outlandish than even Percy imagined with his fictional Knotheads in his third novel.)

Percy felt a new kind of anthropology was needed, one that was entirely different from any heretofore proposed, one that took into account characteristics of humanity that no current view could entirely encompass.

Percy’s search for a paradigm to replace the void created by the incompleteness of scientism and outdatedness of religious views began in existential philosophy and eventually led him to “semeiotic” – the original version of the more well known and popular “semiotics” of his day. Percy sees answers in a study of language and “symbol-mongering,” especially as illuminated by 19th century scientist, semeiotician, and founder of pragmatism, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). Percy’s novels began to move from pure existentialism to his unique science-philosophy hybrid of language theory as he immersed himself more and more in his studies of language.

Percy's language theory, derived from Peirce's science and philosophy, was radically different from the language theorists of his day who based their views in cause-effect science. Dyadic traditional science and its psychological cousin, behaviorism, could not comprehend triadic organisms – human beings – who do not operate solely by cause and effect. Language, a uniquely human activity, is a triadic event, and could not be understood by dyadic semiotic theory, which Percy rejected. For Percy, the naming event entails three elements, an object to be named (referent or signified) and the name (signifier), as well as a third element, a coupler for those two entities, for which Percy had a variety of terms: interpretant, organism, namer. Percy and Peirce have a triadic "semeiotic," while most language theorists espouse a "semiotics," which omits the integral and important coupler, keeping the naming event at a dyadic level, never rising above behaviorism or scientism. Nor can a Percy-Peirce triad be reduced to a series of dyadic interactions; it is a qualitatively different phenomenon than a cause-effect event.

Much of Percy's non-fiction writing was focused on discovering and conveying just what this phenomenon was. His fiction portrays humans entirely indecipherable by behaviorist theory, and his latter fiction includes symbols from his triadic theory of language as the primary symbols in each novel. For Percy, as one "comes face to face with the nature of language, one also finds himself face to face with the nature of man" (MB 150). His language theory was one of the most formative influences on his novels and his creation of fictional characters, especially in his last three novels.

For Percy, language also solves the Cartesian rift inside the individual. Language enables consciousness. Consciousness is not simply a state of being alive, but it is an awareness, a consciousness *of* something. We must have a word to name something to be conscious of it. For Percy, unlike Descartes, both language and consciousness are communal entities, for language does not occur in isolation and is always an agreed-upon event. Our name for something is because an "other" told us it was so, and this meaning-agreement enables others to understand us. Percy says, "The triadic creature

is nothing if not social. Indeed, he can be understood as a construct of his relations with others” (SSL 289). The individual self is not primary; the community is, and relations are – just as they are for Percy’s mentor, Peirce. And ultimately all is related, all is connected. All of Percy’s novels reflect the importance – in fact, the salvation – of intersubjective community. At the beginning of each of his novels, his characters are alone and wandering; by the end of each novel, they settle down into a marriage and start building a community. They become wayfarers.

Not only did Percy find insights into meaning and purpose unique to humans in his study of language and symbol, he saw a metaphysical fabric of life – connectedness and patterns and relationships in the structure of the universe, patterns classified using a theory of numbers. Peirce called this “Cenopythagoreanism,” literally, a “new Pythagoras,” as Pythagoras also saw number as the basis of the universe. Percy’s language theory was a classification system, with geometric shapes and their corresponding numbers as his means of categorization. These permeate his writing, not just his non-fiction, but also his fiction, in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, in ways rarely noticed. He uses the dyad and triad originating from Peirce’s theories, and adds his own tetrad, as recurring symbols dominating his latter three novels, intertwining his fiction and non-fiction.

Percy’s first three novels were heavily influenced by existential philosophy, especially that of Søren Kierkegaard and Gabriel Marcel, and occasionally by exhibited triad symbolism. Even then, the triads were not semeiotic ones, but more reflective of the Catholic symbolism of the divine trinity and of sacrament. His last three novels were written after the publication of his collection of essays on language, *The Message in the Bottle*, and with that, his philosophical emphasis veered into this new direction in both his fiction as well as non-fiction, reflecting a transformation now profoundly affected by his obsession with his semeiotic search. The semeiotic lens had become a better paradigm than the abstractions of existentialists for describing his “radical anthropology.”

A different number, each with semeiotic roots, is emphasized in each of these novels to correspond with differing themes. For Percy, **twos** represent a dyadic, cause-effect worldview – a physicalist, materialist, or behaviorist approach to the world; **threes** represent the presence of a mysterious third element, a spiritual element, that separates humans from animals or mere physical entities; **fours** represent the community of humans which must exist for language and symbol to occur, and for faith in God to be manifested. In Percy's fourth novel, *Lancelot*, threes and triangles correspond to protagonist Lancelot Andrewes Lamar's attempt to find some higher element to human beings than mere physical impulses. Next, *The Second Coming*'s fours, squares, and diamonds correspond with the love story, and the theme of community in general, of humans needing each other. And finally, *The Thanatos Syndrome*'s twos (and sixes) correspond to humans receiving chemical or physical solutions to spiritual problems or dilemmas, essentially transforming into "beasts" and losing important elements of their humanity, including their capacity for language, a result both behavioristic and diabolic.

Percy hoped his study of humankind's unique language capacity, in particular the naming event and the symbolic act, would hold the key to his search for a radical anthropology. While he never solved some aspects of the mystery of naming and symbol, such as the coupler, he did find a coherent theory of who human beings are and how they should live their lives.

1.2 THE BACKGROUND: SOME BIOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON PERCY

By far, Walker's favorite activity was observing others, as almost everybody who has known him at any point in his life attests. (Tolson 85)

* * *

From the influence of many factors, including Percy's prolific and diverse reading as well as his life, would come six novels, many essays, and three books of non-fiction.

As an aristocratic Southerner, from a family of plantation owners, lawyers, writers, and senators (Walker Percy's great-uncle Leroy Percy was a U.S. Senator and hunting companion of Teddy Roosevelt), Walker Percy felt an imperative to follow the dictates of family obligation and enter into one of the few

professional fields open to a man of a his stature: “the law, the military, gentlemanly farming, the ministry, and medicine” (Tolson 107). Percy chose medicine – an apt choice, and for more than just family stature. Firmly planted in the scientific tradition, he found it a good fit for him philosophically. Percy had not only the compelling philosophy of scientism and the two-centuries-old aristocratic Percy dynasty behind his decision, but a family heritage of mental illness and melancholy that haunted him and that he was determined to escape. Percy’s concern about the pathology of humans had more personal roots: his father and grandfather had committed suicide, the former when Percy was only 11 years old. Speculation has it that even his mother’s “accidental” death two years later may have been a suicide (Tolson). Percy and his two brothers were then adopted and raised by his bachelor cousin William Alexander Percy, son of Delta planter and political figure Leroy Percy, in Greenville, Mississippi.

Uncle Will (as the three orphaned Percy boys called him) was famous in his own right – a poet planter and author of one of the essays in the so-called “Agrarian Manifesto” *I’ll Take My Stand* (1930) and of *Lanterns on the Levee* (1941) about the 1927 Mississippi flood. Life with Uncle Will exposed Percy to many experiences he might not have had otherwise, literary experiences including famous authors (Faulkner among them) visiting the Percy household not uncommonly.

Understanding the existential dilemmas suffered by his family and avoiding the same fate consumed him. Understanding the “mess that [his] life revealed itself to be... in order to avoid being sucked down into it himself” (Tolson 97), and rendering life finally explicable, also motivated Percy’s search for the clean absolutes and clear certainties of traditional science rather than the messy complexities of philosophy and art. Tolson writes: “Since science would eventually explain everything, including the unhappiness of man, the best way to proceed in life, he believed, was to be in the vanguard of science. As a convinced convert to this secular gospel, Walker knew that the core of his undergraduate studies would be a scientific discipline” (107). Percy’s worship of dyadic science was in keeping with his time; the logical positivists and the Vienna Circle peaked in the thirties and forties, and

he was sure to have been influenced by this philosophy. This scientism migrated to America during World War II and permeated the culture of Percy's youth in the early-to-mid 20th century.

An undergraduate degree at Chapel Hill in science and a graduate degree in medicine from Columbia University, "the leading center of 'scientific' medicine" (Tolson 132), ensured a successful future, but perhaps was not his true calling. In college, he did better in literature than science (Tolson 114, 122), and he was more attracted to the "idea of science than science itself" (Tolson 115), and in fact, he "liked the idea of medicine but not the reality of it" (Tolson 170). However, science was his philosophy of life and world view – a view that he would later attack in all of his fiction and non-fiction. (A convert is the most enthusiastic of disciples.) Biographer Jay Tolson writes of Percy's early philosophical (and anthropological) beliefs:

Total immersion in the sciences, besides keeping Percy busy, had at least one other result: It brought his faith in the behaviorist model, then firmly entrenched in the Carolina science departments, to its highest pitch. Percy's education during these years [1933-1937] strengthened his belief that science would eventually explain everything. The world might be headed to hell and war, economists might be predicting nothing but greater woes to come, theologians might be lamenting spiritual decline..., but young man Percy believed that science would somehow bring mankind through. A man of science could survive even in a world without honor.... Percy's rather hard-nosed scientism encouraged his cynical tendencies. If man can be reduced to the sum of his chemical and biological properties, he reasoned, why worry about his ideals, or lack thereof? (Tolson 128-129)

Percy's need for absolutes and certainty was not confined to scientific pursuits. He was also fascinated by the absolute sense of truth surrounding strong belief systems – political or religious ideologies that provided their adherents with the sense of being and centeredness that he himself craved. Percy, the detached observer, was drawn to his opposite. While he was still an undergraduate, his brief but meaningful sojourn to Germany in 1934, in which he encountered some fledgling young Nazi supporters before the insidious evil of the Nazi movement became obvious, profoundly affected Percy. He did not notice the anti-Semitic campaign that was beginning to flourish as much as he noticed the "Teutonic romanticism" (Tolson 118), the sense of purpose and the devoted enthusiasm of the Hitler Youth. He says of one member of the Hitler Jugend that he met:

“I had been an ordinary Boy Scout, ...not very good, a second-class Scout – but he was not like an American Boy Scout. He was dead serious, with this impressive uniform... I remember he talked about the Teutonic knights, and taking the oath at Marienburg, the ancient castle. There was a tremendous mystique there.” (Percy, qtd. in Tolson 117)

Of course, the sinister nature of all this revealed itself – but only later. Percy, laid back, often apathetic, who never got involved, was easily dazzled by and envious of the commitment to a cause at this time – whether it was the commitment of a Catholic or a Nazi. The southern stoic tradition that William Alexander Percy writes of valued war and going to war to fight nobly and passionately for a cause. Walker Percy inherited this value from his family as well, going back generations. His closest father figure, Uncle Will, felt that “life had never had more meaning than it had during the war” (Tolson 119). In an early (1957) essay on the Civil War, “The American War,” Percy admires the “suicidal abandon” and “selfless intensity” with which soldiers (on both sides) fought (Tolson 268), and he feels that the war seemed “twice as real, twice as memorable” as the following peace (SSL 75, Tolson 268). In his later writings, he speaks of *Schadenfreude*, delight in disaster, that the excitement of life-threatening dangers such as hurricanes and war are preferable to the boredom of four p.m. on a Wednesday afternoon.

Percy notes that total commitment to a cause – any cause – is exhilarating and invigorating to our everyday mundane lives. Our anxieties are temporarily relieved. However, our commitment must be to real, individual people – not causes – or the end result is devastating and often evil. With the Nazis, it was, eventually, genocide. Percy later became, like Gabriel Marcel, “wary of mass movements or causes” (Con II 278). Commitment engendered by abstract theory for the purpose of idealist do-gooding leads to such horrors as Hitlerian mass genocide, according to Percy.

What he discovered later is that these feelings of loyalty, devotion, and commitment to an abstract cause are illusions. To what is one committing? The cause, whether helpful, harmless, or evil, must have its grounds in an objective, ontological absolute and must be experienced through commitment to individual, particular people; not just any cause will suffice, despite the enthusiasm and

warm feelings it may engender. As Percy matured, saw history play out, and found faith himself, he realized this. The year before he died, he wrote on “The Holiness of the Ordinary” (SSL 368), with a quite different attitude towards the fulfillment of the simplicities of everyday life.

These themes would surface repeatedly throughout his novels, especially *Lancelot* and *The Thanatos Syndrome*. He often echoes Flannery O’Connor’s phrase that “sentimentalism leads to the gas chamber” in criticism of unexamined romanticism, sentimentality, patriotism, loyalty to passing causes or random groups. Percy says Gabriel Marcel “despises the mass movements all over Europe. But he says what people overlook is the excitement and the fact that mass movements answer an emptiness in a Western soul” (Con II 79). One of Percy’s favorite themes in his fiction is “the secret yearning for apocalyptic times” (Tolson 260), a need writer Ernest Becker called the *causa sui*. Becker explains in his Pulitzer prize winning book, *The Denial of Death*, that a cause for being, or *causa sui*, especially one that attempts to eradicate evil, is dangerous. While these *causa sui* address our subconscious anxiety regarding inevitable death, giving us “eternal life” through the cause we die for, their ironic attempt to eradicate or kill evil ends up ostracizing or demonizing others – to the point even of death, or in the case of the Nazis, genocide. The cause to fight evil, in the end, propagates evil. History eventually illuminated the error of Percy’s early admiration for such enthusiasm for a cause as the Hitler youth had; it was something he would never forget, and a lesson he would repeat often for others in his writings.

Percy’s fascination with Catholics and Catholicism developed around this time, too, and it seemed to meet the same need for commitment and certainty that scientism (and the Hitler Youth movement) did. Tolson writes of Percy’s interest in a roommate’s Catholic commitment: “Percy never forgot Stovall’s [moral] admonition – or the conviction behind it” (127). A later friend, Frank Hardart, with whom Percy traveled the West after medical school, also impressed Percy with his religious conviction, as did other close friends, including his adoptive father, Uncle Will, and each caused Percy to

ask, “Why are they so sure of themselves?” (Tolson 156). Percy reflects later on his reaction to

Catholicism:

I was brought up by a good agnostic and a scientist. I went to medical school with two Catholic students. They’d get up and go to Mass, and hang one of those garish Catholic calendars on the wall. They struck me as outrageous. I was offended by Catholicism. The offense is part of the clue, of course, part of the secret. I began to wonder, how dare any Church make this outrageous claim, that it’s unique in time? I think that what offends is the singularity of it, the singularity of the Judeo-Christian claim. The first offense is Jewish. The Jewish claim is equally outrageous. (Con II 126)

Catholicism offered the same absolutes as science, but explained the characteristics of humans outside the realm of science. Still, Percy was not ready to investigate or commit to Catholicism – or anything or anyone – yet.

Percy’s need for the clear absolutes of a scientific world view continued throughout medical school. When choosing between his two favorite specialties, pathology and psychiatry, he favored pathology due to its “purely scientific quality..., its neatness and precision, its intellectuality” (Tolson 148). In fact, even medicine was not enough of an absolute for Percy: he was dissatisfied with “what he called the ‘sloppiness’ of medicine..., an impure science because it involved an extremely difficult variable, the individual patient” (Tolson 148). This observation was a seed for the basis of his future “radical anthropology” and his conclusions that humans were different from the rest of the physical world. He would later realize science could explain the physical world, but it needed something more to explain humans, and Percy himself needed something more for real fulfillment. Science was a security blanket of familiarity – and not where his true talents lay.

Later, once immersed in his internship right out of medical school, Percy would find pathology also unfulfilling. Always a reader, always captivated by “story,” whether print or film (his first novel was entitled *The Moviegoer*), he longed to escape in story. As an undergraduate, moviegoing had been a pastime that had occupied much of his time in school (Tolson 160-61). In fact, this passion persisted

throughout his life and becomes reflected throughout his fiction, with a major presence in two novels: *The Moviegoer* [1961] and *Lancelot* [1977].

Percy contracted tuberculosis in 1942, his first year of a pathology internship, plunging him into depression and isolation. He would later call it a “stroke of good fortune” (Tolson 163, Con 185). It meant that the doctor became a patient. Percy’s recuperation from this nearly fatal illness led to an extended convalescence spent in reading and meditation during a time in which he became acutely aware of mortality and the transience of life in the physical world. And in convalescence that Percy’s view of dyadic science changed; he found it inadequate to explain characteristics of human beings that existentialists could better describe. This realization was another seed that began his lifelong search for a new, better, and radical anthropology – a more coherent theory of human beings than science or social science had to offer.

The doctor in Percy wished to diagnose the “modern malaise” of humankind, especially that of modern America. But first it was necessary to obtain a foundational “theory of man,”³ one that transcended an outdated mechanical Newtonian science but did not contradict this science to which he had so completely and loyally adhered. Raised and educated in the heyday of the Vienna Circle’s logical positivism, he still respected science as an adequate method for discovering most of the physical and biological world, but his profound and highly personal philosophical evolution after his brush with death through tuberculosis now allowed him to see the inadequacies of dyadic science at explaining the intangibles – meaning, purpose, culture, symbolic capacity, death, and the uniqueness of humankind.

After college, medical school, tuberculosis, recuperation, and during extended travels to Santa Fe and Taos, New Mexico, Percy was completely free and without obligation of any sort. He came to the low point of his life, his personal “ground zero” (Tolson 207), “living from second to isolated second in

³ Percy writes in the 1950s and gender neutral language had not become the status quo at the time. He begins using “man” for the whole of the human race, including women, and “mankind” for all of humanity – and keeps these terms throughout his writing career. When quoting him, I keep his terminology; when paraphrasing, I try to use gender neutral terms (such as “human being” or “individual”).

the rarefied atmosphere of pure possibility... oddly dissatisfied, even a little fearful,” feeling irrelevant, and, Tolson speculates, perhaps even suicidal (192). He had now grown from Kierkegaard’s “aesthetic stage” to readiness to participate in the “ethical stage.”⁴ Or in Percy’s own terms, he changed from an aimless experience-seeking “wanderer” – merely partaking of the enjoyments of life to no real end – to a committed and directed “wayfarer,” traveling, yes, but yearning to travel now with a purpose, direction, and connection to community. (Later, community would become an important theme in his novels.) He had now come to a time in his life for real commitment.

For years, he had conducted a primarily long-distance, episolatory friendship with Mary Bernice Townsend (“Bunt”), a woman he met in his hometown of Greenville, Mississippi, as he was just out of medical school and before his Columbia residency. Shortly thereafter, during his medical internship in New York, where he contracted tuberculosis, the romance was sidetracked by illness, recuperation, long distance, and work in New York. Geographically separated from Bunt, he spent his romantic time “trifling” with other women, so that some began to “view him as a cad” and “something of a Lothario,” though in truth “there was no woman he would rather be with” than Bunt (Tolson 187). “To Percy, Bunt was a cause of mild astonishment. He was not only attracted to her romantically. He liked her” (Tolson 158). Still, he didn’t act on his feelings, other than occasionally seeing her on weekends. After recuperation, Percy lived the life of his fictional wanderers, traveling to the literary Southwest with friends and alone, while Bunt, for her part, ever practical and not willing to wait on a man who showed little sign of settling down, dated others and took a new job in New Orleans.

Yet during his travels, Percy had his ground-zero experience and his unexpected transformation: after his, by now, no longer fulfilling or stimulating aimless wandering, he was ready to be a seeking “wayfarer.” He finally realized what he wanted – to be a writer, to live in New Orleans, and to marry Bunt. And he did. Due to his inheritance from his well-to-do family, he was financially independent. He

⁴ See Chapter 1.3 for a greater discussion of Kierkegaard’s stages.

moved to New Orleans, courted an initially reluctant Bunt – since Percy had by now “taken her on an emotional rollercoaster for five years” (Tolson 193). When he finally proposed a couple of months later, no one was more surprised than she. And, when marriage brought him great happiness and contentment, no one was more surprised than he. Tolson writes that it was one of the happiest times in his life (202).

Perhaps this influenced his novels; each of them, with the exception of one, concludes with the protagonist settling down with a good woman in a leafy enclave.⁵ When asked, he explained that his characters “did mostly get married. It seems that the nearest approximation, humanly speaking, of happiness is love. You would like your characters to get out of whatever fix they were in and achieve some kind of happiness. The best way to do it, the easiest way to do it, is to fall in love” (Con II 107). This kind of pledge to human love is the penultimate one, however. His next life step introduced him to the ultimate commitment.

The decision to marry was followed by a second commitment, a real investigation into and deep thought about his religious belief and affiliation. Catholicism, as he came to see it, offered the absolutes of science, but also offered answers to what science did not: the nature of human beings.⁶ However, the faith now attracted him for deeper reasons now than just certainty, its original allure. He was searching deeper, for something grounded in reality, something that offered a lifestyle he could adhere to and live daily. Other attractions of the Catholic Church were the ritual, the idea of community that it offered the loner in Percy, and its lack of Protestant fuzziness. Faith, a satisfying, lifelong faith, came to Percy after much thought. As much as he admired the Protestant Kierkegaard, he did not find faith irrational as Kierkegaard did. He says, “I was always put off by Kierkegaard’s talk about inwardness,

⁵ In *The Last Gentleman*, Percy later says in an interview that he assumed Will married Kitty (though in the sequel, he marries Allie, her daughter). In *Lancelot*, Lance plans not to marry, but to settle down tougher with Anna and her daughter in her cabin in Virginia, creating a family.

⁶ While Catholicism, scientism and other world views offer various answers, whether any of them deliver on their promises is another matter entirely. Ketner says that when he knew Percy, he was “parked in Catholicism, but open to further discussion, further searching” (KK).

subjectivity, and the absurd, and the leap into the absurd. I didn't think it was necessary to go that far" (Con I 120). Kierkegaard also abandoned the world, life, and people to find God; the liberal Catholic theologians that Percy began to study found the world and community the ground through which God's presence is manifested. Percy's conversion was intellectual, based in and a product of a process of careful reason, as well as faith and grace (Tolson 198). In the end, it was theologian Gabriel Marcel's Catholicism, not Kierkegaard's Protestantism, that shaped his theology – and his fiction - more.

His Catholicism would stay with him throughout his life and profoundly affect his writings. He would later say that his Catholic faith was the most important influence on his works. With his commitment to the Church, he found the ultimate cause for living, God, that would permeate all his novels. Like Marcel, Percy believed the human love that his heroes find at the end of his novels (first marriage, then community) is a manifestation of, and an actual though lesser mirror of, a greater divine love, and human love is a conduit through which his characters experience God in human life. The subject of all his novels is his protagonists' search for this love. Percy says, "Life is a mystery, love is a delight. ...one should settle for nothing less than the infinite mystery and the infinite delight, i.e.: God" (Con I 175).

1.3 SOME LITERARY AND INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES ON PERCY

Leary: What were perhaps your most significant transitions?

Percy: From Tolstoy to Dostoyevsky. From Sartre to Marcel. From Plato to Aristotle. From Wolfe to Faulkner. Though, in no case did I lose admiration for the former performance. It was a matter of further discovery. (Con II 63)

* * *

An avid reader before his illness, Percy deepened and expanded his reading during his years of forced convalescence. The range of Percy's sources is too wide to list in their entirety here. To presume to summarize Percy's influential sources into a few dozen writers and philosophers is to limit him and underestimate the depth and breadth of his intellectual background – far more than would be expected

even for a thinker of his significant stature, yet far less than has been explored by students of Percy. However, from these sources, a few can be (and have been) named by both Percy students and Percy himself as the strongest influences.

Were such a list to be compiled, it would include and extend beyond the often-named and much written about Kierkegaard and Marcel to other existential philosophers like Heidegger and Dostoevsky and Pascal. It would include poets and novelists (Gerard Manly Hopkins, Aldous Huxley, Flannery O'Connor, William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, Sartre, Camus, Tolstoy); theologians (Fulton Sheen, Teilhard de Chardin, John of St. Thomas, Jacques Maritain, Roman Guardini, Rahner Mounier) (Con II 74, 118); social scientists (Thomas Griffith, Vance Packard, Franz Boas) (Samway 197); contemporary psychotherapists (Freud, Jung, and Fromm); and the ancient scholastics (Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus). He also cites Arthur Koestler (*The Ghost in the Machine*), Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, Heinz Werner and Bernard Kaplan (*Symbol Formation*). Patrick Samway says that Percy's first essay was influenced by as many thinkers as James Collins, Susanne Langer, William E. Hocking, Christopher Dawson, C.K. Ogden, I.A. Richards, Charles Morris, Freud, and Kant (176). Alfred North Whitehead's "fallacy of misplaced concreteness" occurs in a later essay ("Culture" SSL). And Samway also includes David Rioch, Harry Stack Sullivan, George H. Mead, Martin Buber, Paul Weiss, and Lucien Levy-Bruhl as influential in Percy's later essays (212).

Percy's journey towards his radical anthropology rooted in language theory began with the existentialists. His existential search led to his Catholic conversion which led to his apologist endeavors by way of language. The two main influences most often cited on Percy's existential philosophy, especially as seen in his novels, were the theistic existentialists Søren Kierkegaard and Gabriel Marcel.

Walker Percy was profoundly affected by Kierkegaard's thoughts, and Percy's characters and themes reveal this influence in all his novels. Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher who lived from 1813 to 1855, is often considered the father of existentialism. He wrote on the nature and existence of human

beings, considering, as Percy does, the question of who we are and why we are here. A devout Christian, Kierkegaard also extensively considers faith and the individual's relationship with God. Kierkegaard the author employed irony to get his points across, using narrators of many different pseudonyms with diverse personalities, and both fiction and non-fiction formats to accomplish his goal of conveying his thoughts without teaching or preaching. His thoughts anticipated those of other pivotal thinkers of this time and beyond, including Sigmund Freud and Jean-Paul Sartre. Many of Freud's ideas such as the "pleasure principle," the "death drive," and the reason man "sins" echo Kierkegaard's philosophy. A summary of Kierkegaard's contributions includes the concepts of "dread," "despair," "rotation," and "repetition" of which Percy writes about in detail in his non-fiction, and mirrors in his fiction. Other concepts are "the double movement of infinity," that is, that of the "knight of infinite resignation" and the "knight of faith."

Percy, the scientist who liked systematization, was particularly attracted to Kierkegaard's three "stages on life's way" - the aesthetic, ethical, and religious spheres. Percy's novels often end with his protagonists making the movement from one stage to the next, specifically, aesthetic to ethical. Kierkegaard's stages are developmental; one must travel through each. The first stage, the "aesthetic stage," is the stage in which an individual acts in such a way that will bring pleasure or happiness to him or herself, which is the main motivation and concern. Some may call this a "hedonist" stage, though hedonism takes many different forms, as does the aesthetic stage, which has different stages within it. The lowest aesthetic stage is that of the least sophisticated individual, one who exists merely to satisfy his physical senses. This may take the form of self-indulgence and an "eat, drink, and be merry" philosophy or a "wine, women, and song" lifestyle, or today's equivalent, "sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll." Have fun and enjoy the moment. Higher up but still within the aesthetic stage is the "busy man of affairs" as Kierkegaard calls him. This man is still living for a worldly and selfish pleasure, but instead of the pleasure of the physical senses, the pleasure is that of success in the world, such as making a clever

business deal. Engaging in activities in the world that bring success to self, in whatever way one defines that, is still motivated by the pleasure of that success for one's self gain, so remains part of the aesthetic stage. The highest level of the aesthetic stage is more aristocratic – that of the cultivated sophisticate. The appreciation of culture including art, music, and literature may be more refined than the lower levels, but is still motivated by pleasure and pleasure-seeking. (This is not to say that appreciation, study, and/or mastery of art is to be eschewed, just that the pursuit of art for self-pleasure is not the realization of the fullness of art's purpose.)

The transition from one Kierkegaardian stage to the next also has certain characteristics. The aesthetic stage, characterized by the pursuit of pleasure as the motivation for one's actions and one's purpose, eventually leads to satiety and boredom. Eventually the sought after-pleasure ceases to satisfy, and the individual seeks a solution. The solution, if he chooses to remain an aesthete, is "rotation." The aesthete constantly "rotates" the roles, the places, and the people in his life to avoid commitment(s) to any one particular thing or person or role in life. By remaining outside of life as a spectator of life, the aesthete can continually pursue new and different experiences of the generalized abstraction of the chosen pleasure and discard them once he becomes bored, moving on to a new one. For example, the generalized abstraction of "beautiful woman" may be filled by any beautiful woman that walks by, but just as easily discarded for the next one, who also satisfies the abstraction. The particulars of each individual woman are irrelevant. Careers or jobs may also be rotated, discarded once they cease to become amusing; as can places – with the aesthete moving from place to exotic or more desirable place, abandoning one when it becomes dull for something else that seems more adventurous or interesting. In this way, the aesthete avoids intense pleasures or pains associated with close intimacy and commitment (whether to a love, a friend, a cause, a role, a place, a community); therefore, he must continually distract himself with variety of pleasures, experiences, persons and/or vocations. As one might guess, even this solution disintegrates into a cynical apathy... and to the aesthete's conclusion

that all actions lead to regret. The aesthete has been merely role-playing up to this point and reveals to no one his true, inner self; in fact, he has no true, inner self to reveal at this point. The multiple roles are pleasurable distractions for his own narcissistic satisfaction, but are no reflection of a caring or investment in any of these apparent choices. In reality, his inner self is a splintered, fragmented one. Rather than being free of society's dictates as the aesthete thinks he is, he inadequately defines himself by a multiplicity of socially defined roles, all of which are incoherent and complicated in the one person. Stated harshly, his life is a masquerade of role-playing to hide his inner emptiness.

The successful transition to the second stage, the ethical stage, is characterized by a "leap": if the aesthete is to leave the aesthetic stage and move to the next, he must abandon this early stage blindly, and take a "leap." The individual loses his or her own self, not yet knowing what new self will be created. Until this point, the aesthete has been "morally neutral" in that choices are not in the ethical realm; it is not that one chooses evil over good, but that one is not even in the sphere of good and evil. In the leap to the next stage, the aesthete will choose to enter the realm of good and evil, where every choice is a moral one – for good or for bad – which did not even "exist" for the aesthete before.

The leap to the ethical stage is the result of the distracted aesthete, tired of "rotation," making a commitment to one particular role in relationship to persons, society, and all of life. For Kierkegaard, at this point, any commitment will suffice (he advocates no one particular dogma or cause or religion or person at this point), as long it is both a commitment to self-perfection as well as a commitment to other human beings. The ethical person now has a genuine and non-fragmented identity, role, and place in life, defined by his commitment to others and self. He or she has now *chosen* himself whereas before, in the aesthetic stage, there was no self behind the empty and transient role. In addition, instead of acting for self-pleasure, one's actions in the role are motivated by the commitment to others and caring for the well-being of others. So, the person in the ethical stage considers the needs of others and community when making decisions. A businessperson in the ethical stage operates not for the thrill of

the deal, selfish gain, or social accolades (as in the aesthetic stage), but for the benefit of community and society. At this point, every decision that the individual makes is an ethical one. The aesthete might have to decide between steak or fish for dinner, or between wearing a suit or sweats to work, but no ethical implications are involved for him. In the ethical stage, the ethics and effects of the situation on others and the world (which is determined by the role or commitment one has chosen) enter into every decision the individual makes.

Percy's New Mexico "Ground Zero" experience fostered such a realization within himself. His decision to commit to a career of writing and to a wife and to a home in New Orleans was his leap from the aesthetic stage to the ethical stage. His protagonists in his first three novels make this same movement at the end of each of these novels; Kierkegaard's journey through the aesthetic stage and finally, the leap to the ethical stage is Percy's primary theme in the first half of his fictional works. Percy says:

I want to pay due homage to Kierkegaard. Insofar as one thinks in a philosophical frame of reference, when I was writing *The Moviegoer*, also *The Last Gentleman*, and maybe also *Love in the Ruins*, I was thinking in terms of the three spheres of existence. It is a very convenient frame of reference, particularly when you are writing a novel of quest, pilgrimage, or search about a young man "on life's way," as Kierkegaard would say, to think of him going through the aesthetic stage, the ethical stage, and then the religious. Although most of the novels are about the aesthetic stage. (Con I 203)

So Percy, whose first three novels are about this movement from the aesthetic stage into the ethical, has his protagonists enter into this ethical stage at the novels' end by way of marriage. Percy says, "I think that Kierkegaard regarded marriage as the highest state of ethical existence" (Con I 48). (However, Kierkegaard does not feel marriage is primary in the next stage, the religious stage.) All heroes of the first three novels but Will Barrett, protagonist of the second novel, marry at the end. Percy's last three novels either restore a previous marriage or portray a commitment to a woman exclusively to live together and marry later; (the times had changed and marriage was no longer the only social structure available for the Marcellian commitment). As for Will's aloneness at the end of *The Last*

Gentleman (though he does reach out to Sutter Vaught), Percy ascribes it to Will being “sicker” than the others, though he speculates that, after the novel is over, “Of course he married Kitty Barrett [sic], and I think maybe he lived tolerably. But who knows?” (Con I 48). Percy’s own journey from aesthetic to ethical ended in a marriage and a family, a home in a permanent place, and a commitment to a career of writing. His wanderings had ended; his wayfaring had begun.

For Kierkegaard, the individual's spiritual journey does not end with the ethical stage. Commitment to others, to a "cause," to a mission or purpose, to our "role" in this life, whatever we have chosen that to be, must eventually give way to the ultimate commitment – to God. If the individual's commitment to others and to his role in the world remains primary and all that there is for him, these obligations then become "god" for him. These must be given up for the transcendent God. While Kierkegaard sees marriage as the highest state of the ethical sphere, in the religious stage, the believer must be ready to give up everything for God, even marriage. In fact, he must give up any relationship in the religious stage, and the entire world itself. This leap of faith into the religious sphere is much more difficult than the first leap from the aesthetic to the ethical sphere. Before, the aesthete gives up a poor sense of self and spiritually unfulfilling life for a better one; in the second leap, a good and rewarding life is sacrificed for nothing but God.

This can perhaps best be exemplified with the biblical story about the "rich young ruler" who comes to Christ and asks how he can enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ responds that he must obey the commandments. The rich young ruler answers that he has, and Christ knows that he is a good man (ethical sphere) and is ready for the next stage of spiritual growth (religious sphere). So Jesus asks the man to give up everything he has, and come and follow him (Christ). The young man walks away in disappointment, for he cannot make this leap of faith. (Christ's response: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” Matthew 19:24)

Does commitment to God contradict or conflict with living an ethical life in this world? Does following God ever get in the way of commitments to others and society? Kierkegaard answers unequivocally in the affirmative. He calls this the "Teleological Suspension of the Ethical" and believes that faith in God is logically absurd, but absolutely essential for true being. Percy says that, for Kierkegaard, "Faith is not a form of knowledge, it is a leap into the absurd" (Con I 204).

Others, including Walker Percy himself as well as Gabriel Marcel, disagree with Kierkegaard on this point. Percy says, "It is the classical dispute between Catholics and Protestants whether faith is a form of knowledge... Aquinas [says]... faith is a form of knowledge. It is different from scientific knowing, but it is a form of knowledge. I tend to agree with Aquinas there" (Con I 204). However, Kierkegaard's argument for the absurd ironically makes a kind of logical sense from one point of view. If we are unwilling to sacrifice ALL, everything in this life, including commitments to others and including ethics, then those things are still "before" (in front of or more important than) commitment to God.

Kierkegaard uses the story of Abraham and Isaac to illustrate his point. Perhaps the strongest commitment or bond of love a human can have is that of parent and child; for a father, too (especially in Abraham's day and culture), the son represents the father's future and "immortality" (through descendants) in this world. There is nothing greater in the world that Abraham could sacrifice, yet he is asked by God to sacrifice his son. Abraham goes to the mountaintop with Isaac and builds the altar; at the last minute, he is stopped by God. Abraham has passed the test of faith; his ultimate commitment is to God. However, his actions which were right in the religious sphere seemed absurd in the ethical sphere: God's commandment to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac was requiring him to act like a murderer. This is Kierkegaard's "teleological suspension of the ethical"; however, it does not abolish the ethical. The suspension is only temporary.

This is what Kierkegaard means by the "knight of infinite resignation" and "knight of faith." Abraham is the knight of infinite resignation in that he is willingly resigned to lose everything he has for

God – his son, his future, and even his ethics. He is willing to renounce the world, himself, and even his position as a moral agent. Yet he is the knight of faith because he never gives up hope in God. He believes God's promise and goodness, though it was not logical given what he was asked to do. He believes two mutually exclusive ideas at the same time, what Kierkegaard calls "divine madness." This is Kierkegaard's "double movement of infinity." The wisdom of God is foolishness to the world.

Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), the second major existential influence on Percy, is a theistic existentialist as Kierkegaard is, but differs in his vision of what faith is. Marcel is French, a Jew, and a Catholic convert, and Percy too was a Catholic convert. Marcel's Catholic viewpoint resonated more with Percy than Kierkegaard's Protestant stance. While Kierkegaard sees the "knight of infinite resignation" sacrificing community and earthly relationships in the journey to God, Marcel sees the opposite. Faith is not irrational; the individual is not in isolation. For Marcel, the community and relationship with others are vastly important, and, in fact, are the medium through which transcendent faith is found and lived.

Since Marcel sees the human spirit in social context, one of his main concerns is the state of modern society and its effect on modern man. Like Percy, Marcel believes modern man is not at ease with himself – a stranger to himself – and one of the reasons for this is the loss of the "ontological" sense in the modern world. Humans are no longer valued for their ontological worth; they are valued for their "functional" worth. Ontologically, humans have value just by virtue of the fact that they exist, that they are born and live. There is simply a sacredness of being that is what gives dignity and worth to the individual. In modern society, however, individuals are valued not for the sacredness of their being, for the fact that they simply ARE; they are valued instead for what they DO. They are valued functionally. Human worth is the same thing as their work – what they produce and contribute to the world. A functionalized world is one that emphasizes "process without a purpose, utilisation of means with no clearly defined end, a journey without a goal" (Keen 10). In a functionalized world, we are busy

creatures filling up time with "productive" activities that have no real ontological purpose. With the loss of the ontological sense, there is a loss of a sense of mystery and wonder in life and the world.

The functional orientation to life is more concerned with "having" than "being." Sam Keen illustrates the polarities of these two different approaches to the world (14):

Ontological	Functional
Being	Having
Participation	Objectification
Mystery	Problem
Presence	Object
I-Thou relationships	I-It relationships
Thought which stands in the presence of....	Thought which proceeds by interrogation
Concrete thinking	Abstraction
Secondary reflection	Primary reflection

Marcel associates functional thinking with technological thinking. Like Heidegger, Marcel sees technology, in and of itself, as morally neutral. It is when technological thinking deteriorates into "technomania" and "technolatry" that there is a loss of the ontological sense. Technological thinking causes an anthropocentric world view – a loss of humility, that is, a pride that man's technological products and an inadequate scientific worldview, i.e.: scientism, are the answers to life and to all knowledge – which is Percy's complaint against and rejection of "scientism" (not science or the scientific method, however). One then becomes one's own source of meaning and value to life.

In addition, technology has created a loss of particularity and individuality and uniqueness and intimacy to real people and concrete places. We live in a society of mass production, standardized products, brand names, and uniform workers. The loss of concrete particular and unique identity results in a "spirit of abstraction." Like technology, abstraction itself can be useful – it is necessary for reason and thought. It helps us to theorize and to order and understand the world. However, it becomes negative and dangerous when the concreteness from which it arises is lost. Keen explains:

When we forget that the enemy whom we may be forced to kill in war is an individual human being with hopes and fears, that the 'schizophrenic' is a unique person whom no diagnostic

categories wholly fit, that a flower that can be understood in scientific terms is also a thing of beauty existing in its own right, we yield to the fascination of abstraction and betray a contempt for concrete reality. (13-14)

Percy believes like Marcel that it is abstraction, generalization, functionalization, and the loss of the particular individual that sends modern humans astray.

Percy's appreciation of nature is another indication of the Marcellian manifestation of the human need to be in the reality and presence of the physical world and not be divorced from it. Nature suffuses Percy's novels. He does not split spirit from world any more than he splits mind from body. Percy's theology, as much as he used Kierkegaard's stages, is ultimately far more similar to Marcel's.

Interviewer Bradley R. Dewey explains:

In Kierkegaard's view, there seems to be a narrow vertical line straight up and down from God to man, not touching the believer's earthly surroundings at all. How strikingly different it is for Percy.

His novels are suffused with nature. No fewer than twelve species of birds appear in *The Moviegoer*. We are kept constantly, but gently, aware of the look of the sky, sounds, smells, the feel of things. (Con I 123)

Kierkegaard had "stark landscapes" (Dewey, Con I 123), as one's earthly surroundings are unimportant and superfluous to faith in Protestant theology. Percy is more like the Catholics – both Marcel and Gerard Manley Hopkins. "It is as if the whole universe is filled with grace. It's not just gracious Jesus, which is so Protestant" (Dewey, Con I 124), Percy says of Hopkins' writing. Of his own writing, Percy says it is a "consciously Catholic attitude toward nature – nature, created nature, as a sacramental kind of existence" (Con I 124). Such an orientation is directly opposed to the mind-body split of the Enlightenment; in Percy's view, the Catholics, before and after Descartes, have always had it right in this way.

While Kierkegaard's religious stage would require the believer to give up the entire world, including all earthly relationships (if asked by God), for Marcel and Percy the opposite is true. Not only is nature a kind of sacrament, a conduit to the transcendent, but relationships and community also are a medium of this world, through which God is lived and experienced. By entering into a commitment of

fidelity to another person and of service to a community, the believer enters into a life of the religious sphere, the life of faith and service to God. Percy's novels do end with his protagonists leaving Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere - but even *The Moviegoer's* Binx Bolling, who jumps straight into the religious stage, according to Percy, enters into a Marcellian world where relationships are the medium of growth. Percy does not foresee his protagonists eventually abandoning their community or nature to have the ultimate union with God as they progress out of the ethical sphere into the religious. In fact, it is through commitment to and growth in the world, body, and community that God is found through the body – just as it is through the body and blood of Christ that God is encountered.

Percy's writings continually emphasize the unity of mind and body – and that answers can never be found directly through abstractions, nor solely through mind divorced from the body. In *The Second Coming*, when Will Barrett, in a misguided scientific experiment, goes into a cave seeking a scientific answer to the question of God's existence, God's answer comes delivered through the earth, nature, itself - a toothache, driving him from an abstraction in his mind right back into his body. Will says, "What kind of answer is this to an elegant scientific question?" (SC 224). God's reply is nature's lesson that abstract scientific generalities are not the answer – but rather, it is the particular relationship lived out in the world, through the body. (The next step in Will's journey is to quite literally "fall" into a relationship with a woman.)

It is the combination of the scientist – who cannot say a single word about the individual, only utter abstract generalities applied to groups and categories – and the romantic idealist, bent upon improving society, that leads "to the gas chamber" (Con II 191). Flannery O'Connor was influential to Percy in a number of ways; he met her before she died of lupus and was impressed with her physical and spiritual strength even as she battled her debilitating illness in its latter stages. But it was O'Connor, especially, who brought home to him the "gas chamber" phrase and concept. In her "Introduction to *A Memoir of Mary Ann*," she muses on the life and early death by cancer of twelve-year-old Mary Ann,

whose beauty of soul was inversely matched by her face which was grotesquely disfigured by a tumor.

O'Connor writes:

One of the tendencies of our age is to use the suffering of children to discredit the goodness of God, and once you have discredited his goodness, you are done with him. ... Ivan Karamazov cannot believe, as long as one child is in torment; Camus' hero cannot accept the divinity of Christ, because of the massacre of the innocents. In this popular pity, we mark our gain in sensibility and our loss in vision. If other ages felt less, they saw more, even though they saw with the blind, prophetic, unsentimental eye of acceptance, which is to say, of faith. In the absence of this faith now, we govern by tenderness. It is tenderness which, long since cut off from the person of Christ is wrapped in theory. When tenderness is detached from the source of tenderness, its logical outcome is terror. It ends in forced-labor camps and in the fumes of the gas chamber. (*Mystery and Manners* 226-227)

Walker Percy echoes O'Connor's insights against abstract, generalized sentimentality and tenderness.

Percy also says, "Scientific inquiry should, in fact, be free. The warning: If it is not, if it is subject to this or that ideology, then do not be surprised if the history of the Weimar doctors is repeated. Weimar leads to Auschwitz" (SSL 394). To be both theorist (i.e.: mental abstractionist) and sentimental, idealist do-gooder is to be divorced from the body, the physical, the particular, the individual, from everyday life and the ground of reality. The dangers of the sentimental theorist are not readily apparent. Percy elucidates:

Darwin, Newton, and Freud were theorists. They pursued truth more or less successfully by theory – from which, however, they themselves were exempt. You will look in vain in Darwin's *Origin of the Species* [sic] for an explanation of Darwin's behavior in writing *Origin of the Species*. Marx and Stalin, Nietzsche and Hitler were also theorists. When theory is applied, not to matter or beasts, but to man, the consequence is that millions of men can be eliminated without compunction or even much interest. Survivors of both Hitler's Holocaust and Stalin's terror reported that their oppressors were not "horrible" or "diabolical" but seemed, on the contrary, quite ordinary, even bored by their actions, as if it were all in a day's work.... The denizens of the present age are both sentimental and bored... in an age of theory and consumption it is appropriate that actions be carried out as the applications of theory and the needs of consumption require. (SSL 309-310)

So for Percy, theory – especially scientific theory, a result of the process of the scientific method – is an abstraction into generalizations based on a collection of individuals, particular instances or persons. But in the process, the individual person is lost. What happens then? True intimacy, commitment, and love become transformed into an abstract and general "tenderness" or "sentimentality" which involves NO

particular or known individual. Percy explains, “The nihilism of some scientists in the name of ideology or sentimentality and the consequent devaluation of individual human life lead straight to the gas chamber” (SSL 396). If a Nazi officer were at the table of the “Final Solution,” and Jews are simply an abstract category, classified by scientific theory as racially inferior to Aryans (as they actually were labeled by the Nazis), and if he were intent upon improving his society, it is quite simple for him to make the choice to “better” society through the efficient solution of the gas chamber. But if his wife, mother, child, friend or neighbor were a Jew, the decision would not only be difficult, it would likely not be carried out. The Jew is no longer an abstract category – but a particular individual relationship set in community.

Percy cites existentialists Heidegger and Sartre as pivotal to his thinking as well. The Russian novelists with their Christian existential viewpoint influenced Percy also; he said that his second novel, *The Last Gentleman*, was an American remake of Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot* (LG xvi). Of *The Moviegoer*, one critic called it “the first American novel which can be called Existentialist which hasn’t one word of philosophy in it” (Tolson 290).

His examination of the “modern malaise” of humans was not just through existential literature and philosophy, but was also augmented by his interest in psychiatry. While a bit suspicious of the “dangers of the therapeutic culture” (Tolson 267), especially behaviorist solutions to the existential dilemma, Percy still found value in therapy. Percy’s protagonists were often psychologists or psychiatrists (a profession he nearly entered) who examine the individual patient. Freud and Jung influenced his novels as well. But their psychology ultimately failed – it could not answer the questions Percy wanted answered.

1.4 THE FIRST FAILURE: PSYCHOLOGY

THE CENTURY OF DEATH

I think if the novels have found any response it’s because anybody who has any sense at all finds himself in this culture in a state of confusion; that is, as Guardini would say, we’re living in a

post-modern world. The world has ended in a sense. We're living in one of those times that hasn't been named yet....We live at the end of modern times. The end of modern times will be the end of Christendom as we know it. No one has named this period yet. We don't know what it is. (Con I 280-281)

* * *

It is the century of the love of death. (MB 162)

* * *

Percy believed that the true spirit of religion was absent in modern times, and no viable alternative is offered to the existential dilemma. Clearly, scientism fails to answer the need for human assurance, but surprisingly, so does psychology. Percy says:

God is absent, said Johann Christian Holderlin; God is dead, said Nietzsche. This means one of two things. Either we have outgrown monotheism, and good riddance; or modern man is estranged from being, from his own being, from the being of other creatures in the world, from transcendent being. He has lost something – what, he does not know; he knows only that he is sick unto death with the loss of it. (SSL 262)

Kierkegaard's "sickness unto death" was so important to Percy that it was the epigraph for his first novel, *The Moviegoer*. The theme continues throughout his fiction, (especially the first three novels before he moved to an emphasis on semiotic symbols): "The first thing a man remembers is longing and the last thing he is conscious of before death is exactly the same longing. I have never seen a man die who did not die in longing.... At what age does a man get over this longing? The answer is, he doesn't" (LR 21).

There was once an answer to the longing of the soul – provided in the very milieu in which one was born, raised, and lived. Today, what is offered for the longing of the soul in our times, in the absence of a transcendent God, is "self-actualization." Percy illustrates this repeatedly in both his fiction and non-fiction. In *Love in the Ruins*, a priest admonishes the "scientist" protagonist Dr. Thomas More:

"Love them, Doc! Believe me, it lies within your power to make all three of them happy and yourself too. Didn't God put us here to be happy? Isn't happiness better than unhappiness? Love them! Work on your invention. Stimulate your musical-erotic! Develop your genius. Aren't we all obliged to develop our potential? Work! Love! Music! That's what makes a man happy." (LR 364)

More's first wife, Ellen, abandoning him for "greater fulfillment," says, "Spiritual growth is the law of life. Our obligation is to be true to ourselves and to relate to this law of life." Ellen's "spiritual growth" is not to relate to any transcendent "other"; it is instead, to self-actualize. More knows that our purpose is not a solipsistic goal of "personal growth" (which may be a side effect, but is not the end), nor is it to relate to an abstraction ("the law of life"). It is relationship with real, concrete individuals, through which God manifests. He responds, "Isn't marriage a relation?" (LR 66). For Percy, the answer to human longing is in the Marcellian notion of devotion and service to God through community. Marriage is a sacrament and a community that brings into it the transcendent God – not some random social group that exists to seek personal fulfillment or self-actualization. Ellen offers a Kierkegaardian aesthetic solution. More's wife and More find solutions to their longing in far different ways.

"We like to think, hiding the thought, that with all the marvelous ways in which we seem now to lead nature around by the nose, perhaps we can avoid the central problem [death] if we just become, next year, say, a bit smarter," says Lewis Thomas in his book of philosophical observations about biology, humanity, and community, *Lives of a Cell* (47). Percy illustrates this in his last novel, *The Thanatos Syndrome*, in which the water is intentionally contaminated with a compound that reduces man to animals with little symbolic capacity – though humans are now much "smarter" with improving "test scores" and academic performance, especially mathematical performance. The scientists have no absolute transcendent values; they live by "self-actualization" and "happiness" measures: "'I didn't say I didn't believe you, Tom,' says Max [the devil figure] affectionately. 'Belief. Truth. Values. These are relative things' " (LR 113). Percy, however, believes in absolutes.

Psychiatry, the modern tool to resolve psychic and spiritual ills, offers no solutions. Percy's readings of several 20th century psychiatrists – Freud, Jung, Eric Fromm, Ernest Becker, and Viktor Frankl – illustrate his concerns.

FREUD'S MATERIALISM AND JUNG'S SYNCHRONICITY

Freud and Jung influenced Percy, though he had issues with both:

Though I admired and respected Dr. Freud more than Dr. Jung, I thought Dr. Jung was right in encouraging his patients to believe their anxiety and depression might be telling them something of value. They are not just symptoms. It helps enormously when a patient can make friends with her terror, plumb the depths of her depression: "There's gold down there in the darkness," said Dr. Jung. True, in the end Dr. Jung turned out to be something of a nut, the source of all manner of occult nonsense. Dr. Freud was not. He was a scientist, wrong at times, but a scientist nonetheless. (TS 67)

In *The Thanatos Syndrome* quotation above, Percy has his protagonist espouse that not uncommon charge that Jung was too metaphysical, too "pseudo-science," and that he preferred Freud, implying that this is Percy's view as well. In other places, Percy rejected Freud's rigid, materialist, positivistic, behavioristic philosophy, that did not capture the "perversity" of humans, who often behave in ways counter-productive to their pleasure and self-interest (Tolson 208). Here we see Percy's conflict: trying to understand and describe spiritual and intangible aspects of human beings from a purely biological point of view. Percy asks, "What account can Freud give of his own lifelong quest for the truth? How an 'interaction of forces' can be sublimated into a search for truth is never explained" (SSL 255). Freud's materialism is insufficient to say anything about that other side of humans, the longings of the soul, the existential search. Percy elaborates:

Is psychiatry a biological science in which man is treated as an organism with instinctive drives and needs not utterly or qualitatively different from those of other organisms? Or is psychiatry a humanistic discipline which must take account of man as possessing unique destiny by which he is oriented in a wholly different direction?...The question then, is no longer whether the social sciences, given sufficient time (as they like to say), may succeed in applying the biological method to man, but whether the very attempt to do so has not in fact worsened man's predicament in the world...It is increasingly noticeable that American psychiatry has almost nothing to say about the great themes that have engaged the existential critics of modern society from Søren Kierkegaard to Gabriel Marcel. Would anyone seriously contend that these themes are peculiar to postwar Europe and have no bearing on American life? (SSL 252)

By the 1970s, Percy was developing a stronger interest in Jung. As he matured philosophically he moved from the hard dyadic science of his college days, to the mysteries Catholicism during his early marriage days, and eventually, in his old age to a greater openness to accepting philosophical mysteries

and non-traditional explanations such as those found in Charles Sanders Peirce (though he never totally embraced them – see Part Three). But during the 70s, Percy was a member of a Jungian discussion group and his “mystical” artist friend Lyn Hill encouraged his exploration of Jungian ideas (Tolson 398, 423). His mixed feelings about Jung, and even about Freud, reveal themselves in one letter during this time in which he says, “Time was, however, when Jung would irritate me with his patronizing approval of religion. – e.g. the cult of the Virgin not because it was true but because it conformed to the ‘anima’ archetype. I preferred Freud’s old-fashioned atheism. Now, however, don’t ask me” (qtd. in Tolson 393). After his second-to-last novel (1980), Percy says, “I take a Jungian point of view that maybe our neurotic symptoms, our depressions, our anxieties, and our dreams are worth investigating.... Carl Jung was right in encouraging his patients to believe that anxiety and depression might be trying to tell them something of value.... ‘there’s gold down there in the darkness,’ said Dr. Jung” (Con II 187). These ideas later end up as themes and quotes in his novels; in *The Second Coming*, the gold metaphor is particularly emphasized. But psychotherapy, as valuable as he proclaimed it to be, was not the answer he was seeking to the enigma of “How Queer Man Is” (MB v).

Yet, just as with other more esoteric thinkers, Percy is uncomfortable with Jung’s metaphysical leanings. The exploration of the unconscious was as far as his appreciation of Jung went, despite his knowledge of Jung’s other theories from his discussion group. Percy was familiar with Jungian synchronicity, and in interviews, refers to Jung (Con I 270). Ironically, Percy didn’t pursue this path very far, despite its similarity to his own views.

Percy’s internal conflict over science’s adequacy to describe humans arises here. He wants to hold onto science as an explanatory theory for humans even though it is incomplete. Since Freud was a scientist, in Percy’s view, despite his materialist errors that Percy objected to, he therefore was more admirable and respectable in Percy’s eyes. Jung, for all his value, engaged in “occult nonsense” and veered too far out of Percy’s comfort zone. Yet what Percy neglects to observe here (or at all) is that

Jung used the scientific method itself to examine those things that seemed to Percy, and traditional science, to be outside of science. In reality, Jung is the true scientist – holding on to the scientific **method**, not the scientific **worldview** (scientism). Jung adheres to Percy's requirement that we keep the scientific method and relinquish the outdated scientific worldview. And Jung's "synchronicity" is similar to the hypotheses of Percy's primary mentor, Charles Sanders Peirce, concerning "synechism": the universe was somehow aligned, or synchronized, so that uncanny coincidences (such as guessing the correct hypothesis in the first two to three tries, or seeing a golden scarab beetle fly through the window at the same time one is analyzing a patient discussing her dream of a golden scarab beetle)⁷ are not random coincidences, but have an actual relational connection behind them. Jung believed in "meaningful coincidences" rather than random ones, in direct contrast to Freud, who believed coincidences were random and mere chance and were only given meaning and connection by the neurotic and superstitious human mind.

Freud's theories are in direct opposition to Jung's and Charles Sanders Peirce's, Percy's semeiotic mentor. Freud's basic hypothesis is that nothing is connected. Freud defines coincidences as "uncanny" ("*unheimlich*") in an important essay "Die Unheimlich," meaning that an entity's opposite has attained a similar meaning to it. "Heimlich" refers to something "familiar, not strange, intimate, tame, comfortable, homely, belonging to the house" (Freud 155). "Unheimlich" means ghostly, secret, obscure, inaccessible to knowledge, hidden, unconscious, mystic, allegorical, dangerous (Freud 157). So in this combination of meanings, the paradox becomes that the uncanny is both familiar and strange, comfortable and dangerous, intimate and obscure, known and inaccessible to knowledge. The uncanny is the repetition (hence, familiarity) of coincidental circumstances or events, with no apparent causal reason (hence, mysterious and hidden).

⁷ Percy refers to this in *The Second Coming*. See chapter 4.4.

While Freud acknowledges that many people experience coincidences as meaningful, he offers an alternate explanation. He uses the example of the repetition of a certain number, say 62, that one might see several times in a day. "The recurrence of the same situations, things and events ...awaken an uncanny feelingit is only this factor of involuntary repetition which surrounds with an uncanny atmosphere what would otherwise be innocent enough, and forces upon us the idea of something fateful and inescapable where otherwise we should have spoken of 'chance' only" (Freud 163-164). For Freud, coincidences are simply a figment of man's imagination – a neurotic human tendency in search of meaning, which is also a neurotic tendency. Again, Freud's views were diametrically opposed to Percy's, Jung's, and Peirce's. Freud rationally explains coincidences away in a manner limited to a causal, space-time cosmology that doesn't allow for an explanation of the existential side of man – the wayfarer and pilgrim searching for meaning – that was Percy's main subject.

For Freud, any kind of meaning ascribed to uncanny events is erroneous, pure superstition, yet it appeals to us, Freud admits. Freud assigns this appeal not only to our failure to "harden" ourselves against superstition but ultimately to our neurotic needs.

... unless a man is utterly hardened and proof against the lure of superstition he will be tempted to ascribe a secret meaning to this obstinate recurrence of a number, taking it, perhaps as an indication of the span of life allotted to himNot long ago an ingenious scientist attempted to reduce coincidences of this kind to certain laws, and so deprive them of their uncanny effect. (Freud 164)

Freud, like the deterministic scientist he refers to, kindly removes the mystery of the uncanny for us. He postulates an unconscious instinctual repetition-compulsion principle to explain the uncanny. "The quality of uncanniness can only come from the circumstance of the 'double' being a creation dating back to a very early mental stagea regression to a time when the ego was not yet sharply differentiated from the external world and from other persons" (Freud 163). He says "all obsessional neurotics I have observed are able to relate [uncanny] experiences" (Freud 165) and "whatever reminds us of this inner repetition-compulsion is perceived as uncanny" (Freud 164). Freud attributes uncanniness to "the

individual [narcissistic] stage of development corresponding to that animistic stage of primitive men" (Freud 165). Uncanniness is something repressed which RECURS, simply "a morbid anxiety;" this uncanniness is "nothing new or foreign but something familiar and old, established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression" (Freud 166). Uncanniness is not something inherently meaningful, revealing some truth about the nature of the universe itself; it is only something that "ought to have been kept concealed, but which has nevertheless come to light" (Freud 166). Uncanniness arises from the unconscious, then, and is a product and element of the unconscious emerging into the light of the conscious.

Despite Percy's stated admiration of Freud, Freud's worldview was the opposite of Percy's "fabric of life." As a materialist and a determinist who had little room for ideas of spirit, soul, noumena, and otherworldly occurrences that some might use to explain uncanniness, Freud believed dyadic physical and psychological laws can simply explain all mental phenomena, positions which Charles Sanders Peirce neatly and easily disposed of. Freud's universe has little or no room for mystery; all will ultimately be explained by rational science. Thus, uncanniness is reduced to a psychological (read: dyadic science of the mind) occurrence, governed by psychologically determined and predictable laws; specifically, an unhealthy psychological occurrence (obsessive neuroses) (as it postulates that perhaps there is something unexplainable, incomprehensible, "other," in the world.)

Others disagree, and not just Peirce. Freud's student and contemporary, Carl Jung, defines the same external phenomena, coincidences, by a completely different concept: synchronicity, or "the meaningful coincidence of two or more events, where something other than the probability of chance is involved" (Jung 505). For Jung, all is connected, and connected meaningfully: "As its etymology shows, this term has something to do with time, or to be more accurate, with a kind of simultaneity. Instead of simultaneity we could also use the concept of a *meaningful coincidence* of two or more events, where something other than the probability of chance is involved" (Jung 505).

Jung's hypothesis echoes both Percy's and Peirce's view. Jung speaks of several experiments – his and others – that demonstrate meaningful coincidences that could not be accounted by chance. The characteristics show that both time and space are “psychically relative” – that is, within the human mind; time and space factors can be eliminated. Jung also does away with causality in relation to these coincidences. “Equally, the law of causality does not hold... we cannot conceive how a future event could bring about an event in the present” (Jung 509). Synchronicities, or meaningful coincidences, are “improbable accidents of an acausal nature” (Jung 509).

Jung here is essentially arguing as Percy's primary semiotic mentor Charles Sanders Peirce argues: Secondness is causal, or cause and effect interaction. Secondness is, well, secondary, and Thirdness is primary, seemingly a non-linear, acausal relation of everything in the universe. In other words, physical cause and effect interactions are only ONE part of the universe;⁸ underlying it all is a set of relations that may not necessarily have a direct and visible cause and effect interaction but do, in fact, relate and connect seemingly disconnected things – creating a continuity, or a “fabric of life,” as Percy calls it.

For Jung, the significance of a lack of a known reason or cause for mysterious coincidences, the juxtaposition of two uncanny events, is the implication that there IS a reason for it beyond our understanding, and beyond our traditional visible, causal interpretation of reality. Hence, the mystery of this supposedly randomly ordered event suggests that the world is ordered, albeit not always with our complete knowledge of the nature of such order, and that all is safe, stable, secure, and comfortable. Ironically, it is the hiddenness and secretiveness of the cause of uncanniness that reassures us that the world is known and stable. Even if we fail at discovering a particular meaning for coincidences, we still assume that there is some meaning behind them that we have yet to come to grasp.

⁸ Peirce's theory is discussed in detail in later chapters. See chapters 3.1 and 3.2 for an explanation of Peirce's Secondness and Thirdness; see chapter 3.9 for a discussion of Peirce's synechism, similar to Jung's synchronicity.

Using a rational, scientific method,⁹ Jung examines some "uncanny" or "synchronistic" occurrences, typically considered very unscientific (such as astrology) (Jung 513-17). Jung says these coincidences that seem connected may in fact be connected – if there is a greater than chance incidence of them. That there is no demonstrable, understandable, causal link between synchronistic events other than their common character does not refute a connection; instead, it calls into question our ideas of causality and correspondence in explaining the universe. If as Jung says, the inner content of a subject can have a non-causal connection with outer events, then "either the psyche cannot be localized in space, or space is relative to the psyche ...the same applies to the temporal determination of the psyche and the psychic relativity of time" (Jung 518). Synchronous events reveal an underlying pattern, a conceptual framework which encompasses, but is larger than, any of the systems that display the synchronicity. Scientism may not find compatibility with Jung's synchronicity (or Peirce's synechism) but actual science - quantum physics – reflects and supports both Jung's and Peirce's views.¹⁰

Clearly, Jung disagrees with Freud's causal explanation of uncanniness as mere superstition. Freud refused to let go of causality while Jung was open to a better explanation even if it reached beyond the reigning paradigm. Jung was ahead of his time. As the new paradigm of quantum physics, nonlocality is accepted, if not as an irrefutable doctrine, then as a possibility or probability, Jung's hypotheses are being supported and Freud's are refuted. For Jung, there is something mysterious and unexplainable about humans. He offers a way of viewing the world that transcends Freud's deterministic, causal paradigm. Freud's unfortunate practice of removing the mystery and hiddenness from the uncanny only leaves the random repetition of the familiar. Mystery becomes a mere psychological aberration and uncanniness merely another psychological law conforming to our understanding of basic scientific theories, revealing no new truth about the world.

⁹ Percy asserts many times the importance and value of the scientific method, which Jung uses, as opposed to adherence to "scientism," or science as a world view. He believes that science, elevated to a world view, becomes much like a religion and establishes materialist, physicalist norms whether or not the scientific method affirms or denies those norms. Freud was a victim of "scientism."

¹⁰ See Appendix B for discussion of "entanglement" and the EPR experiment in physics.

This is, of course, completely antithetical to Percy's ideas of signs and symbols guiding his characters' progress through the novels. This is the opposite of his protagonist's explanation in *The Thanatos Syndrome* that: "The great American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce, said that the most amazing thing about the universe is that apparently disconnected events are in fact, not, that one can connect them. Amazing!" (TS 68).

Percy writes of human longing for and searching for meaning and the mystery of language; the mystery of coincidental events written off as mere accident (rather than *meaningful* coincidence) does nothing to satisfy our existential longings. The repetition of the familiar as something non-causal and non-accidental and full of meaning, is mystery, and hints at secrets of the universe that are now hidden, obscure, inaccessible knowledge, but may someday be known (St. Paul: "now I see through a glass darkly, then I shall see face to face"). For Percy, it brings existential satisfaction to assume God structures and patterns the world in a way that we can't even comprehend, but through which "signs" peek, so that at the time of occurrence of these events, they may seem random and coincidental, but we, the readers, discover, now or later – as we, the humans hope to discover now or later, there is a pattern (and thus, a meaning) to the synchronous incidents in life and in his novels.

While Percy once said he admired Freud more, he was in fact a Jungian at heart. For Freud, mere repetition is without mystery, though it may have significance psychologically. Not only does it not keep his interest, it imparts no truths nor any insights. It has no meaning or purpose. Coincidences, in Freud's view, are reduced to mere random events, and this reduces man's place of importance in the universe; life has no overarching purpose, nor does one's individual, personal life have a meaning and purpose beyond biological sustenance and nurturance. By removing the mystery and explaining away coincidences as random, Freud removes the capacity to reveal any hidden truths of a spiritual nature in a God-given world.

Yet Percy also viewed Jung as too “occult” – and never gave his theories full credence or examination, despite their general agreement with his quest. Jung was too much like other new age philosophers, whom he often parodies in his novels, for the traditionalist in Percy.

FROMM

Eric Fromm, one of the more popular self-actualization psychologists in Percy’s time, calls monotheism merely a stage in society’s cultural development – like totemism – and then concludes that “worship of God is idolatry and alienation” (SSL 261). However, totemism is like monotheism only insofar as totemism is a symptom of the need for transcendence. The need for monotheism is not yet fulfilled in the primitive (or in modern man, when totemism becomes a material object). As Percy writes, “What does it mean to say that a man may become alienated, fall prey to everydayness, become unauthentic? Fromm provides us with a close analysis of the pathology of Western man, the ‘marketing personality’ who regards himself as a commodity, who consumes goods, not to use them, but to *have* them” (SSL 258). Percy feels the opposite of Fromm – for him, the marketing personality identifies with his or her objects, “becomes” them in the absence of a monotheistic deity with which to identify. (Percy later discusses this tendency in modern man as the same in the primitive [see chapter 5.2], both behaviors indicating the unfulfilled existential need for an identification with a transcendent deity.)

As his second novel demonstrates, Percy concludes that psychiatry is simply inadequate to say anything about existential needs; in fact, Fromm, like Freud, deals with the problem simply by doing away with it. For one it is a “stage;” for the other it is a “neurosis.” Percy concludes, “The very men whose business is mental health have been silent about the sickness of modern man, his emotional impoverishment, his sense of homelessness in the midst of the very world which he, more than the men of any other time, has made over for his own happiness” (SSL 252).

Percy believes that Fromm diagnoses the modern malaise correctly, but that Fromm offers the incorrect prescription: creativity, productivity and love are not sufficient, according to Percy. Fromm

seeks to secularize and so deletes the idea of transcendence, yet all the existentialists, theistic OR atheistic, agree transcendence is “the one distinguishing mark of human existence” (SSL 260). Theists would call it a “motion toward God;” atheists would call it “absurd striving,” but for all, the transcendence is unique and necessary to being human. Viktor Frankl writes, and the existentialist Percy agrees:

This usefulness is usually defined in terms of functioning for the benefit of society. Confounding the dignity of man with mere usefulness arises from a conceptual confusion that in turn may be traced back to the contemporary nihilism transmitted on many an academic campus and many an analytical couch.... Nihilism does not contend that there is nothing, but it states that everything is meaningless. (Frankl 152)

Percy says, “As Fromm puts it, there are no physiological substrata to the needs of relatedness and transcendence” (SSL 257). Fromm secularizes the transcendent into “creativity” and “biological reproduction” (SSL 261).

However, Percy’s solution, unlike Fromm’s, is a transcendent one.

BECKER: DANGER OF MASS MOVEMENTS

Jones: “Early on in your career you expressed at least a sympathy with that [civil rights] movement and its objectives, but by the time of Love in the Ruins and Lancelot you had taken the sentiments of those movement people and kind of satirized them. Lancelot makes fun of his NAACP connections. Do you think the movement got kind of misdirected toward the end?”

Percy: “No I don’t. I use that purely as means of drawing the character of a person in the novel. The satire comes in view of a person who thinks he can find his own course in life through liberal causes. The NAACP was admirable, the civil rights movement was admirable, but it was also a way of avoiding one’s self.” (Con I 277)

* * *

Mass movements provide a false – even dangerous – meaning for life. As Percy says, “Marcel always talked about being wary of mass movement or causes. There’s always a danger of taking up a cause, of being too much identified with a cause.... There’s no greater danger to fiction I think than ideology” (Con I 278). Why? Because, not only is it an avoidance of self, it does not re-create life,

presence, or communicate, but rather forces an agenda in the physical world. It ultimately deteriorates into dyadic behavior. Susanne Langer explains:

In such a time people are excited about any general convictions or ideals they may have. Numberless hybrid religions spring up, mysteries, causes, ideologies, all passionately embraced and argued. A vague longing for the old tribal unity makes nationalism look like salvation, and arouses the most fantastic bursts of chauvinism and self-righteousness; the wildest anthropological and historical legends; the deprecation and distortion of learning; and in place of orthodox sermons [read: honest and thorough conveyance of ideas and beliefs], that systematic purveying of loose, half-baked ideas which our generation knows as “propaganda.” (292)

Ernest Becker, in his 1974 Pulitzer Prize winning *The Denial of Death*, speaks of our universal terror of death and the need we have to transcend this terror. The world is terrifying, the inevitability of death haunts us all constantly without our conscious realization, and religion is a psychological necessity to human beings or we become neurotic (or worse). Psychoanalysis fails because it “doesn’t allow a person to find out who he is and why he is here on earth, why he has to die, and how he can make his life a triumph” (Becker 193). Whether or not religion has any grounding in actual reality, Becker seems to argue, humans must make the Kierkegaardian leap of faith to the transcendent to find real happiness and fulfillment. Instead, usually the avoidance of the terror of death is accomplished in a variety of non-transcendent ways – most effectively by giving ourselves to a *causa sui* – a cause greater than ourselves – accomplished by identifying with a group, fighting for the cause of the group, sacrificing self for the group’s cause. “We repress our bodies to purchase a soul that time cannot destroy; we sacrifice pleasure to buy immortality, we encapsulate ourselves to avoid death. And life escapes us while we huddle within the defended fortress of character” (Keen, qtd. in Becker xii-xiii). Society conspires with our psychology by creating “a hero system that allows us to believe that we transcend death by participating in something of lasting worth” (xiii). Yet, “our heroic projects that are aimed at destroying evil have the paradoxical effect of bringing more evil into the world. Human conflicts are life and death struggles – my gods against your gods, my immortality project against your immortality project. The

root of human caused evil is not man's animal nature, not territorial aggression or innate selfishness, but our need to gain self-esteem, deny our mortality, and achieve a heroic self-image" (xiii).

Percy and Becker both agree that the times we align ourselves with a cause and fight for that cause are the times we feel most fully alive. Yet this "self-actualization" is deceptive if the cause is non-transcendent – as it creates an enemy of the "other;" the opposite of the real answer, which is relation with the other (God and community). It creates divisions rather than unions. During Percy's visit to Germany in the 1930's he admired the enthusiasm and purpose of the Hitler Youth, only to discover a few years later how misguided their cause – and his admiration for their loyalty and fervor – was. Any non-transcendent cause is finite, limited to a specific group, and engages in establishing its identity by fighting another non-transcendent cause – both falling short of the mark of truth – and both creating division, destruction, and "evil" of the other.

Becker identifies only two non-destructive kinds of heroism: (1) a societal development of the moral equivalent to war, hating not some human scapegoat, but "something impersonal like poverty, disease, oppression, or natural disasters" (*Denial of* xiv), or (2) an individual living of the path of wisdom, which is conscious awareness of our death and obsession with that, willingness to face our terror, impotence, and vulnerability and discovering our own choice and free will – rather than the dependency of following the transient cause:

Living with the voluntary consciousness, the heroic individual can choose to despair or to make a Kierkegaardian leap and trust in the 'sacrosanct vitality of the cosmos,' in the unknown god of life whose mysterious purpose is expressed in the overwhelming drama of cosmic evolution. There are signs... that some individuals are awakening from the long, dark night of tribalism and nationalism and developing what Tillich called a transmoral conscience, an ethic that is universal rather than ethnic. Our task for the future is exploring what it means for each individual to be a member of earth's household, a commonwealth of kindred beings. Whether we will use our freedom to encapsulate ourselves in narrow, tribal, paranoid personalities and create more bloody Utopias or to form compassionate communities of the abandoned is still to be decided. (Becker, *Denial of* xv)

While Percy agrees with Becker on the dangers of "causes," he differs in his solution. Becker stops short and "drops the ball," as Percy would say. "Compassionate communities" not grounded in

any kind of transcendent absolutes are part of self-actualization and fulfillment movements of the 60s and 70s that Percy criticizes mercilessly. For Percy, it is a transcendent God only, not a “path of wisdom,” that is the answer. The answer is living a sacramental life in a community of commitment to particular individuals, not an earthly love and unity unconnected to anything above itself. The sacraments, the daily rituals charged with symbol and compassionate actions, are reflecting a transcendent Being – just as symbol reflects what is symbolized.

FRANKL

Frankl's two-part book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, first outlines his experiences as a Jewish prisoner in a World War Two concentration camp, where he saw prisoners live or die not on the basis of the amount of food, warmth or torture they received, but on whether or not they had meaning – a reason to live – that was either given or taken from them. In the second half of his book, Frankl the psychiatrist outlines his philosophy of logotherapy where he tackles the issue of meaning head on. Percy says, “Victor E. Frankl's [*Man's Search for Meaning*] ‘medical ministry’ is an attempt, not to probe the unconscious, but to correct the world view of the patient” (SSL 256). Frankl also meant to take the existential angst and loneliness out of the realm of psychiatry; like Percy, he believed that human discontent in the world may be revealing something wrong with modern society – a society unhealthy for the soul, a society which has no means to address spiritual ills. “A man's concern, even his despair, over the worthwhileness of life is an *existential distress*, but by no means a *mental disease*” (Frankl, *Man's Search* 108). Frankl believes that this distress is not the domain of psychology or biology; his correction is that biological motivations are not the primary ones, but that man's

search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a ‘secondary rationalization’ of instinctual drives.... I would not be willing to live merely for the sake of my ‘defense mechanisms,’ nor would I be ready to die merely for the sake of my ‘reaction formations.’ Man, however, is able to live and even to die for the sake of his ideals and values! (Frankl, *Man's Search* 105)

In fact, Frankl says, the will to meaning is the primary need. Any other kind of “will to...” is a compensation for the unfulfilled will to meaning. Nietzsche’s “will to power” becomes a “will to meaning” and many neuroses are simply “noölogical” due to a “frustration of the will to meaning” – or lack of purpose in the patient’s life. Under this view, much discontent and aberrant behavior is not mental illness, but existential:

Moreover, there are various masks and guises under which the existential vacuum appears. Sometimes the frustrated will to meaning is vicariously compensated for by a will to power, including the most primitive form of the will to power, the will to money. In other cases, the place of frustrated will to meaning is taken by the will to pleasure. That is why existential frustration often eventuates in sexual compensation. We can observe in such cases that the sexual libido becomes rampant in the existential vacuum. (Frankl, *Man’s Search* 112)

Percy acknowledges a new primary need that is not biological; still it was slightly different from Frankl’s. For Percy, the new need is the existential encounter with the other, with the world – to “know” life.

Frankl’s meaning must be found by the individual himself; it is “unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone” (Frankl, *Man’s Search* 105):

For the meaning of life differs from man to man, from day to day, and from hour to hour. What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person’s life at a given moment. To put the question in general terms would be comparable to the question posed to a chess champion: “Tell me Master, what is the best move in the world?” There simply is no such thing as the best or even a good move apart from a particular situation in a game and the particular personality of one’s opponent. The same holds true for human existence. One should not search for an abstract meaning of life. Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life to carry out a concrete assignment which demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated. (Frankl, *Man’s Search* 113)

Like Percy, for Frankl, meaning transcends the rational. Another similarity that Frankl and Percy have is that meaning is not found in self-service, but in service to others. In other words, we don’t seek meaning in order to have psychological health – this is the error of psychoanalysis today: the health of the patient is for the patient himself; the patient’s life (meaning) is for the patient’s life. This is a “closed system” (Frankl, *Man’s Search* 115). The meaning of life is discovered in the world, not within the man’s own psyche. It is “he who is asked” by life to fulfill a purpose, rather than the individual asking life for meaning:

The more one forgets himself – by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love – the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself. What is called self-actualization is not an attainable aim at all, for the simple reason that the more one would strive for it, the more he would miss it. In other words, self-actualization is possible only as a side-effect of self-transcendence. (Frankl, *Man's Search* 115)

Of enduring a concentration camp, or any suffering, Frankl says: "...in reality there was an opportunity and a challenge. One could make a victory of these experiences, turning life into an inner triumph, or one could ignore challenge and vegetate, as did a majority of the prisoners" (Frankl, *Man's Search* 81). The one way to combat the oppressions of the camp was to develop the inner life, in which one lived for some future goal. "It is a peculiarity of man that he can live only by looking to the future – *sub specie aeternitatis*" (Frankl, *Man's Search* 81). Frankl and Percy use the same term here. For Frankl, meaning is not found in an outer life, or in biological sustenance and nurture. Suffering and dying do not eradicate meaning; the inability to procreate or carry life on, to extend it, does not eliminate meaning. "Procreation is not the only meaning of life, for then life in itself would become meaningless, and something which in itself is meaningless cannot be rendered meaningful merely by its perpetuation" (Frankl, *Man's Search* 122-23). Like Percy, who sees symbol-mongering to fulfill what Langer thinks is the need for symbol as a tautology, Frankl considers the meaning of life being that life itself is a tautology. Modern man is missing the meaning of life.

In Dr. Thomas More's confessional with the priest in Percy's *Love in the Ruins*, More has difficulty feeling penitent for his sins, though he knows he should feel that way. But his participation in the sacrament brings on some feeling of sorrow, and finally, the priest takes that, tells More to pray for sorrow, then teaches him that, in the end, focusing on the plight of one's own soul – one's own life - is far less important than other things:

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

For Percy the solution is not found in self-actualization so popular in the seventies when he wrote the novel. It is found in living the Marcellian way – through focusing on serving and loving others around us, not for our own gratification, but for their needs, forgetting our own self-centered “daydreams” and longings.

Erich Fromm also says that the guilt and anxiety of 20th century human beings are not pathological sicknesses to be fixed with a pill or psychiatry or other treatment – they are, rather, appropriate reactions to this age. Walker Percy, like Victor Frankl and Erich Fromm, says that the 20th century has a greater existential vacuum than ever before:

The radical departure of these new points of view lies in their tacit recognition of a standard of human existence wholly different from that by which we judge the flora of Australia or the ape population of the Congo. It means that there is being proposed as the central criterion of man's well-being the very thing most detested by the biological method: a value scale of rightness, authenticity; in short, a concept of human nature and what it is proper to it. (SSL 256-57)

Frankl and Percy differentiate humans from apes. Frankl says that by unanimous agreement, those people he asks say that an ape is unable to grasp the meaning of suffering he might have to endure.

And he doesn't stop there; he poses another question, one that hints at the transcendent:

And what about man? Are you sure that the human world is a terminal point in the evolution of the cosmos? Is it not conceivable that there is still another dimension, a world beyond man's world; a world in which the question of an ultimate meaning of human suffering would find an answer? ... This ultimate meaning necessarily exceeds and surpasses the finite intellectual capacities of man; in logotherapy, we speak in this context of a super-meaning. What is demanded of man is not, as some existential philosophers teach, to endure the meaninglessness of life, but rather to bear his incapacity to grasp its unconditional meaningfulness in rational terms. *Logos* is deeper than logic. (Frankl, *Man's Search* 121-122)

Yet Frankl never commits to the transcendent as a part of meaning – he only speculates. Frankl, like Fromm and Becker, did not find meaning or solutions in transcendence. Here is where Percy – for whom transcendence was necessary for meaning – differs with all three of them. Here Frankl hints at the symbolic act – logos, the Word, meaning – as primary compared to rational dyadic knowledge. Percy, however, is certain beyond a doubt that the transcendent must be intricately woven into everyday life.

1.5 THE SECOND FAILURE: SCIENTISM

...the Cartesian division between mind and matter became foundational to much of Western thought since the seventeenth century because it seemed utterly and incontrovertibly consistent with the worldview of classical physics. This division not only has served as grounds for divorce between the world of quality, sense perception, thought, and feeling and the world of physical reality, it also laid the groundwork for the divisions between the Enlightenment ideal of the unification of all knowledge and the Romantic ideal of the ultimate integrity and supremacy of individual knowledge; the abyss between the conception of God as a creative and generative force in nature and the conception of God as the distant and absentee clockmaker; between constructions of reality based on ordinary language and descriptions of physical reality in the mathematical language of physical theory; and finally, but no less tragically, between the culture of humanists- social scientists and the culture of scientists-engineers. (Nadeau and Kafatos xiv-xv)

* * *

Despite centuries of pondering and experiment, of trying to get together two supposed entities called mind and matter in one age, subject and object in another, or soul and body in still others, despite endless discoursing on the streams, state or contents of consciousness, of distinguishing terms like intuitions, sense data, the given, raw feels, the sensa, presentation and representations, the sensations, images, and affections of structuralist introspections, the evidential data of the scientific positivist, phenomenological fields, the apparitions of Hobbes, the phenomena of Kant, the appearances of the idealist, the elements of Mach, the phanera of Peirce, or the category errors of Ryle, in spite of all these, the problem of consciousness is still with us. (Jaynes 1-2)

* * *

While it is understandable that scientist and traditionalist Percy would handily reject unreliable new age philosophy of any sort, and even the amorphous soft sciences, such as psychology, his rejection of hard “scientism” is less expected. Yet modern science had logical inconsistencies which disturbed him, and his pursuit of a logical path led him to its inadequacies. Ever present in his mind was the inability of pure scientism to fully explain human beings – and the social and existential problems it had caused, in religion’s absence, as a substitute for a world view. The historical schism that began during the Enlightenment presented the world with a revolutionary change in thought and time and set the human race down numerous wrong paths. This schism is still causing splits in the Modern Era, especially within American society.

In medieval times, when the Catholic church and monarchies dominated everything and the average person was illiterate, humans defined themselves as creatures with “*souls*” – obedience to state was the role, but their spiritual purpose was love and service to God and the church. God was once “present” in every moment of the devotee’s life, a god that was anthropomorphized – a “person” to whom the devotee related, followed, worshipped.

It was not something to “think” about, it was something to “do” – mass was in Latin and therefore incomprehensible; it was a play that was acted out. Bible stories were conveyed pictorially throughout the church – tile floor mosaics, stained glass windows, carved statues. There was one, and only one, unchallenged answer to the longing of the soul – in God through the Church. There was a simple unity to society – one God, one King – devotion and obedience to both were the supplicant’s primary roles.

By the Enlightenment, a time of invention of the printing press, decentralization of power from monarchies to democracies, and the rise of science, humans defined themselves – and God – by *mind*, logic, reason, and empirical facts. God moved into the background. Instead of a Being involved in daily life, God became the watchmaker God (Deism). He created and wound the watch, the universe, then set it into motion with certain laws and principles that ran everything – and otherwise we never heard from him again. If we wanted to know God, we examined the world. Science could eventually tell us about everything – even God.

Nadeau and Kafatos describe the “watchmaker God” concept that arose with this shift from the devout medieval to the secular scientific culture after the Renaissance:

The enormous success of classical physics soon convinced more secular Enlightenment thinkers, however, that metaphysics had nothing to do with the conduct of physics, and that any appeal to God in efforts to understand the essences of physical reality in physical theory was ad hoc and unnecessary. The divorce between subjective constructions of reality in ordinary language and constructions of physical reality in mathematical theory was allegedly made final by the positivists of the 19th century. (Nadeau and Kafatos 6)

Cartesian dualism not only divorced God from the universe, but mind from matter. Nadeau and Kafatos offer detailed background on Descartes' philosophical effect on Western civilization:

But as classical science progressively dissolved the distinction between heaven and earth and united the universe in a shared and communicable frame of knowledge, it presented us with a view of physical reality that was totally alien from the world of everyday life.

Descartes, the father of modern philosophy, rather quickly realized that there was nothing in this view of nature that could explain or provide a foundation for the mental, or for all that we know from direct experience as distinctly human. In a mechanistic universe, he said there is no privileged place or function for mind, and the separation between mind and matter is absolute.... And the dream that the entire physical world could be known and mastered through the extension and refinement of mathematical theory became the central feature and guiding principle of scientific knowledge.

The radical separation between mind and nature formalized by Descartes served over time to allow scientists to concentrate on developing mathematical description of matter as pure mechanism in the absence of any concerns about its spiritual dimensions or ontological foundations. Meanwhile, attempts to rationalize, reconcile, or eliminate Descartes' stark division between mind and matter became perhaps the most central feature of Western intellectual life. (ix)

This divorce between mind and body led finally to the eradication of mind, spirit, and soul altogether.

Since Cartesian dualism failed to account for how mind and body connected and worked together, (for example, how does the intangible mental thought, "raise my arm," cause my physical arm to rise, if they are separate substances?), the attempt to solve the Cartesian mind-body problem was accomplished by simply eliminating mind, a kind of monism called "physicalism" or "materialism." Dualism then fed into and supported its creation, scientism. Percy now had not only to resolve Descartes' split, but also to address the recent rise of physicalism that resulted from the split. He describes the new problem as follows:

To oversimplify the case, one might describe the traditional view of man, say, up to one hundred years ago, as the centerpiece of creation, made in the image of God, distinguished from the beasts in being endowed with soul, intellect, free will, reason, and the gift of language. He could name things, think about things, was free to do all he wanted, convey his thoughts by words which could be understood by other men.

At the opposite swing of the pendulum – say, thirty to fifty years ago, following the victory of early Darwinism, at the full tide of Pavlovian and Watsonian behaviorism and with the gathering impetus of Freud's discovery of the power of the irrational forces of the unconscious – man was not only dethroned from his lordship of creation, but his very reason, and the autonomy of his consciousness, was called into question. (SSL 117-118).

Today, these two conflicting, and *both* erroneous (according to Percy) views battle for supremacy as explanation for the mind-body problem. In the 20th and 21st centuries, the general population has a traditional Cartesian view – humanity can be seen through the lens of Descartes’ dualism, or as a “ghost in a machine,” a spirit in a body, composed of two entirely different substances. How do these substances interact, relate, or communicate with each other? And what is a “spirit”? It seems an ethereal, amorphous, and suspect entity in the scientific world of modernity. Dualism has a set of unanswered questions that no philosopher or scientist has yet resolved.

Academic and scientific thinkers tend to take a different approach from the general population. Modern science, which is often uncomfortable with the idea of ghosts, or anything, really, that cannot be physically accounted for and experimentally verified, has another solution – physicalism or materialism. Humans are not made of two substances, a "ghost in a machine," but rather, all one substance – a physical substance. Carried to its extreme, physicalism says that human consciousness, as well as emotions, is just the by-product of chemicals interacting in the brain. While apparently accounting for the problem of how a mind and a body can interact, it raises another problem, at least for some. The new problem is that this does away with "mind," as well as the ideas of consciousness, spirit, soul, and, for some hard-line physicalists, even emotions become physical reactions, subject to chemical cure. Percy cites a psychiatrist: "What can a physiological psychologist say about human self-awareness? We know that it is altered by changes in the structure of chemistry of the brain. We conclude that consciousness is just a physiological function, just like behavior" (Carlson, qtd. in SSL, 274). Feeling a little anxious? Take some Valium. Depressed? Try Prozac. In the 21st century, physical (specifically medical) solutions are applied to emotional problems – whereas past eras had once ascribed these symptoms to entities such as the soul – something no longer universally acknowledged to exist. Percy calls the soul a “dirty word,” as seen from a modern and scientific perspective (Con II 86). Even human consciousness is shaky ground for scientists.

Yet another mind-body solution, idealism or Platonism, takes the opposite approach of physicalism. Idealism says all is mind, and matter is a kind of illusion (“maya” in Hinduism; “shadows” of Ideals for Plato). Given little attention by thinkers today, including Percy, this view finds credence primarily in such Eastern philosophies as Buddhism or Hinduism. Other versions and variations of idealism, materialism, and dualism abound, but none reign supreme, and all come with unresolved philosophical problems.

None of these views sufficed for Percy, including the most popular one among scientists, despite his scientific background. The positivist resolution – materialism – left key characteristics of humans unexplained. Yet, while Percy felt that scientists and academics are, in general, prejudiced towards certain assumptions about the nature of man (i.e.: that man can be explained by this behaviorist, materialist, physicalist, or “scientific” model), science was perfectly fine for explaining most of the world, except human beings. He explains science’s inadequacy and contradictions (including the limitations of current cultural anthropology and semiotics) when used as the sole explanatory model for human beings, individual creatures with consciousness:

What people don’t realize is that the scientific method has no way of uttering one word about an individual creature. Science only speaks about leaves, or stars, or people in so far as they belong to a class.... But science cannot utter one word about the individual self in so far as it is individual. It leaves a huge leftover. We almost automatically believe that science is not only our best way of knowing things but, maybe, the only way of knowing things. If a thing cannot be known scientifically, we believe it cannot be known at all. (Con II 73)

Science does a marvelous job of explaining most everything in the universe – quasars, black holes, atoms – but only on a purely physical level. It fails when it comes to human beings because humans are, to Percy, more than just purely physical organisms. Percy’s view was that perhaps depression wasn’t due to a body’s lack of chemicals, but a soul’s right realization of something gone wrong in a modern environment devoid of spirituality and community and all those things that would

nurture such. Understood in terms of Percy's semeiotic categories of dyads and triads,¹¹ traditional science deals in the world of dyadic events (cause-effect reactions between two objects in the physical world); however, humans are triadic creatures (beyond cause-effect). Traditional science can't get beyond the dyadic world to explain anything else. "Anything else" includes those activities unique to human beings that cannot be explained as space-time, linear, energetic events: culture, art, religion, and language – anything using symbol. These activities are not "dyadic," those cause-effect world events for physical survival, but rather, triadic events: assertions and interactions of identity (between symbol and that which is symbolized) and expressions of meaning. Peirce scholar Kenneth Laine Ketner explains:

Triadic events are "reals" in the world that the scientific method can observe and study; for instance, I lay my pen on the table. I forget where I put it and ask a friend for it, the reply is 'Your pen is on the table,' which describes an observation of three real items: the pen, the table, and a relation.... We can watch the relations be and not be as various persons over time 'borrow it temporarily and then return it to the table. Percy clearly recognized this observability of relations as a basis for study of semeiotic. Physicalists use them, but ban them from their attention like a medieval exorcist would cast off succubi. (KK)

Percy adhered to Peirce's philosophy when it came to his conclusions about traditional science, writing at length not only of its triadic gap, but also of the traditional scientist's inability to observe his own behavior.

Even the social sciences, such as behaviorism, based in scientific¹² assumptions and explanations, are also limited and cannot encompass the entire scope of man's character. Humans are existential and subjective as well as biological. While behaviorism adequately accounts for cause-effect actions, responses to stimuli, survival and instinctual behavior in human beings, it does not explore the need for meaning and myth or the drive to perceive and participate in other endeavors besides those which merely aid physical survival. These needs, for Percy, arise from human capacity for symbol and are the results of that symbolic ability:

¹¹ See Part Three for greater explanation of semiotic dyads and triads, as well as for Percy's desire for a new kind of science - a triadic and a semeiotic science – that would accomplish what traditional science does not.

¹² Not derived from the root "science" or "scientific," that is, assumptions and explanations based on the scientific method, or hypothesizing and then experimenting to see if evidence supports one's hypothesis, but derived from "scientism," or science as a world view that eliminates the non-tangible and non-empirical, despite evidence to the contrary.

Clearly something is wrong with the behaviorist model when it is applied to symbolic phenomena.... Accordingly I was sitting at my desk in Louisiana on a summer day in the 1950's wondering whether this split in human knowing was not in the very nature of things and whether, also, that peculiar and most human of all phenomenon, language, did not fall between the two, and was not somehow unapproachable from either, a forbidden island, a terra incognita. (MB 32-33)

Behaviorism and logical empiricism fail to describe human beings fully because consciousness is not accounted for. Percy writes, "It is well known that logical empiricism is without a theory of knowledge since it restricts itself to an abstract theory of logic of language. It is equally well known – and perhaps one is a consequence of the other – that the history of logical empiricism is the history of wide fluctuations on the mind-body axis" (MB 247). The problem of how a mind and body interact is the problem of consciousness, and behaviorism omits this element of human beings. Percy says:

Believe it or not, consciousness has just now become a respectable subject in the scientific world. Until a few years ago, the behaviorists had their way of ignoring consciousness or even denying it existed. So what sort of scientific discipline do we have for thinking about the fact that I am a conscious person – that I am aware of you, for instance, and everything around you. (Con I 224)

Ketner notes that the problem of consciousness is not a problem for relational monists who do not propose a duality of mind and body. For Percy and his mentor Peirce, mind and body are just relations "configured in different aspects," and Ketner sees physics today as having the same view. "Matter or light, etc., are expressible in equations which are description of relations, as are items like minds and cultures," he explains (KK). For the dualist, however, relation between mind and body is an unsolved dilemma. The traditional alternative, pure materialism, deletes mind and consciousness entirely, which creates its own, entirely different, set of philosophical problems.

Not only is consciousness not explained by traditional science, but neither is culture or symbol use. Behaviorism cannot explain activities of man that are "not primarily physiological or psychological, but [rather] assertory: language, art, religion, myth, science – in short, culture" (MB 216). These activities are activities not of biological function, but of *ontological* purpose. They are not cause-effect or stimulus-response events, but events of *assertion*: they are "an assertory phenomenon – a real

phenomenon but not a space-time event.... The symbolic assertion cannot itself be examined as a world event unless it be construed as such, as a material event of energy exchanges, in which case its assertory character must be denied" (MB 234, 237). Behaviorism and logical empiricism are, according to Ketner, "inadequate sciences. Walker Percy yearned for an adequate science, which he saw hope for in Peirce" (KK).

Percy explains that this functional method of science is inadequate to explain non-functional, or ontological, phenomena: "The difficulty is that knowledge entails assertions and assertions are beyond the grasp of the functional [dyadic only, or cause and effect] method; ... the functional method of the sciences cannot construe the assertory act of language" (MB 235, 230). Behaviorism also fails to describe how human language differs from the animals, including such characteristics as: "(1) the productivity of language, the fact that a child, after two or three years' exposure to a language and without anyone taking much trouble about it, can utter and understand an unlimited number of new sentence in the language; (2) an explanation of names; (3) an account of sentences" (MB 32).

Traditional science has failed to completely account for a "theory of man" and so no competent anthropology or understanding of mankind exists. While Percy would not reject science's established findings concerning dyadic activity, he believed a fuller science was needed to fill in the gaps (KK).

Traditional science also fails to understand itself, its own process, Percy says, because that process entails symbol use. Science observes and analyzes and explains the physical world quite competently, but to do this, it must use language (statements of assertions, or symbol) about the world. Its first activity is well within the realm of its capability and expertise. Its second activity is not. Science can say things about energy exchanges and cause-effect or stimulus-response reactions, but nothing about assertions. "The assertion itself is a pairing of elements [word and object], a relation which is not a space-time event, but a kind of identity asserted by an assertor" (MB 221). It cannot explain language – yet it USES language to explain the world, and therefore it is "incoherent." "Science characteristically

issues in assertions [statements about the world, or language, which require symbol use]. But that which science asserts [the physical world itself] is not itself an assertion but a space-time event” (MB 221). Science makes these assertions when describing and understanding the physical world, which it is quite competent at doing. But it cannot understand its own act of asserting – since assertion is language – and therefore *cannot understand itself*. This is what Percy calls “the antinomy of the scientific method” (MB 215). Percy says:

If modern man was split in two by Descartes’ mind-body theory three hundred years ago, it is unlikely that he can be pasted back together by yet another theory. [We need]... a “new way of looking at things. It is not new being in the main the discovery of the American logician and philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce some seventy-five years ago. Charles Peirce’s triadic theory applies mainly to man’s strange and apparently unique capacity to use symbols and in particular, to his gift of language. (SSL 117)

Humans, Percy observes, are uniquely both dyadic – explainable by science – as well as triadic – accounting for consciousness, symbol use, culture, religion and art. Percy believed a different discipline, which he and others called “semiotics,” was necessary for understanding this kind of human behavior. From that, a better, “radical” anthropology could be derived.

Peirce scholar Ketner, however, uses the Peircean name for the discipline – semeiotic – and proposes that term as a more accurate description of what Percy was doing. A semeiotician takes into account the triad; semioticians stay on the level of dyads, or cause-effect. “Percy was forging toward semeiotic, not semiotics. For one thing, semiotics is dyadic as in signifier/signified.” While traditional semioticians mention Peirce as their predecessor, they’ve modified him into something quite different. They don’t take his next step, the ontological step, “staying stuck in behaviorism such as Morris and Sebeok” (KK). However, Percy’s philosophy was firmly grounded in the triad.

Percy concluded that a radical anthropology must be created that accepts not just “functional criteria,” but “normative criteria;” it must include such assessments and analyses beyond just space-time, cause-effect events, and also include these assertory events, such as the concepts of “truth–falsity, right–wrong, authenticity–inauthenticity” (MB 241). The problem with science, psychiatry, and

most current philosophical attempts to understand man was that each of these disciplines treated human beings as a biological organism with instinctive drives and needs – and nothing beyond. Behaviorism fails to give an account of meaning, and overlooks “the new key in philosophy – and a truly exciting idea it is – ... the universal symbolic function of the human mind” (MB 292). Science fails in explaining human symbolic activity, which encompasses language, consciousness, and culture, including art, religion, and even, science itself. Behaviorism fails to explain why an individual might pursue his need to, say, create art, at the sacrifice of physical well-being or other biological needs. The existence of the “starving artist” refutes behaviorism; the celibate, fasting monk refutes behaviorism.

Percy believed in the efficacy of science’s method, but discounted science elevated as a comprehensive world view – or “scientism.” He questioned modernism’s cultural adherence to science as the answer to every question, even those questions about human nature which he felt were outside the realm of science. He wished to “challenge science [scientism]” in the “name of science [the scientific method],” stating that science “fails on its own terms [scientific testing]” (SL 272).

He does not attack science in the name of religion. He still claims the scientific method is adequate – in fact, the perfect tool – to do what it does (explain just about everything in the world except self), and it does that quite well. He finds...

...something offensive about the current tendency to use as a weapon against science every mishap of science - ...and to rejoice at anything that seems to ‘defy’ science. It is as if some theists believe that scientific laws and the ordinary happenings which follow scientific laws are the work of the devil and that the only reason God works a miracle is to give evidence of himself against this overwhelming counter-evidence. (SE 6-7)

However, Percy does believe science has an oversight, which occurs when it encounters the existential side of human beings: Heidegger’s “loss of being” or Marcel’s “refusal of being” (SE 6). It is the “self” which dyadic science cannot explain (SE 10).

Though science at first could still tell us everything, if we had the best instruments, intelligence and enough research, science in contemporary times began to have cracks in its armor: Quantum

physics no longer conforms to previously expected logical reality and creates the need for Kuhnian paradigm shift as too many incidences of anomalous evidence cannot be explained by reigning theories. Not only are God and soul disappearing, but even the success of any kind of paradigm for understanding the world and life. Humans become, no longer creatures with “souls” or even “minds” but merely creatures of the “body.” For Percy, a new science –a triadic science – is needed.

With the rise of empirical science casting doubt on any non-empirical reality, and then quantum physics casting doubt on our previous clockwork understanding of the logic and order of the universe, with increasingly more effective transportation technologies creating a global society, two world wars, weapons that could destroy the earth, and the mixing of cultures from around the world with differing and often conflicting values and world views, another paradigm shift occurred. Community disappeared; suburbs sprang up. The extended family became the nuclear family as the 20th century progressed, which deteriorated even more as half of all marriages ended in divorce. By the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, the individual knows even less; it is a “strange land” with no “signposts,” Percy says. The intellectual foundation for the modern Western world was laid. An absolute transcendent seemed to no longer exist in the midst of all this change. Nietzsche said God is dead; Marx said religion is an opiate to suppress the masses; Freud said religion and art are neuroses; Darwin conveyed a picture of the origins of man that contradicted the traditional biblical creation story – implicitly eradicating the idea of man as a unique creature with a soul.

The dearth of spiritual or moral guidance is replaced by a consumerism, by the acquisition of “things” and by external appearance with no depth or lasting purpose behind them. “The real pathology is not so much a moral decline, which is a symptom, not a primary phenomenon, but rather an ontological impoverishment; that is, a severe limitation or crippling of the very life of twentieth-century man” (MB 214). Humans no longer know who they “are” – ontologically – why they’re here or what they are meant to do, individually or collectively as a race. They go through the motions which have no

connection to any kind of lasting or transcendent purpose or reality. Biological propagation and sustenance seems all that is left. Susanne Langer explains its import on a symbolic world:

Consequently, in primitive society, a daily ritual is incorporated into common activities, in eating, washing, firemaking, etc., as well as in purely ceremonial; because the need of reasserting the tribal morale and recognizing its cosmic conditions is constantly felt. In modern society such exercises are all but lost. Every person finds his Holy of Holies where he may: in Scientific Truth, the State, Democracy, Kultur, or some metaphysical word like "the All" or "the Spiritual." Human life in our age is so changed and diversified that people cannot share a few, historic, "charged" symbols that have about the same wealth of meaning for everybody. The loss of old universal symbols endangers our safe unconscious orientation. The new forms of our new order have not yet acquired that rich, confused, historic accretion of meanings that makes many familiar things "charged" symbols which we respond to instinctively. (Langer 287-88).

A worldview of life is gone, and with it, daily meaningful, shared, charged ritual and symbol that give import to our actions has disappeared. What's left? Percy begins *Love in the Ruins* with his protagonist thinking he has found sufficient reason to live, some pleasurable distractions, as Kierkegaard's aesthete has: "What does a man live for but to have a girl, use his mind, practice his trade, drink a drink, read a book, and watch martins wing it for the Amazon and the three fingered sassafras turn red in October" (LR 336-37). By the end, he realizes these aren't enough. He rejects the orientation of the postmodern world and returns to the world of the medieval Catholic scholastics.

Percy's modern protagonist reflects on his medieval namesake:

Why can't I follow More's example, love myself less, God and my fellowman more, and leave whiskey and women alone? Sir Thomas More was merry in life and death and he loved and was loved by everyone, even his executioner with whom he cracked jokes. By contrast, I am possessed by terror and desire and live a solitary life. My life is a longing, longings for women, for the Nobel Prize, for the hot bosky bite of bourbon whiskey, and other great heart-wrenching longings that have no name. Sir Thomas [More] was right, of course, and I am wrong. But on the other hand these are peculiar times... (LR 23).

Percy's answer for his protagonists is a return to a sacramental life, a sacramental world, in this century that otherwise has no answer – other than superficial, ineffective answers – for the longings of the soul.

1.6 THE THIRD FAILURE: NEW AGE PHYSICS AND NEW AGE PHILOSOPHY

Percy was not the only one who recognized the failure of physical science and traditional religion to provide a paradigm for the existential human to follow. New physics arose and revealed the incompleteness of Newtonian science; new age philosophies also arose to fill in the faith gap in the absence of traditional religion. While quite different in their origins (new physics through the reliable scientific method of hypothesis testing through experiment; new age philosophies a much more random and often dogmatic origin), both were filling a gap created by cultural shifts.

Yet, in both faith and science, Percy preferred the old rather than the new. And therefore, unfortunately, he gave new ideas in science and new age philosophies little examination due to his inclinations. And Percy was a man inclined to be skeptical of most things. He searched traditional philosophers and analyzed traditional science for answers. The developing religious sensibilities of his middle age found solace in a centuries old faith, Catholicism, rather than in those that were surfacing during the sixties and seventies hippie-new-age-cult-and-commune lifestyles and fads.

It was this need for absolutes and certainty in understanding the world and human beings that he felt had kept him from finding the answer he searched for, that kept him from straying too far from his native philosophical roots of scientism despite his conscious recognition of its flaws. This same attraction to absolutes led him to adopt Catholicism with little variance from its traditional theology and with an accompanying disdain for these less mainstream “new age” philosophies that incorporated new physics and more truly radical approaches to anthropology, to understanding human beings, than he might have ventured in his radical anthropology.

Percy asked about Gleick and chaos; Chomsky, Peirce and abduction; and Jung, theorist of synchronicity. But he did not go beyond the questions with the new thinkers – Percy, the scientist, the biologist, the medical doctor, kept his in-depth examination of symbol, life, and humans to the brain, its neurological processes, and the process and function of language. He cursorily examined the larger

picture and then dismissed it as an avenue of exploration – or at least for his further examination of them. He was on a different track. However, had he given them more serious thought, this wayfarer might have found a way that fared better for him. His anthropology needed a paradigm shift – one he was trying to initiate on the biological and linguistic level – but a wider fundamental working hypothesis might have enabled Percy to find more fertile soil in which to grow and flourish.

Most quantum physicists, if not embracing some kind of seemingly “new age” (non-local) view of the universe, acknowledge that what happens at the micro-level (quantum) of the universe does not at all match what happens on the macro-level (visible) of the universe, and science has an unresolved dichotomy in its picture of the world that has never occurred before – because, before, Newton’s laws matched what we observe. At first glance, it would seem that Percy would have much in common with the new physicists – he and they both finding Newtonian science inadequate. One answer to the consciousness problem was more direct and obvious than a complicated study of the language event and the nature of the coupler – it could be found in (or rather, the coupler could be viewed through and explained by) the new quantum physics.

But for Percy it all comes together by the time it gets to us, at the macro level, so he isn’t much concerned with the doings of little quantum particles. He is a doctor, trained to heal human beings; not a theoretical physicist. It’s interesting to note that Percy, the medical doctor, restricted his search to human beings – whether biology (brain interactions, brain locations, or genes), psychology, actions, anthropology, or language analysis and use. While this was certainly a natural inclination for one of his training and background, broadening his inquisition to other areas could have led him down some fruitful paths that may have helped his search. Whenever in his writings and interviews he mentions metaphysics or the new physics, he touches on it lightly, then brushes it off or merely moves on.

Maybe it’s my medical training – yes, I was headed for either psychiatry or pathology until the mycobacterium bit me – but my ingrained method is to look at the patient, the rhesus, and make a diagnosis, a guess really, at what is going on inside the organism. One does this, of course, by constructing a model, drawing a mental picture, and then seeing whether the model

works. Thus one sees certain symptoms, takes a guess, makes a model of say a dyadic dysfunction of the Langerhans islets in the pancreas, i.e., diabetes, then runs tests, etc., to 'verify' the diagnosis. (TP 41)

Percy decides, for lack of a better approach, to "retain the objective method,... start with the Cartesian stance of our natural 'science'" (TP 41), and take it as far as it can go. He didn't expect it to go very far; he expected it to fail: "But I defy anyone, Skinner included, to draw me any such picture or even the roughest schema, of any sort of thing that happens within Helen Keller when it dawns on her that water (spelled out) 'means' the water flowing over the other hand. She puts the two together" (TP 42). Percy's conversation with Peirce scholar Kenneth Laine Ketner doesn't solve the Cartesian problem for him; though Ketner actually gives him a viable answer. For Percy, it was too metaphysical. Ketner writes:

CSP is an idealist – an objective idealist. Idealism can resolve René's old mind/body problem with no mention of the pineal gland or any other wiggling organ. It does it basically by saying there is no body – it's all mind. As CSP said, matter is just effete mind, too weak, too hide-bound with habit to be vigorous interpreting mind. Matter, in other words is just a certain kind of relational pattern or system. (TP 32, 33)

This answer is insufficient answer for Percy. He doesn't like non-traditional "idealism," about as far removed from empirical science as a philosophy can be. Percy responds, "It bothers me a little to hear you call CSP an idealist – which has bad echoes of Kant, Hegel, *und so weiter*. Wouldn't one be justified in calling him a philosophical realist in the sense that he believed there was something out there, whether he chose to call it matter or not, about which something could be known?" (TP 42, 43). And Percy goes on to point out that Freud did the opposite – instead of turning all into *mind*, as Ketner says Peirce did, Freud turns all into "dyadic" *body* – a "nutty business," Percy concludes (TP 43). For Percy, neither approach is the right way to solve the mind-body problem.

As for Percy's skepticism about objective idealism as being a science, Ketner observes that "objective idealism is precisely the way current theoretical physics seems to be heading, not as a [random] choice, but because it is fruitful in solving their problems... Doesn't an equation in physics

describe a relation? And a real relation at that – one can make an A-bomb or a hair dryer with such equations and relations. Relations are real” (KK). But this is too unfamiliar of an approach for Percy.

A second factor limiting Percy’s openness to new paradigms from the new physics was timing: the “newness” of it all. Some of these ideas, the seeds of which had been planted in the early 20th century with the origins of a couple of Einstein’s papers and quantum theory, did not germinate and flower until close to or even after his death, and certainly did not become immensely popular or well accepted during his lifetime. Percy lived for almost the whole of the 20th century – which only towards its end began to slightly depose the hard sciences and their positivist, mechanical paradigms from their ubiquitous and omnipotent control over the world view of both intellectuals and the general populace. In fact, the physical implications of this new physics, which contradict classic (Newtonian) and Einsteinian epistemology as well as Cartesian dualism (Percy’s goal!) are still the subject of passing curiosities, not widely discussed, acknowledged or explored today. Percy, the conservative, was always reluctant to embrace the new, the untried, the avant-garde, instead choosing the traditional path and more codified knowledge.

Since Percy lived before quantum physics’ canonization in modern science, it was still suspect to him, something Percy grouped with theories like astrology. Percy always rejected the new physics as a solution or even a clue to his search. He criticizes those who use new science as justification for non-traditional religious beliefs as an explanation of humans, or even as a rejection of mechanistic science; it was simply too “esoteric”:

If religion and metaphysics are only to be provided for by certain esoteric physical findings, such as Heisenberg’s Principle of Indeterminacy or Rhine’s ESP, or du Nouy’s demonstration that life violates the Second Law of Thermodynamics – little loopholes in the great wall of immanentism – then the jig is up. For the wall is more beautiful than the loopholes. Perhaps the saddest sight of the day is the spectacle of people trying with all their might to squeeze through the loopholes, seizing upon the lightest rumor of occult phenomenon as their last hope of salvation. It is these people, paradoxically, who have fallen prey to scientism far more than the scientists, who in their very despair assign an omnipotence to science as a world-view which few scientists would claim for it. (SE 5,6)

Percy concludes by rejecting any philosophical implications of subatomic physics for changing our world view, while at the same time agreeing with them that: “The sciences of man are incoherent.... they... have not one word to say about what it is to be born a man or woman, to live, and to die.... the source of the incoherence lies within science itself as it is presently practiced, and that the solution of the difficulty is not to be found in something extra-scientific, not in the humanities or religion, but within science itself” (SSL 271). He further concludes, “...the gap is not being closed, ... the gap is not in principle closable... How, even in principle, can mind be connected up with matter?” (SSL 274).

One problem Percy has is his lumping together all “new age” philosophies willy-nilly – with no sense of discretion between them or evaluation of any. For him, they are one and the same, part and parcel of a misguided attempt to find religion and meaning anywhere, due to a society that desperately needs it, since traditional Christianity has failed, largely usurped and defeated by a dyadic science which fails to meet human existential needs. As new paradigms arose, some valid, some not, to replace failed religious paradigm and failed scientific paradigm, he threw them ALL out.

The new science receives little more respect from Percy than new age philosophies. It is even thrown in with all other new age beliefs, and just as summarily rejected. The amorphous intangibility of the new physics seemed to Percy to mirror those “pseudo-mysteries” (SSL 421) and pseudo-sciences of the hippie new age which received his intense and unsparing criticism in both his fiction and his non-fiction. He gave it little thought. When he did think about it, he only warned that it was NOT the answer. This was an attitude he held his entire life. Percy writes as late as 1989, a year before his death:

On the one side are the dyadic sciences from atomic physics to academic psychology with its behaviorism and the various refinements and elaborations thereof. And on the other are the ‘mental psychologies’ with such entities as consciousness, the unconscious, dreams, egos, ids, archetypes, and such.... When I speak of dyadic phenomena as descriptive of ‘matter’ in motion, it will be understood that I am using the word ‘matter’ to mean whatever you please – as long as it is also understood that such phenomena, at least at the biological level, are not challenged by so-called chaos science or the indeterminacy of particle physics, however vagarious and mystical the behavior of some particles and however chaotic some turbulences. Which is to say:

Even though it has been tried, it is surely a silly business to extrapolate from the indeterminacy of subatomic particles to such things as the freedom of the will. At the statistical level, large numbers of atoms behave lawfully. Boyle's Law still obtains. If the will is free, it is no thanks to Heisenberg. As for chaos theory, it has been well described, not as a repudiation of Newtonian determinism, but as its enrichment. (SSL 283)

Ever careful to avoid "scientism," Percy now makes the charge of scientism to the new physics, and dismisses it, yet it was a clue to the solution that Percy sought – an answer to the mind-matter split and the materialist world view that traditional science had devolved to. Within new physics was a unity and a synchronistic view that echoed his own philosophy.¹³ Genius that he was, Percy had been reluctant to leave the (traditional) scientism of his youth, and when he finally could no longer ignore its inadequacy, he ran from it as fast as he could and felt any and ALL forms of science would fail in describing thought and consciousness.

Ironically, it was his goal to refute scientism and to venture away from the purely physical and empirical as the only kinds of explanatory theories or events in the universe, but it seems he didn't want to venture too far. He admits, as mentioned earlier, that he wants to put science back on the right path as "one of them [scientists]." So it seems his early roots, immersed in scientism himself, were too strong to completely shake off, and held him back in his investigation of a phenomenon – the mind-body connection – that he admitted was at least partly a metaphysical one.

Percy eventually seeks to understand humans in terms of their symbolic capacity, and even this had a fuzziness that discomforted him. Even when Percy's eventual paradigmatic home became language theory and the study of symbol, he was still slightly uncomfortable with the fact that it was not a hard science. He grudgingly acknowledged that the study of symbol is not only an empirical one, but also a metaphysical one: "...it is my hope to show that a true 'semiotic,' far from being the coup de grace of metaphysics, may prove of immense value, inasmuch as it validates and illumines a classic metaphysical relation – and this at an empirical level" (MB 245). He continues:

¹³ See Appendix B for discussion of entanglement, entangled states, the EPR experiment and the recent so-called "quantum transportation: - all of which are quite real phenomena and support Jung's synchronicity and Peirce's synechism.

...an impartial analysis of symbolization can only bring one face to face with the very thing which the semiotician has been at all pains to avoid – a metaphysical issue. Let us not be too hasty in surrendering the symbol to the symbolic logician or, as is sometimes done, the mythist. It is possible that a purely empirical inquiry into symbol function, an inquiry free of the dogmatic limitations of positivism, may provide fresh access to a philosophy of being. (MB 246)

However, while he accepts that it is a metaphysical issue, he doesn't really like that. The scientist in him wishes to get at the metaphysical issue empirically.¹⁴ While Percy says he wishes to examine symbol free of the "dogmas of positivism" (MB 246), it seems he is still captured and held in check by the reigning paradigms of his day, unable to venture too far away from positivistic roots. While he saw its errors, he was much more comfortable close to home base. "Folks, especially scientific folks, have no way of getting hold of Thirdness. My own prediction is the most educated folks are going to end up schizoid: Practicing 'dyadic' science and Hindu New Age shamanism at the same time" (TP 53-54).

The prescient Percy was right on target; his prediction that "Hindu New Age shamanism" would be the path of "scientific folks" hit the bulls-eye; the proliferation of physicists today who propose new views of consciousness based on "new physics" theory – quantum particles acting in non-Newtonian, non-local manners - is rampant. Percy's cynical dismissal, however, may have been premature, and based in a preference for traditional views and remnants of scientism. These theories not only have philosophical and experimental support, but make considerable sense and have much explanatory power for a concept (the mind-body problem, or "Thirdness" as Percy calls it above) that has baffled "educated folks" for centuries.

In the latter half of the century, and especially since the late sixties and early seventies, Eastern philosophers and Western physicists have agreed upon many facets of their picture of reality – even holding conferences and publishing popular and scientific books and documentaries. The extent of Percy's disdain for this kind of "new age" melding of physics and philosophy becomes more and more

¹⁴ Ketner proposes a "fundament hypothesis" paradigm shift model, a larger scale empirical move within science as a method, to accomplish this, answering Percy's dilemma. Percy himself was not onto this yet.

apparent in his novels from the seventies onwards. Interestingly, it is usually Percy's female characters who become the vehicles for this new age kind of thinking that he disparages. (Few would quibble that Percy was sexist, perhaps merely reflecting a southern, mid-century, all-male family upbringing).

Love in the Ruins (1971) criticizes science's propensity to quantify and reduce to the purely physical the experience of love and love-making – and Percy directly critiques the new and popular Eastern philosophy as a method for self-actualization and as a replacement for traditional religion: the protagonist Dr. Thomas More's wife Doris was ruined by books, "not by depraved books but by spiritual books" (LR 64). He speaks disparagingly of Doris' attractions to "the Unity Church, [with] English lecturers of various Oriental persuasions, Buddhist, Sikh, Zoroastrian... reciting *I Ching* in a BBC accent" (LR 67). While others embraced new age philosophy, Percy rejected it as an answer to the existential dilemma created by religion's void and ineffectiveness. Here we see Percy's answer: not born-again religion, not new age philosophy, not self-actualization, not anatomically perfect sex, but the Marcellian answer: commitment to another, true and lasting love. When Doris threatens to leave More for "spiritual growth" and "relating," More responds. "Isn't marriage a relation?" (LR 66). This idea of faith in God realized and lived out in this world through fidelity to one's spouse is Percy's holy grail. All of Percy's heroes except one end their search for God with a good woman in a leafy enclave.

Lancelot has a group of Hollywood actors bringing new age philosophy to the Bible belt, and the town is ready to receive. They perceive this kind of "religion" as deep, a deliverance from the shallowness of a consumer society, yet Percy shows otherwise; he says that wanton actress Raine Robinette's "depths are vacant" (L 111). Percy criticizes her absorption in a "California cult... Ideo-Personal-Dynamics"... based not merely on the influence of the stars but on evidence of magnetic fields surrounding people" with the existence of auras proved by special photography (L 112). Raine justifies her flighty new-age beliefs as "scientific." All the actors, Lancelot observes, are dilettantes with only a

“light passing interest in everything.... blown about like puffballs” in their dabbling with passing new age fads, like Dante’s uncommitted in the vestibule of hell (L 112).

In *The Second Coming*, an older, now rich and spoiled, Kitty Vaught becomes the means through which Percy conveys his impression of the flighty, self-serving, silly nature of “new age” beliefs: She believes in past lives, astrology, and mystics, with a detailed story of her daughter’s past life (SC 285-286). Will is overtly envious, but inwardly reveals the meaninglessness and the emptiness of such beliefs. “Everyone believed everything. We’re all from California now. Yet we believe with a kind of perfunctoriness. Even now Kitty was inattentive, eyes drifting as she talked. In the very act of uttering her ultimate truths, she was too bored to listen” (SC 287). (Southerner Percy hits Californians especially hard.)

Criticism of new age philosophy is present even in *The Second Coming’s* prequel, *The Last Gentleman*, published in 1966, the beginning of the new age movement. Sutter Vaught’s wife Rita goes to Mexico in search of self-actualization; Kitty’s friend is swept up by “frivolous teachings” as well.

The Thanatos Syndrome continues the critiques: “A patient with mystical expectations from a trip to Mexico and some Mayan ruins had given it [a statuette] to me. Her mystical Mexican expectations didn’t pan out. They seldom do” (TS 19). Through the priest and nun, Percy personifies the abdication of the church’s authority to the guidance to New Age philosophies:

Father Kev Kevin, ex-Jesuit, and sister Therese, ex Maryknoller, now Debbie Boudreaux. Both radicalized, joined Guatemalan guerrillas, Debbie radical feminist, used to talk about dialoguing, then began to talk tough, about having balls, cojones – now both retired to a sort of commune retreat house in pine trees, marital problems: Kev accusing Debbie of being into Wicca and having out-of-body experiences with a local guru which are not exactly out of body, Debbie accusing Kev of becoming overly active as participant therapist in a gay encounter group.... (TS 151-152).

The Catholic Church’s response to all this craziness? In the form of Father Smith, the church speaks: “Father Smith would say the pathogen [the source of the former priest and nun’s behaviors] is demonic,” More tells Lucy (TS 152). Clearly, Percy is of similar opinion.

However in *Thanatos*, Percy gives less attention to new age censure. He has other fish to fry – mass production (in this case of food/water) and a Prozac society. It's no longer the misguided new age philosophy that threatens to usurp relationship with God as the answer to our existential condition, but serotonin reuptake inhibitors (in *Thanatos*, it's in the water). A physicalist world view solves existential problems with drugs. By 1987, new age philosophies were no longer so new and dazzling, and the furor had begun to fade. They were still present, perhaps even more widely acknowledged and accepted than they ever had been, but it was a quiet acceptance. "Believers" had less the enthusiasm of a new convert throwing off all to go join a commune barefoot with flowers in the hair, but merely a somewhat modified world view, one in which announcements of non-dyadic, non-linear, acausal events would no longer be met with astonishment and rejection, but simply a curious "Hmm" as the news recipient then returned to go about his or her daily business.

So Percy's novels became the perfect media through which to express his criticisms of failed 20th century paradigms. Early in his career, Percy found the novel – the tool of the existentialists – the best method to express his existential consciousness which psychology, science, and new age philosophies could not explain. As his career continued, the novel was his refuge when non-fiction attempts failed.

His first published novel, *The Moviegoer*, was a classic existential journey of a young man trying to find his "self" and his place in life. Science fails to answer the existential dilemma; psychology also fails.¹⁵ Religion, specifically Catholicism, succeeds, is Percy's early conclusion. Catholicism could also answer questions that science could not. Science could not say anything about "the most important facet of the human creature – the joyous, suffering, and perverse self" (Tolson 199). Existential philosophy could; religion could; art and the novel could. His first novel, *The Moviegoer*, demonstrates this belief.

¹⁵ In the late 1950s, new age philosophy had not yet become predominant, so Percy does not yet criticize them in his first novel.

1.7 EXISTENTIAL ROOTS: THE MOVIEGOER

On writing *The Moviegoer*: *[It] is not the picture of a man setting out to entertain or instruct or edify a reader. It is the picture, rather, of a scientist who has come to the dead end of a traditional hypothesis which no longer accounts for the data at hand. (MB 190)*

* * *

Since true prophets... are in short supply, the novelist may perform a semi-prophetic function. Like the prophet, his news is generally bad. (MB 104)

* * *

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 percentage point for a seeker (MG 14).

* * *

Percy's first novel sets him on the themes and characterizations that he would continue his entire literary career. His protagonist, Binx Bolling, a wayfarer, a pilgrim, and a seeker, is searching for something "more." In *The Moviegoer*, Percy shows a protagonist subtly guided on his search by signs and clues of the transcendent, as in all his other novels; however, Percy's symbolic use of numbers and geometric diagrams would not emerge until his fourth novel.

As the novel opens, Mardi Gras is about to begin, and John Binkerson ("Binx") Bolling is about to turn 30. Dismayed with the everydayness of life, Binx assuages himself with distractions: money, sex, movies. From a successful New Orleans family and successful in his career as a stockbroker and his passing romantic dalliances with pretty girls, he is starting to develop the vague feeling that these external successes are not enough. He searches for mystery and something more fulfilling than his previous empty pursuits. He encounters friends and acquaintances who feel they have the answer to a happy, fulfilled life, but Binx rejects their philosophies. His frequent visits with his Aunt Emily provide fertile discussion of stoic Southern values which Binx no longer finds fulfilling either. Aunt Emily encourages Binx to help his emotionally unstable cousin by marriage, Kate, whose fiancé has died years

earlier. Kate's deeper existential side seems to be just what Binx needs for his searching and the two grow close as Binx finds he is learning love and commitment. Assisting his lesson is the trip they take to visit his Catholic remarried mother and his six half-siblings, including sickly and dying Lonnie, whose faith impresses the seeker in Binx. At the climax of the novel, Binx seeks out Kate and when she doesn't show and a pretty girl offers a date, he turns it down – no longer transient and superficial, he has found himself and the something "more" he has been seeking. It's Kate he wants, as well as commitment, community, and love. The novel ends with the Catholic mystery of the ashes of the sacrament of penance, with Lonnie dying and the sacrament of last rites, and with the sacrament of marriage. Binx commits not only to marry and care for Kate, but to care for his extended family as well. He also decides to leave the money business and go to medical school.

EXISTENTIAL ALIENATION

Percy's thesis is that man is "more than an organism in an environment, more than an integrated personality, more even than a mature and creative individual, as the phrase goes. He is a wayfarer and a pilgrim," a theme demonstrated throughout his novels (SSL 246). The outward, physical, dyadic world is far less than the whole – or even the primary purpose – of any Percyan character. Binx Bolling is a twentieth century postmodern man, dealing with spiritual alienation and dissatisfaction in materialist culture that offers nothing outside itself – as other mid-century writers have portrayed.

He is the "Unknown Citizen" Auden draws, and the "Invisible Man" that Ellison creates – anonymous, unattached, alone. They are at peace, outwardly, with society and with life, yet inwardly, something is unfulfilled... something not quite right: "...people with interesting hobbies suffer the most noxious of despairs since they are tranquillized by their despair" (MG 86). Binx lives the good life, but is still, himself, on the brink of despair – only his self chosen "search" keeps him from it, and his occasional distractions: women, earning money, movies, cars. "Whenever I drive a car, I have the feeling I have become invisible" (MG 11). Binx says:

Life in Gentilly is very peaceful. I manage a small branch office of my uncle's brokerage firm. My home is the basement apartment of a raised bungalow belonging to Mrs. Schexnaydre, the widow of a fireman. 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... It is a pleasure to carry out the duties of a citizen... I subscribe to *Consumer Reports* and as a consequence I own a first-class television set, an all but silent air-conditioner, and a very long lasting deodorant.... I pay attention to all spot announcements on the radio about mental health, the seven signs of cancer, and safe driving... (MG 6-7)

Like the anonymous "Unknown Citizen," identified by Auden only as JS/07 M 378, Binx is known more by his identity cards than his *name* or his inner self, the essence of who he is. He is the "model citizen" as the unknown citizen is. He and Auden's citizen both own the right possessions, albeit different ones for their times; they both take care of their health (both mental and physical) as per social dictates. He takes pride in his conformity, and his certifications by society ("birth certificate, college diploma, honorable discharge, G.I. insurance,...") (MG 6)). The details parallel Auden's poem, and Percy uses the word "citizen" twice in this paragraph, reinforcing the comparison. Binx is the unknown citizen – but is he free? Is he happy? The question is absurd – or at least it is in the modern world. The fact is, he is not happy because he is not a dyadic creature:

Now in the thirty-first year of my dark pilgrimage on this earth and knowing less than I ever knew before, having learned only to recognize merde when I see it,... living in fact in the very century of merde, the great shithouse of scientific humanism where needs are satisfied, everyone becomes an anyone, a warm and creative person, and prospers like a dung beetle, and one hundred percent of people are humanists and ninety-eight percent believe in God, and men are dead, dead, dead; ...

Nothing remains but desire... My search has been abandoned;... I have to find a girl. (MG 228)

He is triadic, though Percy is not yet at the point of using triadic symbolism to represent this. Above all, Binx is a seeker for something more than what is offered in his environment. Like Dante wandering in the dark wood, Binx often "comes to himself" – comes out of the distractions of the dark wood of this-world, and sees where he is for what it is. "I remember what I came for" (MG 44), Binx says often. "I came to myself under a chindolea bush. Everything is upside down for me as I shall explain later" (MG 10). It is then that, for the first time, the possibility of the search occurs to him. "The

search is what anyone would take if he were into sunk in the everydayness of his own life.... To become aware of the possibility of the search is to be onto something. Not to be onto something is to be in despair” (MG 13).

The search is for the satisfaction of another need than biological; the new need is the ontological need of “knowing” an “Other” – of encountering Being. The symbolic, triadic nature of humans is a manifestation of this need. Percy’s “everydayness” is the physical world of sign. Animals don’t search for anything other than their next meal, and while many humans choose only to live at this level too, and while modern society even encourages that, Percy believes true human nature needs more. Humans, who use symbols, need God, who is in the realm of meaning and symbol, who is accessed through symbol.

Binx’s discomfort, not being at-home-in-this-world, is reflected in his life. His apartment is “as impersonal as a motel room” (MG 68). He doesn’t accumulate possessions; he remains anonymous in the world, simply earning money and enjoying the pleasure. His heartfelt connection to others in community doesn’t exist. It is a life of loneliness and occasional distractions, such as the girl Sharon or earning money. The magazine of people stories his landlady gives him is the closest thing to connection he experiences. Lonely old Mrs. Schexnaydre, the landlady, has three dogs...

...each for the reason that it had been reputed to harbor a special dislike for Negroes. I have no particular objection to this trait in a dog – for all I know, Mrs. Schexnaydre’s fears may be quite justified. However, these are miserable curs and to make matters worse, they also dislike me. One I especially despise, an orange-colored brute with a spitz face and a plume of a tail which curves over his back exposing a large convoluted anus. I have come to call him old Rosebud. (MG 76-77)

Percy’s themes of alienation and loneliness, search and meaning, manifest in this passage. Mrs. S. is alone and lonely, disconnected from community. Her fear of Negroes represents the lack of oneness in society – divisions not just on a personal level, but on a social level. Binx is detached from it all. He has not reached Kierkegaard’s ethical stage yet, so the “rightness” or “wrongness” of Mrs. S’s prejudices matter not at all to him, only how it might affect him. The three dogs are Cerebus, the ugly

brutish three headed dog guarding the gates of hell: Mrs. Schexnaydre's world, in which Binx lives, is a hell in its aloneness and division. Again, Percy is not using triadic symbolism yet. This three is not the semiotic three, or even the divine three; it is evil, hell.

The allusion to Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*'s "Rosebud" is significant. The movie centers around the search for the meaning of the name "Rosebud" which the movie's dying protagonist utters at the very beginning of the movie – the movie's first spoken word and the protagonist's last dying word. The movie's search echoes that Binx is on a search for the ontological connection. "Rosebud" was the meaning of the Welles's protagonist's life; in the movie, it was the sled given to him by his parents that he was separated from when he was a boy – symbolic of when he was taken from the love of his family to be raised by the bank – a lonely and alienated arrangement, though financially lucrative.

This, then, is the life and fate of modern man. The danger is of becoming "no one nowhere" (MG 83). Kate says to Binx, "What if there is nothing. That is what I've been afraid of until now – being found out to be concealing nothing" (MG 115). The void is terrifying. Death is a void; death is terrifying. It is nothingness. Naming, self, community, ensures something. But the community is also related to an actuality, a reality, outside that. In other words, the community can't agree upon something that doesn't really exist. But it must agree on something. It ensures that we do not live in a void, that we live in an agreed-upon community of symbols, a tetradic community that creates a world. To not live in this agreed-upon world is to be isolated, and to wonder if one's world actually exists – if it actually is real. Kate continues:

"Couldn't a person be miserable because he got one thing wrong and never learned otherwise – because the thing he got wrong was of such a nature that he could not be told because the telling itself got it wrong – just as if you had landed on Mars and therefore had no way of knowing that a Martian is mortally offended by a question and so every time you asked what was wrong, it only grew worse for you." (MG 113).

Neither Binx nor Kate feel at home in their worlds. Something is missing. They are seekers.

THE SEARCH

Binx may be on a search, but would rather not think so. His distant buddies (“the last time I had friends was eight years ago,” MG 41) are content with their distractions from the search, but Binx, try as he may to be content, is not: “We were pretty good drinkers and talkers and we could spiel about women and poetry and Eastern religion in pretty good style... In fact this was what I was sure I wanted to do. But in no time at all I became depressed” (MG 41). Binx feels they are saying, “How about this, Binx? This is really it, isn’t it, boy?” (MG 41), yet this only spirals him into a “deep melancholy” (MG 41).

Their distractions are not the “it” that Binx is searching for; rather, he is enticed and gladdened and fascinated by “wonder.” He says of his friends’ activities: “It doesn’t distract me from the wonder.... Not for five minutes will I be distracted from the wonder” (MG 42). It is also mystery – mystery beyond the everydayness – he seeks. Kate’s derriere is a kind of mystery; it is “ample and mysterious,” he says. Though obviously not the real wonder, the real mystery, it is a “clue” to mystery beyond the everydayness, just like the contents of his pockets are “both unfamiliar and at the same time full of little clues” (MG 11). Their unfamiliarity means he is seeing things with fresh eyes – which are now opened to see something more, to see the transcendent.

Even in Kierkegaard’s aesthetic stage, these mundane objects can be clues that there may be a transcendent. The sign/symbol permeates as light shining in the darkness – or maybe just faintly glimmering, but light-emanating nonetheless. The difference is, in the aesthetic stage, the light is fleeting and transitory – and distorted by the lens through which it is viewed – and easily lost and disappears. St. Paul said, “Now I see through a glass darkly...” and then, in the afterlife, he will see more clearly, “face-to-face.” In Plato’s Parable of the Cave, the prisoners view the shadows as real, though they are not- they are merely shadows of real people and things. Yet the shadows, though not reality in its entirety, still give glimmers as to what really exists. These shadows don’t point to the transcendent, but they do hint that there is something more.

Success can satisfy briefly. Binx, exulting and communing with Sharon on their success, saying: “Our name is Increase” (MG 94), conveys a shadow of the real symbol, and a reflection of the joy, though muted and transient. “It is a great joy to be with Sharon and to make money” (MG 95). Binx’s car becomes a symbol of not only his own success, but a hint of this something beyond, something other-worldly, that can lift him out of everydayness. It is a religious icon, carrying the transcendent within it, at least within Binx’s head (where all symbol occurs anyway). The new automobile is “endowed...with certain magic properties by virtue of the mystery and remoteness of its manufacture” (MB 284). Percy calls this an “idolatrous desire” – to have the car not for its function of transportation, but rather to “have the car itself” and therefore transform one’s life from nothingness to somethingness (MB 284). It is a means of identity, totemism: “The car itself is all-important, I have discovered” (MG 123). While his old Dodge was

a regular incubator of malaise... , The MG jumps away from the stop sign like a young colt. I feel fine. Yes she [Sharon] is onto the magic of this little car. We are earthbound as a worm, yet we rush along at a tremendous clip between earth and sky. (Like Odysseus on the horizon...) ... we flash past and all of a sudden there is the Gulf, flat and sparkling away to the south. (MG 124)

The car has become the carrier of magic and mystery, a clue to the transcendent. Like the Word, the divine name, the divine is contained within the earthly signifier.¹⁶ The car is a symbol, however earthbound and ultimately inadequate a signifier it is, for Binx. Yet the fact that he signifies at all is evidence of his search for the signified, despite the mistaken and “idolatrous” path. He is a human seeking the divine encounter.

Certain clues – Kate’s derriere, the coins in Binx’s pocket, his car – are signs of his search for the transcendent despite their inefficacy at leading him to the transcendent. The war also provides a distraction from “death” and the void of everydayness, ironically. Emily says, “How simple it would be to fight. What a pleasant thing it must be to be among people who are afraid for the first time when you yourself for the first time in your life have a proper flesh-and-blood enemy to be afraid of. What a

¹⁶ See chapter 5.3 for a greater discussion of “The Word” as God, and as proxy for God.

lark! Isn't that the secret of heroes?" (MG 58). A cause gives an elusive, though concrete and non-transcendent, meaning and purpose to life. Binx explains his scar to Sharon: He got it in the war: "Farewell forever, malaise" (MG 127). For Binx, the war is not a Kierkegaardian stage two "cause" – for a purpose or contribution to society – but an aesthetic cause, bringing him closer to the delights of Sharon. Yet, within it is the shadow of eternal victory – denial of death – not transcendent yet, but still a glimmer of such. Having a real, concrete obstacle or battle to fight is a cure to the abstract, elusive enemy of existential angst. A cause lifts us out of the everyday banality of life.

Eddie Lovell, the salesman, is caught in the everydayness and conformity of life, and quite happy with it. He asks no questions, is not on any search, has no need for mystery or for searching: "Now he jingles the coins deep in his pocket. No mystery here! – he is as cogent as a bird dog quartering in a field. He understands everything out there and everything out there is something to be understood" (MG 19). For similar reasons, Binx does not envy his more industrious and successful friend Harry Stern: "—now here is a fellow who does have a flair for research and will be heard from. Yet I do not envy him. I would not change places with him if he discovered the cause and cure of cancer. For he is no more aware of the mystery which surrounds him than a fish is aware of the water it swims in" (MG 52). Lovell is the earthly salesman, Stern the airy romantic (a scientist enthralled with his research), but neither are onto the answer. Both are dyadic and desire nothing "more."

Yet both characters are drawn without overt references to twos or pairs or dyads. And even Binx's triadic character is drawn with many symbols and other rhetorical devices, but only a few threes or triangles present themselves in this, Percy's first novel. And, when threes are present, these threes are not the triad of language theory, but the trinity of the church. Percy's themes here are primarily existential; his semiotic emphasis has not yet entered his fiction.

Percy uses the triad also in the name of the fraternity: Delta Psi. Delta is his name for the triad, representing the triangle of the Greek Delta symbol. Here, the boys' Delta is actually ironic – the loss of

symbol that might point to something transcendent, and instead, points only to this world. Percy juxtaposes two opposites, in his view: Delta and Psi. The second half of the fraternity name is “Psi” – short for psychology. Percy almost went into psychiatry, and that interest is one seed of his study of anthropology. But psychology is inadequate to fully describe humans, especially their spiritual needs, which it often overlooks or even denies. It more often than not offers chemical solutions to such conditions as despair. Psi is also a term for ESP and other paranormal activity, something Percy viewed with disdain – and also not an answer (though purported to be one by the current age) to spiritual emptiness. The first half of the name is more significant: the Delta symbol represents human triadic behavior – symbol, language, art, culture, religion, the presence of the transcendent in the world where he lives – the REAL answer.

But not for the frat boys. Walter says in admiration, ““But when it comes to describing the fellows here, the caliber of the men, the bond between us, the meaning of this little symbol – ’ he turned back his label to show the pin and I wondered if it was true that Deltas held their pins in their mouths when they took a shower — ” (MG 37). When the fraternity members hold the Delta pin – a sign of the fraternity, no more than that, and not true fraternity – in their mouths, where language emits, Percy shows us that instead of searching for transcendence and meaning beyond themselves, these boys remain happy in the material world, keeping their spirituality and symbol-mongering locked away inside of them.

Binx is unsatisfied with this. His primary reaction to Walter’s world is: “It was boring, to tell the truth” (MG 39). While Walter and his fraternity brothers have nothing wrong with them per se – they are in fact all “good fellows” (MG 38) – Binx would much rather be “lost in the mystery of finding myself alive at such a time and place” (MG 38).

The movies are alternately clues to his search and distractions from his search. Binx finds greater reality in movies at times: “It is their [movie stars] particular reality which astounds me” (MG

17). When Kate and Binx watch *Panic in the Streets* with Richard Widmark, that takes place on Tchoupitoulas Street in New Orleans, and they walk out onto the street itself, she and Binx both know it is “certified,” making it more “real” (MG 63):

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

Certification is a kind of “naming” – just as we name an object and place it in our intersubjective framework by such action, so does movie certification “name” the object, placing it in a communal framework – moviegoers from California to New York now know and see Tchoupitoulas Street just as the movie director has framed it, and the masses of America agree upon its existence and character, as portrayed by the movie director. Samway explains:

Percy wrote a draft of what would eventually become *The Moviegoer*, winner of the National Book Award in 1962. The story, which differs considerably from the printed novel, depicts a young medical student attending a John Ford movie at Radio City Music Hall in New York City. The unnamed narrator lives at the West Side Y.M.C.A., just as Walker Percy did when he first arrived in New York to begin studies at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons. While watching the cowboy in the movie, the narrator asks: “Who is he? What is his identity in relation to me?” And then the epiphany: “For we live in a meaningful world,” the narrator says. “This moment, the moment of the movies, is the Significant Moment.” ... The protagonist, Binx Bolling, who ultimately goes to medical school himself, resembles his earlier New York City counterpart in that both men find intense satisfaction while watching movies, suggesting, as did Woody Allen later in “The Purple Rose of Cairo,” that movies are more “real” than everyday life. In *The Moviegoer*, Percy poses not only a serious question about the nature and function of art for people who are searching for some type of authentic existence, but about the place where they will find it. (“Walker Percy's Homeward Journey”)

THE FABRIC OF LIFE

When Binx’s world gets a little too dyadic – too biologically oriented, too full of everydayness, too absent of symbol and meaning – the fabric of life wears thin. “Ah, William Holden where are you when we need you. Already the fabric is wearing thin without you” (MG 18). William Holden, the movie star, is an everyday symbol, a clue to what lies beyond. Again, these symbols, that have nothing to do with Binx’s physical or biological success, represent that he is searching for something beyond that.

They indicate a spirituality, however misguided or ineffective they are at actually bringing him to an existential “authenticity” or fulfillment, when he searches in the right place.

With this spirituality, the fabric of life is full. The fabric is the interwoven connectedness of all that is, instead of the chaos of random events. It is a Langer’s “world” instead of an environment, and Peirce’s synechism and Jung’s synchronicity instead of Freud’s uncanny.

Ultimately, these everyday symbols such as William Holden fail to provide lasting connectedness to an underlying ground of Being. Binx thinks of the movies:

The movies are onto the search, but they screw it up. The search always ends in despair. They like to show a fellow coming to himself in a strange place – but what does he do? He takes up with the local librarian, sets about proving the local children what a nice fellow he is, and settles down with a vengeance. In two weeks time he is so sunk in everydayness that he might just as well be dead. (MG 13)

In fact, everyone is dead. “For some time now the impression has been growing upon me that everyone is dead” (MG 99). Talking to Nell Lovell, who speaks of her values, Binx thinks “...why does she talk as if she were dead? Another forty years to go and dead, dead, dead,” Nell asks how Kate is and Binx can only “think hard, trying to escape death.” But in the end, “We part laughing and dead” (MG 102).

Living the externally successful “good life” does not mean being alive. Physically, yes; ontologically, no. It is not life or the fullness of life. “I don’t feel a bit gloomy!” Nell exclaims (MG 101). She and her husband communally have the same life goal: ““To make a contribution, however small, and leave the world just a little better off”” (MG 101). For Percy, this is not the meaning of life, nor a cause worthy to live for. Binx rejects Kierkegaard’s second stage – the ethical stage of contribution of community.

AUNT EMILY: SECULAR HUMANISM

Other characters also conform to second stage everydayness, and so none can offer Binx guidance or assistance in seeing something “more,” something beyond the second stage, even if they’d

like to. Aunt Emily is another character grounded in the world, who wants to direct Binx on his search, but is less far along spiritually than he is, so can offer him no help at all. Her search is still a this-worldly one in the ethical stage: “What is it you want out of life, son? ... don’t you feel obliged to use your brain, to make a contribution?” (MG 53). She recommends he search for purpose, but one found in the rewards of this world – a career, a job, good deeds, at the very least. But the real search is not for anything in this world, which Binx already knows. It is inside of himself. Aunt Emily’s rigid adherence to her southern stoic tradition and values keeps her from the real connectedness and fabric of life that Binx is seeking. While Aunt Emily’s former world view is crumbling around her as the south is changing, she looks still to “this world” for her answers.

Her search is not the triadic search but the dyadic one – in a society. And even for Aunt Emily, the fabric of life is wearing thin. Binx says, “For her too the fabric is dissolving, but for her even the dissolving makes sense. She understands the chaos to come” (MG 54). For Aunt Emily the solution is to live a good life in this world; Binx should go to med school and make a contribution and do it as best he can. Her southern stoicism admits defeat ahead of time, but finds honor in the fruitless struggle anyway: “a man must go down fighting. That is the victory” (MG 54). She frames Binx’s search, his spiritual journey, in a culturally accepted tradition that ends in this world, a “*Wanderjahr*, a fine year’s ramble up the Rhine and down the Loire, with a pretty girl on one arm and a good comrade on the other” (MG 55). This *Wanderjahr* she exhorts is not the search of a wayfarer for meaning and purpose, but rather literally means to wander (with distractions and for distraction) aimlessly. It is a random journey, not a search, because it points to no transcendent reality and has no destination. Aunt Emily later condemns the search, without knowing her prescience; she is not in the photograph on the mantel because the participants wanted to, in her words, “Go gallivanting [sic] off to Hungary to shoot quail. I said, My God, you can shoot quail in Feliciana Parish” (MG 49). With unrealized wisdom, Aunt Emily voices that the quest is right here and now. It seems like it is far away, but it is in our home, inside us.

She represents the humanist tradition which fails only because it ends in itself – just as science, books, music fail (MG 55), if they become, not symbols to something else, something transcendent, but ends in and of themselves. “Percy presents a dialectic between two ‘cures.’ The first is stiff-upper-lip devotion to duty and traditional Southern values, as exemplified by Aunt Emily. The second is the mystery and irrationality of Catholicism, as embodied by Binx's mother and the Ash Wednesday service” (Coulehan).

Binx's realization of the despair and emptiness and futility of stage two ethical contributions to the world leads him to reject it, and to fall back into stage one, distractions.

SEEING SIGNS TO THE FABRIC OF LIFE

“Seeing” is also important to Percy. Vision enables humans (and animals) to perceive the physical environment, as Percy defines “environment;” however, “seeing” is the framework that we choose to overlay onto all that our senses absorb. Seeing refers to the ability to see past the mere physical everydayness and find clues and signs of something beyond. “Seeing” creates the “world” (as per Percy's definition of world) that we live in and into which all that our vision perceptions will then fit, and then have symbolic significance and meaning. We “see” beyond our environment to the world. A world has meaning, is a place of human activity that transcends mere dyadic cause-effect. Freud's theory of the “uncanny” says that these signs and clues are random and any meaning we attach to them is neurotic; Jung's theory of synchronicity and Peirce's synechism say that we're on to something in perceiving something “more” in these coincidences. Binx deals with the dialectic of randomness versus order and pattern in the chaos, with the idea of arbitrary chance as opposed to an ordained, divine plan for life – right from his very beginnings. Aunt Emily laments Binx's father marrying the nurse that worked for him. Binx says, “Sometimes I have the feeling myself that who my mother was and who I am depended on the chance selection of a supervisor of nurses in Biloxi” (MG 48). In the end, he seeks for

and chooses divine pattern, not randomness, through his ability to “see” something more in the clues and symbols of life.

Sign comes in many different forms, not always word and language. In order to signal to Binx he wishes to see him, Uncle Jules “so signifies by leaving his door open to the corridor so that I will see him” (MG 96). It is the coupler (the human’s perception) that makes sign what it is and that gives it meaning.

Among the many signs and clues Binx sees, the Jews predominate, just as they do in all his novels. Rather than a passing sign with significance only for the individual symbol-monger, the symbol presence of the Jews has its roots in Judeo Christian biblical tradition. Its communal certification over the span of millennia gives it greater authority and power. “An odd thing. Ever since Wednesday I have become acutely aware of the Jews. There is a clue here, but of what I cannot say” (MG 88). Binx’s noticing of the Jews presages *The Second Coming*, where the symbolism of Jews is even more prolific. Binx believes they indicate some meaning, purpose, and pattern to the world rather than a meaningless, absurd existence that has no transcendent reality. He doesn’t know what they indicate, but they indicate something. Percy says:

Between him and the Camus and Sartrean heroes of the absurd there is a difference. Camus would probably say the hero has to create his own values whether absurd or not, whereas Binx does not accept that the world is absurd; so he embarks on a search. So to him the Jews are a sign. I think he said, “Lately when I see a Jew on a street I am amazed nobody finds it remarkable. But to me it is like seeing Friday’s footprint in the beach.” Of course, he is not sure what it is a sign of. Sartre’s Roquentin in *La Nausee* or Camus’ Meursault in *L’etranger* would not find anything remarkable about a Jew, they would not be interested in him. (Con I 76)

Binx searches for a “fabric of life” to impose form on the absurd chaos around him, and he seeks clues. He knows the Jews are one. Just as Binx does not know what the Jews are a clue to, just that they are a clue, Percy does not know what the coupler is a clue to, just that it, also, is a clue. His conclusion of *Message in the Bottle*: “The apex of the triangle, the coupler, is a complete mystery. What it is, an “I,” a “self,” or some neurophysiological correlate thereof, I could not begin to say” (MB 327), echoes

Binx's claim of the Jews that, "There is a clue here, but of what I cannot say" (MG 88). These are the same – both clues, signs, but more than dyadic signs, they are both symbols.

In college, Binx's friend Walter is "tapped for Golden Fleece,... the final honor in a paragraph of honors" (MG 36). In Greek myth, Jason's Golden Fleece is a sign of worldly achievement and status – he wins the crown of king upon retrieving it. It is also the color of gold, representing money, and something rare and valuable and coveted. The Order of the Golden Fleece is also an order of chivalry founded in 1430 by Phillip III of Burgundy – later becoming exclusively Catholic during the Reformation despite a pagan reference for its name and symbol. Both of these are symbolic of good behavior and social status in the world, something Walter represents and something that sends Binx into a spiral of depression because he is searching for something more.

However, embedded in the phrase is another, quite different allusion. In biblical lore, Gideon refers to his pact with God that if "there is dew on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said" (Judges 6:37) Sure enough, God does as requested, and when Gideon reverses the sign, (fleece dry, ground wet), God does so again. The biblical fleece is a sign, not of achievement, but of covenant and relationship and community – and not any kind of relationship, but one with the eternal and transcendent. It represents God's real presence in Gideon's life as well as God's commitment and fulfilled promises. Gideon's fleece is a concrete entity carrying clues of the transcendent, a symbol; the Golden Fleece of Greek myth is merely a sign that points to external accomplishment – even if represents solely an achievement in one's personality instead of physical deeds, it is still temporary and temporal. Binx seeks the symbol, not the sign, because his humanity calls him to such. To see a world only full of Golden Fleeces, and not Gideon's fleeces, is what brings on his displacement and his melancholy.

Belief in the Golden Fleece also represents that Binx lives conscious of a "world" of symbol, of myth, that he lives a semiotic life – not a life merely of biological need-satisfaction. He can "see"

something beyond it. Like the Jews, the fleece symbol with its roots in biblical tradition is a symbol of greater power than an individually created symbol. Both the Jews and the fleece can either be merely the same as any other thing in the world – physically, Gideon’s fleece is no different than Jason’s; Jews are no different than Gentiles. Or spiritually, they can be signs of God, almost sacramental – depending on if one “sees.” Binx does.

THE SACRAMENT OF UNION

The train ride to Chicago that Kate and Binx go on is a sign of the journey – but their answer is in New Orleans, not Chicago. The answer is inside self, at home; not outside self, far away. Binx’s only real, authentic connections are with Kate and Lonnie. Kate is on “the brink of an abyss” (MG 81) – Kierkegaard’s leap of faith. Kate is uneasy with Walter and her stepmother’s help:

How much better it would be if they weren’t so damn understanding – if they kicked me out of the house. To find yourself out in the street with two dollars to your name, to catch the streetcar downtown and get a job, perhaps as an airline stewardess. Think how wonderful it would be to fly to Houston and back three times a week for the next twenty years. You think I’m kidding? I’m not. It would be wonderful” (MG 66)

She abruptly hangs up when Binx suggest she do that. Kate is even less placated by the materialist world than Binx is, and her malfunction in it only indicates her need for something more. Kate is truly Binx’s soul mate as their souls are both searching for the transcendent, unsatisfied with external substitutions.

As soul mates, Kate and Binx’s fumbling sexual encounter on the train is more “right,” more meaningful and fulfilling, than any of his encounters with other girls. Sex without soul – dyadic instead of triadic – is another theme of Percy’s, covered much more thoroughly in later novels, especially *Love in the Ruins* and *Lancelot*. In *The Moviegoer*, Percy writes, “Dr. and Mrs. Bob Dean autograph copies of their book *Technique in Marriage* in a Canal Street Department store” (MG 189). The spiritual is missing from the physical act; the book is cold psychology, not soul, and reduces sex to a mere biological act – a cause-effect dyad without the third element of the coupler. The physical act should be an expression of,

and a medium through which the spiritual occurs, just as a sacrament is. If one biological action is a sacrament that we are born with, rather than one we arbitrarily create, it is the sexual act. Spiritually, it is an encounter of ontologically knowing the essence of an “other.” “Adam knew Eve” as we know the signified through the signifier. It is quite literally a coupler. Binx feels an aversion to the Deans’ reduction of it to a mere “technique”: “It is impossible not to imagine them at their researches.... A wave of prickling passes over me such as I have never experienced before” (MG 190). Binx’s sexual encounter with Kate on the train is completely different, not the technically perfect act the Deans’ exhort, but an imperfect soulful expression of love.

A sacrament is the union of the physical and spiritual – or more exactly, it is the spiritual manifested through the physical, made present through the physical world and actions – triadic, not dyadic life. Percy’s Catholic message is subtle in most of his books – while there are occasional Catholic figures (priests, nuns, or believers), they do not necessarily proclaim Catholic doctrine as though it were the only truth and the only way. But, when Catholicism is present, including specific, particular Catholic practices, they are shown as clues to the search.

In *The Moviegoer*, Binx’s half brother Lonnie is the Catholic figure – the Jesus Christ figure who suffers and dies for mankind: “For one thing, he has the gift of believing that he can offer his sufferings in reparation for men’s indifference to the pierced heart of Jesus Christ” (MG 137). He fasts and abstains for Lent, he participates in the sacraments such as extreme unction and the Eucharist. Lonnie is the one that Binx envies the most – that Binx feels has found an answer to the search: “He is my favorite, to tell the truth.... I would not mind so much trading places with him. His life is a serene business” (MG 137). Binx’s transformation at the end is marked, like Lonnie’s life, by sacraments and participation in sacraments; marriage, penance.

Binx’s commitment to others becomes his grace and his sacrament. But, it is to be differentiated from Walter’s and Aunt Emily’s stage two ethical commitment to achievement and

contribution – he is not doing so out of a desire to make a contribution to society – that ends only there, with itself. His commitment to others is also a commitment to God – he creates the closest community – an intimate one, a family, not an abstract or anonymous one. Nor is he doing so out of a fatalistic, stoic, resignation that this is what must be in the changing South. Percy explains: “But in the end – and we’re using Kierkegaardian terminology here – Binx jumps the aesthetic clear across the ethical to the religious. He had no ethical sphere at all. That’s what Aunt Emily can’t understand about him” (Con I 66).

Binx’s religious stage must be differentiated from Kierkegaard’s, however. It is *through* commitment to people in one’s life that commitment to God is experienced. The novel itself ends with Binx’s servanthood to Kate and his family: “I watch her walk toward St. Charles, cape jasmine held against her cheek, until my brothers and sisters call out behind me” (MG 242). Gabriel Marcel’s relational spirituality captures this idea better than Kierkegaard’s stage three asceticism and rejection of others and the world. Through relationship with the people in Binx’s life – a true affirmation and embracing of “this world” and the people of this world – he experiences the grace of God. The Marcellian religious stage is a connection to something transcendent out of which flows connections to this world and to those inhabitants in it, which then become fertile ground for further connection to the transcendent. In Binx’s commitment to Kate, to Lonnie, to his family, he lives out his love for God. The aesthetic’s distractions are gone: “The playground is deserted” (MG 231). Sharon and Joyce are gone – Kate is chosen. The playground of life is empty, he realizes, and he no longer finds satisfaction in distracting himself with other women or meaningless activities – he is going to build a Marcellian community in marriage and family, where he can live out fidelity to and love of God through faithfulness to and love of his wife and family. Where Binx finds his true place and purpose, and his real clues to his Kierkegaardian search, is in Marcellian community and family. He finds it at home with Kate and Lonnie – relationships of love, relationships of understanding, commitment, family, and permanency.

This is the end to all of Percy's novels (except *The Last Gentleman*¹⁷) – the protagonist wanders and searches throughout the books, for “God” we presume, only to find himself, at the end of the novel, settling down with a good woman, a fabric of life, in a leafy enclave of human love in which grows divine love and grace. The divine is interwoven within their love. Binx ends with his commitment to Kate, and in the final scene he is a father figure for his nieces and nephews – the movie ending of “everydayness” that he deplores at the beginning of the book. As interviewer J. Gerald Kennedy said, to which Percy answered in the affirmative: “In other words, essentially what you’re interested in is in the wandering and the searching and being in doubt, but once the character makes his commitment, that’s the time when you’ve got to hit the road and end the book” (Con I 234).

Yet Percy retains some of Kierkegaard. His stage three mystic is silent, in a place that transcends words. In the presence of sacrament, words are not only inappropriate, but impossible. In the epilogue, Binx says:

As for my search, I have not the inclination to say much on the subject. For one thing, I have not the authority, as the great Danish philosopher declared, to speak of such matters in any way other than edifying. For another thing, it is not open to me even to be edifying, since the time is later than his, much too late to edify or do much of anything except plant a foot in the right place as the opportunity presents itself – if indeed askicking is properly distinguished from edification.

Further, I... naturally shy away from the subject of religion (a peculiar word this in the first place, *religion*; it is something to be suspicious of). (MG 237)

Language, as Percy says, is worn out, and certainly inadequate for something as profound as the mystery and wonder of life and the transcendent divine.

Words have their place; they are appropriate in the human realm of the head and the world and in relating to others. They are intersubjective. Kate in her despair asks: ““Is everything going to be all right?”” Binx answers in the affirmative, but for Kate, at her insistence, he must say it, must *name* it: ““Everything is going to be all right”” (MG 116). The word has power to transform Kate’s mood. It must

¹⁷ But even regarding *The Last Gentleman*, Percy says that implied is the that Will would have married Kitty, although in his sequel years later, Percy wrote the story differently and Will did not.

be spoken; it must be said. Naming it rescues her from the nothingness. Words are means of change and create community.

Relating to God and to the deeper heart of others is a greater mystery, found in action of love, and transcends words, logic, and reason. It is done in silence. When the “Negro” exits the church on Ash Wednesday, Binx tries to discern the reasons he entered, and whether he received ashes. “...or is he here for both reasons: through some dim dazzling trick of grace, coming for the one and receiving the other as God’s own importunate bonus? It is impossible to say” (MG 235). The allusion to 19th century priest/poet Gerard Manly Hopkins’ “Pied Beauty” (“dim, dazzling”) is appropriate for the mystical symbol of the ashes. Hopkins’ poems celebrate the beauty and mystery of God, but in this poem, the diversity of creation – as the “Negro” going into a Catholic church is a sign of the diversity of the world. “Impossible to say” (MG 235), Binx repeats. In the face of the mystery of God, words are inadequate and reductive. Usually, Binx rarely responds to his aunt’s talks, ethical stage talks, or if he does, it is only in monosyllable. There is no debate or argument or attempt to convince and enlighten on Binx’s part – he knows it is fruitless.

Words are the tools of stage two; silence and the actions of love are the language of stage three. When he announces that he and Kate are to marry, his aunt asks his plans, and he shrugs and does not answer. Rather, to himself, he thinks, “There is only one thing I can do: listen to people, see how they stick themselves into the world, hand them along a ways in their dark journey and be handed along, and for good and selfish reasons.. It only remains to decide whether this vocation is best pursued in a service station or –” (MG 233). This commitment shows Binx chooses a life of service (“service station”), but it is a spiritual choice, not a humanist or ethical one, is evident here. It does not matter what the external job is, nor its status, nor that society is edified by it. The contribution to be made is not an abstract cause or to an abstract group (“to society”), but to particular individuals, to loved ones, and is rather, to the dark journey (a spiritual one – a dark night of the soul) of the individual.

In *The Moviegoer*, Percy is predominately existential and Catholic, using Kierkegaardian theology heavily. While he uses symbol and sign and “clues” throughout this novel – as he does in all his novels – and is also well aware of the differences between dyadic character and the semeiotic triadic, these are minor incidents in this and his next two novels. *The Last Gentleman* and *Love in the Ruins* are similar to *The Moviegoer*. In this, Percy’s first novel, we occasionally have a few threes and triangles, but they are in no way dominant or different from any other symbol in the book; they are not the prevailing pattern. Not so for Percy’s last three novels.

Halfway through his writing career, Percy shifted emphasis and identity – from existentialist to semeiotician and, as Ketner and Peirce would say, a Cenopythagorean – seeing the world and humans through the paradigm of “number.” With his language theory, Percy wishes to add the same perceptions of human uniqueness that existentialism gave, without the fuzziness of philosophy. Existential philosophy was too nebulous for his radical anthropology; Percy wanted science involved in some way, too. Science was his origin, so he felt more comfortable there, despite its failings when it comes to humans. Current dyadic scientific and anthropological views of man were inadequate; the scientist in Percy knew a better explanatory theory was needed. With language, he felt he could accomplish the task of setting traditional science back on the right path. He doesn't attack it as an outraged humanist; instead, he sets science aright conspiratorially, as one of "them," saying of his task that "it is more like whispering to a fellow at a party he'd do well to fix his fly" (SL 272). He wanted a science that was not limited by the box of pure behaviorism for his “radical anthropology.”

He looked to humankind’s unique capacity for symbol-mongering for input into this theory since the study of language allows a scientific examination of abstract thought that traditional science cannot support. Percy felt that the key to understanding humans was understanding the abstract need for meaning which springs from humankind’s unique capacity for language and symbol. No other animal is capable of language and “symbol-mongering” as we know it.

Still existential, Percy used semeiotic¹⁸ to reveal his themes in the second half of his literary career. Semeiotic and number theory revealed his existential message in a more empirical manner. As a science, linguistics could “prove” the existential nature and need of human beings and served as an effective tool for his apologist purposes.

Language now becomes Percy’s means for explaining humans scientifically and yet showing the limitations of science. Human symbolic capacity, or language, is a characteristic of the mystery of human beings that is not explainable by science, yet as a directly observable event, it is still within the reach of scientific investigation. “Walker Percy’s most important legacy is the affirmation that an adequate theory of language following the lines sketched by Peirce is capable of bridging the gap between biology and grammar, between scientific studies and literary studies, so as to gain a united and integrated understanding of what we human beings are” (Nubiola 4). This satisfies Percy’s need to stay within the scientific method, yet allows him to get outside the limits of traditional science.

In each of Percy’s last three novels, *Lancelot*, *The Second Coming*, and *The Thanatos Syndrome*, a number relating to his language theory dominates as the descriptive symbol for the theme of the book. The use of symbol in his first novel, *The Moviegoer*, and his next two, *The Last Gentleman* and *Love in the Ruins*, is quantitatively and qualitatively different than in the last three novels. In the last three, Percy’s main emphasis is not only a Kierkegaardian and existential view of his characters, but he also uses semeiotic and his unique language theory to convey his themes, to portray his characters, and as the primary tool to show their existential status and growth.

The foundation of his semeiotic investigations was an attempt to understand symbol and man’s unique capacity to symbolize. What is symbol and how is it different from sign? Percy asked. Percy’s fascination with symbol-mongering has roots in many theoretical sources, Charles Peirce primarily, but it

¹⁸ That is, the triadic “semeiotic” derived largely from Charles Sanders Peirce, rather than the dyadic “semiotics” of modern language theorists. See chapter 3.1 (especially) and the rest of Part Three for a thorough description of the difference.

is based in the real lives and language acquisition stories of children – blind and deaf Helen Keller, lone and feral Viktor of Aveyron, and last but not least, Percy's own daughter Ann, who was born deaf.

2 THE CHILDREN: THE MAGIC AND MYSTERY OF NAMING

2.1 THE CHILDREN: CROSSING THE SYMBOLIC THRESHOLD

The crux of the issue of “what is a human being,” for Percy, is language, human language that is qualitatively different from animal communication. Humans use symbol, a triadic activity; animals use sign, a dyadic activity. Sign (dyadic communication) is done by creatures everywhere. However, human beings, as a species, are uniquely gifted with the capacity for triadic communication.¹⁹ Humans have crossed the symbolic threshold.

In addition, each individual human must personally cross the symbolic threshold – without the right confluence of factors (almost always in place for most humans), even humans will never learn to communicate in symbol. Usually this threshold-crossing happens to most humans around the time they are one or two years old, when they learn to speak. There are some rare cases, however, where the right confluence of factors never occurs, and a human being does not learn symbolic perception and ability. A language community is one necessary factor for symbol acquisition, so feral children, who have not been raised by humans, fail to learn language. When discovered by humans later in life and brought into the human community, they can be taught to speak after the age of normal and optimal language acquisition, and symbol can be acquired. Percy was particularly interested in the process of that acquisition, in case it held clues to the nature of symbol.

Percy experienced this firsthand. His second daughter, Ann, was born deaf. Her language tutor and the whole family participated in her language education, and Percy saw her symbolic acquisition in process, in a much different and more conscious manner than the automatic attainment of the average toddler.

¹⁹ This is Percy’s view. Others, including Langer, believe symbolic capacity to be a quantitative, rather than qualitative, characteristic – and that some higher level animals are capable of rudimentary symbol.

Besides his real life experience with his own daughter, two other children's stories were pivotal for Percy, those of the blind and deaf Helen Keller and the feral child Victor of Aveyron. Perhaps his experience with his daughter Ann caused Percy to be more than generally interested in Helen and Victor, but nevertheless, he was fascinated by them. He felt the characteristics of these real life cases of later-in-life language acquisition supported his theories. Through examining their experience before and after the onset of language, Percy feels the difference between sign and symbol is clarified and illustrated, and qualities of symbol emerge.

The first story is more famous – that of Helen Keller, not actually a feral child (that is, not raised by animals), but still isolated from the human language community due to the blindness and deafness caused by a childhood illness. After years of being unable to communicate, Helen was taught to use sign language around the age of five, after the normal time of verbal language acquisition. However, she used what she was taught as sign, not symbol, recalling in her much later memoir that her skills were like those of a pet dog who recognizes some words or objects, such as “leash” or “walk” as markers of action or behavior. The important point for Percy is that she was eventually able to use sign language in a symbolic capacity. Percy discusses this event at length in his first book on language, *The Message in the Bottle*.

In his second language book, *Symbol and Existence*, still an unpublished manuscript at the UNC archives, he focuses on a second child's language acquisition experience – that of Victor of Aveyron, a feral child found in the woods in France in 1797. Victor and Helen both crossed the symbolic threshold later than the normal human child, and the experience for both had similar characteristics, characteristics that qualitatively differed from the communication of non-human creatures.

But first, Ann.

ANN

Percy says to interviewer Henry Kisor, whose language tutor was the same as his daughter's,

I became interested in man's use of the symbols of language when I discovered that my daughter was deaf... I'd been reading about Helen Keller's famous breakthrough in discovering that words stood for things: when Annie Sullivan poured water over her hand and spelled the word "water" in her palm, and Helen made the connection. (Con I 193).

It was this "connection," this coupling, that was to become his primary occupation and interest, as it is the very thing that made the naming event a symbolic activity rather than a signaling activity. His second daughter was born on July 11, 1954, and it was soon afterwards that the Percys discovered her hearing problem when, accompanying the family on a hunting outing, baby Ann did not react to Walker's gunshot. Tests later revealed only minimal hearing at best; the Percys were faced with a dilemma – to institutionalize Ann or not. Not wanting to lose their daughter, they chose a teacher for the deaf to come stay in their home for several weeks a year. Miss Dorris Mirrielees, who was "no mere teacher but a woman with a mission, a miracle worker every bit as determined as Helen Keller's teacher" (Tolson 247), taught using the Mirrielees method, which was entirely contrary to traditional methods. The usual and accepted way to teach the deaf was teaching one word at a time in isolation, and teaching words for only simple objects. With Miss Mirrielees' method, the child learned language through three kinds of symbols: pictorial, written and spoken (with the child lip-reading). Miss Mirrielees would draw a picture of the objects, write the words for the object underneath, and say the words themselves – forming them into full sentences, mimicking how hearing children learn language, by hearing in full sentences. Often the lessons were preceded by an outing, an event in which Ann would go somewhere, say to a farm, and the lesson afterwards would be on life at the farm that Ann had just experienced. For Percy, it was

an almost perfect pedagogical analogue to his theories about the differences between the signaling and symbolizing functions of language. While the traditional method reduced the deaf child to rudimentary signaling, using words as signals to satisfy needs, the Mirrielees method brought the full symbolic power of language to deaf children. It taught them to use words as a means of *knowing* the world and themselves. (Tolson 249)

Furthermore, the whole family had to be involved in activities to help Ann learn language, and the entire Percy family, including Ann's big sister, Mary, were completely dedicated to the process.

Percy scholars Lewis Lawson and Linda Hobson each refer to the family's car trips into New Orleans to visit the doctor, with Walker spying through the rear view mirror his wife and daughter in the back seat, as Bunt sat next to Ann and taught his daughter on the way there (Lawson 7). Surely this real life drama emphasized to Percy the concept of intersubjectivity, or the fact that language is a communal process, not an individual one. It emphasized to Percy the difference between isolated cause-effect sign and symbol understood in a whole world context of relations.

HELEN

Miss Sullivan slowly spelled into my hand the word "d-o-l-l." I was at once interested in this finger play and tried to imitate it.... I did not know that I was spelling a word or even that words existed, I was simply making my fingers go in monkey-like imitation. In the days that followed I learned to spell in this uncomprehending way a great many words, among them pin, hat, cup and a few verbs like sit, stand and walk. (Keller 22-23).

Helen's teacher, Annie Sullivan, knows that Helen is only communicating in sign, not symbol. She is communicating, yes, but communicating "monkey-like," to no greater degree or ability than any animal communicates. She signs to "get" something – just like a gorilla can be taught to sign to get a banana. The sign does not have characteristics of language symbol unique to humans: it does not carry the essence of the object inside it; the sign does not stand for or become the object. The sign merely **points** to the object.²⁰

Helen signed in sign language quite frequently – as sign – for years before she understood that the words she was spelling out with her hands were symbol, before she understood her words actually WERE their objects. Later in the story of Helen Keller's life, in the famous scene at the well-house, her tutor, Annie, reaches Helen. Percy quotes a lengthy passage from Helen's autobiography because, to him, it clearly illustrates the difference between sign and symbol. For quite some time, Helen had been able to sign the word "water" and feel the sign of that word that Sullivan made in her hand, but it was

²⁰ See Chapters 2.3 and 3.4 for a greater discussion of these characteristics of symbol.

sign, not symbol, to her. At this moment in the garden, it becomes entirely different, and changes her perception of every word she encounters thereafter. Helen writes:

We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand, she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motion of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten – a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that “w-a-t-e-r” meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away.

I left the well-house eager to learn. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object which I touched seemed to quiver with life. That was because I saw everything with the strange, new sight that had come to me. (qtd. in MB 34)

Helen’s recounting of her experience reveals the clear difference between sign and symbol, and the joyful, fulfilling, and spiritual quality that symbol-mongering has that Percy wants to convey. Percy was not the only linguist to recognize this; Langer, Cassirer and Maritain had too. “Helen Keller’s experience is the classic paradigm of language acquisition.... [personifying] ‘the Eureka act – the sudden shaking together of two previously unconnected matrices’” (Koestler, qtd. In Lawson 8). This connection, this coupling, is what makes symbol qualitatively different from sign and what captured Percy’s interest. But the joy and freedom of crossing the symbolic threshold was not the only characteristic of Helen’s symbolic awareness.

Percy’s term for the naming event is the Delta phenomenon, from the triangle (like the Greek letter Delta) he draws to illustrate what is happening in the symbolic experience. Symbol-mongering is triadic rather than a dyadic, cause-effect event, as it was for Helen BEFORE that moment with the water in the garden. Percy critic Lewis Lawson notes that the word Delta derives from the Egyptian hieroglyph for “door” (Lawson 8); the Delta phenomenon is a doorway to a whole new world,²¹ as well as to the transcendent. A new world opens up for Helen when she understands “water” as symbol not sign, one

²¹ See chapter 2.5 for Percy’s explanation of the world that opens up for the symbol-monger.

that includes an encounter with more than just material existence. The transcendent is brought into the world, and the immanent and transcendent become one. Helen's encounter, as with all symbol-mongers, is with the divine, and hence the joy, hope, and freedom that naming brings.²²

Percy continues to cite Helen's account:

On entering the door I remembered the doll I had broken. [She had earlier destroyed the doll in a fit of temper.] I felt my way to the hearth and picked up the pieces. I tried vainly to put them together. Then my eyes filled with tears; for I realized what I had done, and for the first time I felt repentance and sorrow. (qtd. in MB 34-35)

In addition to the "aliveness" that symbolic capacity gives her, Helen is now able to feel uniquely human emotions, religious and spiritual ones, such as guilt and sorrow at "wrong" actions. No longer monkey-like, as she refers to herself in her autobiography, she leaves her animal mind and now enters through a door to human consciousness. As a result, she now has an awareness that allows her to feel sorrow and repentance for her actions. Before she understood water as symbol, she felt no guilt at throwing her doll. Afterwards, she realizes what she has done is "wrong" and is filled with remorse, a uniquely human emotion. Symbolic activity has allowed her to cross over a human threshold that entails not just understanding of the world around her in symbolic terms, but perceiving the implications of her actions beyond the mere physical or biological results. She has spiritual awareness; she is not sorry for the broken doll because she no longer has "use" (functional, behavioral consequence) of it, but because she repents of the act of damage to a thing. Perhaps the doll has more "essence" or more personhood now that it can be named symbolically. No longer a mere physical object, no longer an "it," the symbolic awareness of the doll has transformed it into a "thou," and Helen's understanding and appreciation of the world around her enters another realm. Connecting to the transcendent brings a new awareness and perception of our actions and of the world around us.

Helen describes the results of her new perception:

²² See Part Five for greater discussion of the transcendent, divine quality in symbol.

I learned a great many new words that day. I do not remember what they were; but I do know that mother, father, sister, teacher were among them – words that were to make the world blossom for me, “like Aaron’s rod with flowers.” It would have been difficult to find a happier child than I was as I lay in my crib at the close of that eventful day and lived over the joys it had brought me, and for the first time longed for a new day to come. (qtd. in MB 34-35)

Keller reveals the uniquely human productivity for language, again with immense joy and hope for the future. While animals who are taught sign language take years to learn even one hundred signs (such as Koko the gorilla), Helen learns dozens in a single day – and her language productivity continued until her fluency within weeks or months. Percy observes that she “concentrated months of the naming phase that most children go through somewhere around their second birthday,” and he even posits that “Helen’s breakthrough must bear some relation to the breakthrough of the species itself” (MB 38).

Percy explains:

What dawned on me was that what happened between Helen and Miss Sullivan and water and the word was “real” enough all right, no matter what Ogden and Richards said, as real as any S-R sequence, as real as H_2SO_4 reacting to NaOH , but that what happened could not be drawn with arrows. In short, it could not be set forth as a series of energy exchanges or causal relations. It was something new under the sun, evolutionarily speaking (MB 39).

This event was not a cause-effect event, with the word separated from the object in space and time. No creature’s capacity for signal or sign creates the same effects and results as symbolic capacity does.

Percy illuminates: “It wasn’t the case that Helen had received the word *water*, which had then directed her attention or behavior toward the water. That wasn’t what happened. What happened was that she received *both*, both the sensory message from the hand Miss Sullivan was spelling in and that from the other hand, which the water was flowing over” (MB 37). She acquired the generality implicit in symbol, in full language.

Helen already knew sign language and was using it in a cause-effect (sign, dyadic) manner; for example, she learned that she could obtain her doll by signing D-O-L-L. She differentiated this, however, from the famous moment in the garden when she realized “water.” She had been signing W-A-T-E-R for quite a while to *GET* water, but now she understood that “W-A-T-E-R” *MEANT* water, with a symbolic

understanding. She already had the water flowing across her hand – she did not sign it to obtain the water, but to acknowledge and encounter and “know” the water. She had known for some time that signs could create a causal reaction from those around her (get her doll, get some water) but “what she did not know and could not seem to learn [until that fateful moment in the garden] was that the word **water** was the *name* of the liquid, that *this is water*.... Giving a thing a name is an extremely mysterious business,” Percy says (SE 60). Regarding her previous signing, she says, “I didn’t know that I was spelling a word or even that words existed” (qtd. in SE 59).

Helen’s epiphany was completely different from sign which she herself recognized. She says, “‘Somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that ‘w-a-t-e-r’ *meant* the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, set it free!’” Percy explains:

Eight year old Helen made her breakthrough from the good responding animal which behaviorists study so successfully to the strange name-giving and sentence-uttering creature who begins by naming shoes and ships and sealing wax, and later tells jokes, curses, reads the paper, writes *La sua volontade e nostra pace*, or becomes a Hegel and composes an entire system of philosophy. (MB 35)

VICTOR

Victor of Aveyron, or “The Wild Boy of Aveyron,” had a similar language acquisition experience as Helen. He too is another child that learned symbol later in life. Victor apparently lived his entire childhood naked and alone in the woods until he was discovered wandering near Saint-Sernin-sur-Rance, France, in 1797. In the late 1700s, some peasants of Tarn and Aveyron, in southern France, encountered Victor scavenging in their fields and forests. He did not speak, nor did he understand speech. While his past was unknown, his feral state was clear. He ran away from others on four limbs. He had scars on his body that indicated he had likely been in the forest for most of his life. Later, as he became familiar with the farmers, he appeared in their houses during the day to be fed, disappearing at night. In early 1800, at around 12 years old, he emerged from the forests on his own. Eventually Abbé

Sicard, the head of the Institute for Deaf Mutes in Paris, and the Society of Observers of Man took over his care.

A young medical student, Jean Marc Gaspard Itard, took Victor's case and worked with him daily for two years using a combination of food rewards and physical punishments. Itard wanted to be the first person to fully civilize a wild child and attempted, primarily, to teach Victor to (1) speak and to (2) show human emotion, two characteristics which Itard believed separated humans from the animals. Itard did help Victor understand language and read simple words and basic signs, but little progress was made after that. As for speech, the only words that Victor ever actually learned to speak were *lait* (milk) and *Oh Dieu* (Oh God). Itard believed he failed at teaching Victor language and quit in discouragement in 1806. In fact, most sources agree with Itard – Victor failed to learn language.

Percy, however, disagrees. He believes Itard succeeded – though Itard himself didn't know it because he did not perceive the difference between sign and symbol as Percy did. Dr. Itard had tried to teach Victor language as sign, but not as symbol, though Victor learned the latter anyway. He withheld water to make Victor use the word *eau* as a sign to obtain the water. It failed – Victor did not vocalize.

When Victor learned the French word for milk (*lait*), Dr. Itard again thought he had failed, even though Victor did vocalize the word. Itard writes of his frustration that Victor did not say “lait” to obtain the milk, which Itard believes is human language. Rather, Victor was exclaiming the word “lait” AFTER he obtained the milk, at the same time he had the milk. However, a gorilla can use sign language to obtain a banana, or milk, and will NOT enthusiastically exclaim that it IS a banana after receiving it. A human child will. Dr. Itard was unknowingly trying to teach Victor to use “sign” in the way animals use it, and not symbol, as humans do.

Itard never understood what he had taught Victor since he was trying to teach it as sign, but Victor HAD actually crossed the symbolic threshold and was using the word “lait” as symbol, as humans do. Percy quotes Itard:

It was not till the moment when, despairing of a happy result, I actually poured the milk in to the cup which he presented to me, the word *lait* escaped him again, with evident demonstrations of joy; and it was not until after I poured it out a second time, by way of reward, that he repeated the expression... instead of being a sign of want, it appeared from the time in which it was articulated, to be merely an exclamation of joy (qtd. in SE 61).

What Itard thinks is “merely” an exclamation of joy, is the uniquely human reaction to naming and language – primates nor any other creature do not have this reaction. Just as in Helen’s experience of crossing the symbolic threshold in the garden, Victor’s reaction is also joy. Symbol brings joy. Sign brings a causal reaction – the object milk, but Victor already had the milk. His vocalization of joy was his understanding of symbol, that lait “is” the white liquid in the glass.

Itard, however, gives up the experiment, concluding that he could not teach Victor language acquisition and that Victor had not acquired it. Others agreed. In fact, Itard quit just as Victor had his symbolic breakthrough and had just begun symbol-mongering. Few scholars understood, as Percy did, that Itard had succeeded.

BOTH CASES – JOY AND ONTOLOGICAL SATISFACTION

Victor and Helen both crossed the symbolic threshold, and the experience for both had similar characteristics, characteristics that qualitatively differed from the communication of other non-human creatures. Each human child goes through the same process of language acquisition as Helen and Victor. The first common characteristic of the symbolic breakthrough is joy. Percy explains:

An empirical element common to both cases is the excitement and joy which attend the discovery, a joy which, unlike all previous pleasure, is unrelated to the economy of the biological needs and satisfactions. It is a joy which is the index of a sudden access of understanding, a meeting of minds, and an affirmation. A relation which was intended by the teacher is, by some happy conjunction of circumstance, grasped in a flash of insight. At once the simplest and most mysterious of relations, it is an insight which cannot be approached by the most propaedeutic of sign education: a chimpanzee cannot grasp it. Once grasped, it cannot be relinquished: it is and remains an irreversible condition of our knowing anything at all. (SE 62-63)

The symbolic breakthrough had nothing to do with biological contentment or need satisfaction – it was joy of an ontological nature.²³

Secondly, the symbolic event is a “pairing.” For both Helen and Victor, the word “lait” or the word “water” was not spoken for cause-effect results separated by time, as sign is; that is, “word” followed by receiving “object.” Rather, it was a simultaneous pairing. Their symbolic epiphany was aided by the fact that they quite literally HAD the object already in hand, and joyfully proclaimed its name. They experienced both – the word and the object – at the same time. The word was a joyful exclamation of the object’s presence, not an attempt to receive the object. For Victor, he had already been given the milk when he uttered “lait” with joy (to Dr. Itard’s great frustration, who wanted Victor to speak lait to get the milk, as in sign communication.) For Helen, the water was flowing over one hand as her teacher, Annie Sullivan signed the word “water” in sign language in the other hand. They did not say the word to receive the separate object. They had the object already in their hands, and the symbol, the name, occurred as they had the object, allowing the concept of the symbol containing the object *in alio esse*²⁴ to be tangibly experienced for each.

Third, symbol also produces a radically different orientation to the environment. Instead of biological need satisfaction, Helen and Victor both become interested in the object being named just to “know” it. Helen already had the water running over her hand; she did not want or need the water. Victor too used *lait* as symbol once he already had the milk, not to obtain the milk. So each event of naming for Helen and Victor was in reality an expression of recognition of the essence of the object. In addition, the language fertility characteristic manifested itself immediately for Helen (whether it did with Victor or not and Itard simply did not recognize it, we do not know). Helen became so excited about crossing this threshold that she had to know the name of as many things in her environment as

²³ See Chapter 2.2 for greater discussion of joy as a byproduct of the symbolic breakthrough, and see Chapter 2.8 for greater discussion of symbol as satisfaction of ontological need.

²⁴ “in another mode of existence”

she could absorb (just as young children do). She ran back into the house to ask that everything be named – but not for functional purposes, not to “use” the names to acquire the objects, not for any biological need. Her orientation in the environment is now an interest that is ontological, and independent of biological needs. It is an encounter and a knowing of the other. Percy quotes Ernest Schachtel: “Man’s grasp of reality is not merely based on his wish to satisfy primary biological needs—is not merely, as Freud assumed, a detour on the path to wish-fulfillment—but... it also has as a prerequisite an *autonomous interest* in the environment” (SE 63). Percy asks:

What then is changed in the semiotic relation by Helen Keller’s inkling that this is water? Physically, the elements are the same as before. There is Helen; there is Miss Sullivan; there is the water flowing over one hand, and there is the word spelled out in the other. Yet something of very great moment has occurred. Not only does she have the sense of a revelation, so that all at once the whole world is open to her, not only does she experience a very great happiness, a joy which is quite different from her previous need-satisfactions..., but immediately after discovering what the water is, she must then know what everything else is.... Has Helen only succeeded in opening Pandora’s box of all our semantical ills of “identification,” or has she hit upon the indispensable condition of our knowing anything, perhaps even consciousness itself? Is her joy a “hallucinatory need-satisfaction,” or an atavism of primitive word-magic; or is it a purely cognitive joy oriented toward being and its validation through the symbol? (MB 259).

Then this is also the productivity of language that sign does not produce, but symbol does.

Helen had in fact been using sign for months, but when she learned symbol, she had an explosion of name-finding and name-giving activity within that very day that continued into the next few weeks, learning thousands and thousands of words. Yet another characteristic of human symbol-mongering is the productivity of language.

So what did Percy learn from the stories of Helen and Viktor? That human language is different – and qualitatively different – from animal communication. He sees several characteristics that differentiate between human and animal communication, or symbol from sign:

- 1) Joyful Affirmation
- 2) Pairing
- 3) A “world” that has art, culture, and religion
- 4) Productivity

2.2 SYMBOL AS JOYFUL AFFIRMATION

“To name something is to own it” – Thomas Friedman to Tim Russert, CNBC, 7/29/06

* * *

Percy calls the “Helen Keller phenomenon” that event in which she *understood* that the sign language motions her teacher made in Helen’s one hand related, stood for, symbolized, meant, the water in the other hand (MB 35). Helen’s subsequent and continuing joy at this experience, at participating in the act of language is, again, a crossing from organism into human territory:

“Unquestionably Helen’s breakthrough was critical and went to the very heart of the terra incognita. Before, Helen had behaved like a good responding organism. Afterward, she acted like a rejoicing, symbol-mongering human” (MB 38). Percy explains pleasure in naming/symbolic act:

The pleasure is a fundamental thing, going back to the origins of speech or consciousness, either in the phylogensis or in the way a child does it at the age of one or two.... Someone gives a thing a name for the child, and the delight occurs in the transaction between the person who gives it and the person who hears it.... Something extraordinary happens. I think that is not only the beginning of consciousness of language and speech, but it also goes to the heart of good fiction, of good poetry. (Con I 217)

Naming is an act of “joy” for humans; it is not the joy of need-satisfaction but the joy of knowing, encounter with, an “other.” The joy comes in many different forms for humans, such as “when a mathematician cracks a hard problem, a novelist suddenly sees how to resolve a tangled plot, a lab experimenter finally solves a tough experiment, an artist grasps beauty, an ordinary man sees a rainbow” (KK). Each of these cases are not about biological or instinctive drives for survival in an environment, but of a different phenomena entirely. They have to do with a revelation, or an encounter with the world.

Percy’s description of Helen Keller’s crossing the symbolic threshold is that “something of great moment has occurred. Not only does she have the sense of revelation, so that all at once the whole world is open to her, not only does she experience a great happiness, a joy which is quite different from

her previous need-satisfactions” but she is filled with eagerness to know what everything else is (MB 259). Naming is a joyful spiritual event not entailed in an “environment.”

Assertion means to state that something is so. In naming, “Two other traits of the thing are discovered and affirmed: one that it *is*; two, that it is *something*” (MB 73). Affirmation through naming is a “yes-saying” to the object, it validates the object, and captures it from “ineffability” into our real world. It says “yes” to the presence of the other. It is our accepting and embracing the object’s existence in our world – a connection and participation with the object. The object acquires a place, a name, in our world, in our system of symbols. By naming, the object becomes “that which I apprehend and you validate by naming in such a way that I am justified in hoping that you ‘mean’ that very ineffable thing?” (MB 73). Symbol is not only a pairing but an affirmation:

But right or wrong, deplorable or not, the advent of symbolization is incalculable in its significance. In the entire inorganic cosmos and in the entire subhuman scale of life, the event of identification, to the best of our empirical knowledge, has never before occurred. For the first time, Something A does not simply become something B through an orderly change: instead Something A is *affirmed* as being what it is by means of its identification with symbol. It is, we begin to realize, *the first event in natural history which transcends the order of causality* (SE 67).

Percy insists that we must deal with this “mysterious” (MB 150) and “extraordinary” (MB 155) and “scandalous” (MB 157) phenomenon of naming – and cannot ignore it or dismiss it with an oversimplified cause-effect dyadic explanation, nor can we ignore it merely because it is “troublesome” and does not fit neatly into any reigning paradigm, whether linguistic, anthropological or scientific: “The collision of two galaxies and the salivation of Pavlov’s dog, different as they are, are far more alike than the simplest act of naming” (MB 154). Naming is completely different from any interaction in science – instead of explaining something, it acknowledges and affirms the being and existence of something – and it says “yes” to it:

When one names a thing or understands from another that a thing is so named, the event can no longer be interpreted as a causal function. Something has happened, to be sure, but it is not an interaction. It is something utterly different: an affirmation. Naming or symbolization may

be defined as the affirmation of the thing as being what it is under the auspices of the symbol... a yes-saying. (SSL 133)

Percy's essay on mistaken metaphors also discusses the ontological affirmation of the thing by naming; even when the name is a mistaken name, it somehow still captures the essence of the object, validates it, and delivers it to our world of experience:

For this ontological pairing, or, if you prefer, "error" of identification of word and thing, is the only possible way in which the apprehended nature of the bird, its inscape, *can be validated as being what it is*. This inscape is, after all, otherwise ineffable. ... This is why, as Marcel has observed, I am more satisfied to be given a name even if the name means nothing to me (especially if?) than to be given a scientific classification. Shelley said that poetry pointed out the before unapprehended relations of things. Wouldn't it be closer to the case to say that poetry validates that which has already been privately apprehended but has gone unformulated for both of us? (MB 72).

Percy continues that naming is unique among world events in that it is an identification that is an affirmation, which no other event in the world resembles. "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. In this act, for the first time in the history of the universe, 'is' is spoken." (MB 155). Percy says this pairing is scandalous "for it occurs by use of the copula 'is' " (SSL 134). The "is" calls the object into being for us, and allows us to experience it – a cause for joy. For example, "the symbol 'sparrow' is... the means by which a creature is known and affirmed and by which you and I become co-celebrants" (SSL 135).

Joy, celebration, are human experiences. For Percy, crossing of the symbolic threshold, humanity's capacity to name, is the step from animal to human sensibility:

The Promethean moment in man's history was not the capture of fire but the awesome moment when he gave the first name to a creature, and thereby knew the world and affirmed it. *And the Lord god having formed out of the ground all the beasts of the earth and all the fowls of the air, brought them to Adam to see what he would call them: for whatsoever Adam called any living creature, the same is its name.* (SE 67)

The “to be” verb is also God’s name, Yahweh, or “I am;” it is also God’s Genesis, creating and calling and celebrating the world into existence (“Let there **be**...”), just as we create and call and celebrate the world into existence with our naming. God is an assertion and an affirmation:

Once the scientific method is elevated to a supreme all-construing world view, it becomes impossible to consider a more radical science, the science of being. Thus when Cassirer is confronted with the assertion of pure existence which Moses received from God as His Name, I am Who Am, he is obliged to see it as a piece of semantical magic, a “mythical predication of being.” (MB 235)

An assertion and an affirmation bring a something into existence. A denial negates it, wipes it out of existence. An assertion is a creative act that allows a thing its reality. One can interpret the first Genesis story in which God calls and names the world into being not so much as a physical description of the creation of the world, but rather as a litany of assertions and affirmations that allow the world to exist – the creation of the world is done through affirmation and through assertion. The creation of our world and reality is done through affirmation and assertion.

While what goes on with the child, the human being, in the language event is something of a mystery to Percy, he insists that humans need to “know” BEING, through which symbol is the means; “by the word I have the thing, fix it, and rescue it from the flux of Becoming around me” (MB 297). Percy even goes on to say that it is not just identification of object with word, but identification of namer with named, of knower with known, “of knowing something by becoming something” (MB 297).

The symbolic encounter is an echo of, a doorway to, our encounter with God him(her)self, whose own name is “I am.” God is Being; God is logos, the Word, or the “intelligible in the cosmos,” past, present and future (KK). Naming, the symbolic transformation, enables us to existentially encounter the object, to know the object, not for any other end, than to BE, to experience the object as one with us. God just IS. Our highest experience of God is not functional, but ontological. It is not to have God DO something for us, but merely to know Him, to BE in his presence and to encounter his being. The namer encounters the named, even becomes the named. It is a connection with something

else in the world and a union with that something else. It is an ontological and existential celebration of the other. The need is to *know* the “other,” and become united with it in an encounter, in a union not unlike Adam *knew* Eve. It is not functional for a separate purpose than the object itself; it is ontological and existential celebration of the whole essence of the other and nothing else. It is not to be used later, in a separate space and time event; but it is a presence and experience of the other in the present moment.

Something happened in her [Helen’s] rediscovery of her capacity to name, that happens in all of us and in all acts of naming – even the “naming” that takes place in literature, art, and religion. Percy says that “at the secular level, you can name the self through art and literature” (MB 90) – a kind of redemption that brings joy. In literature, the reader sees himself and understands himself as the character in the story – he is “named” and affirmed. Music can name the self by “affirm[ing] even the basic motions of the self, Susanne Langer said that” (MB 91). The self can also be named through psychiatry; the psychiatric patient is delighted when a diagnosis (a *name*) is given to his troubles; Percy writes:

The patient’s agitation is not dyadic misery – resistance to the disclosure of unacceptable contents – but triadic delight. This delight, moreover, is quite as fundamental a trait of triadic behavior as organismic “need-satisfaction” is in dyadic behavior. It is a naming delight which derives from the patient’s discovery that his own behavior, which until now he had taken to be the unformulable, literally unspeakable, vagary of one’s self, has turned out not merely to be formulable, that is to say, namable by a theory to which both patient and therapist subscribe [community], but to be namable with a name which is above all names: *oedipal*! (MB 187)

The inability to name is, for Percy, the real cause of human anxiety, not brain chemicals (though they may interact, he says). This anxiety can range from “slight uneasiness to terror in the face of the uncanny” (MB 136). So Percy believes that the symbolic act of communication, of naming, serves the purpose of an existential healing, for it enables a connection of the speaker’s ontological self to reality through an epistemological act. In other words, though the word is not really (one with) the object, though it makes a play at approximating the object, the word enables a grasping and an understanding

of the object (the world), healing for the modern alienated man, reversing that alienation (Telotte 172).

Hence, the joy that Helen Keller experienced at understanding the word “water,” and the joy we all experience at naming:

If he is a good poet and names something which we secretly and privately know but have not named, we rejoice at the naming and say, “Yes, I know what you mean!” Once again we are co-celebrants of being. The joy is as cognitive and as ontological as the joy of a hypothesis. It is a perversion of art to look upon science as true naming and knowing and upon art as traffic in emotions. Both science and art discover *being* [my italics], and neither may patronize the other.

“Daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty

This is a naming and a knowing and a truth-saying at least as important as a botanical classification. (SSL 137)

Symbol lifts us out of this purely physical world and takes us into a higher world – the world of the divine – a totally different reality – where different “senses” are used, where different things happen, where different things are important. Our motivation is no longer solely physical survival nor are our actions compelled by some instinctual compulsion to the propagation of the species. These things matter to animals – who are not capable of symbol, nor capable of language, only capable of sign communication. Part animals, these matter to us some – and the amount may vary from person to person – but ultimately, different things are added into the mix and become more important. Different things matter much more now than physical survival and social adjustment: to live at merely that level is to live in blindness or existential angst. What matters now is meaning, purpose, happiness, joy, love.

2.3 SYMBOL AS PAIRING AND DENOTATION

*The central act of language, both of naming-classificatory sentences and predicate sentences, is an intentional act of identity. It is essentially a **pairing** [Percy’s italics] of elements which amounts to an is-saying. In a naming sentence, This is grass, a symbol and a thing are paired and the pairing is the means by which the namer intends that this green blade is one of a group....an identification brought about by a dividing and composing, a union of the thing with what the thing is. The identity in either case is not real – no one believes that the word is the grass or that the grass is the same as its color – but intentional. The identity is the instrument with which the knowing subject affirms the object to be what it is. The stumbling block to a scientific philosophy of language is the paring of elements in the assertory act. (MB 229)*

* * *

As Susanne Langer has pointed out, when the naming act is construed in these terms, when the situation in which you give something a name and it is the same for you as it is for me, when this peculiar relation of denotation is construed in terms of stimulus response, one has the feeling that it leaves out the most important thing of all. What is left out, what an object-science cannot get hold of by an intrinsic limitation of method is nothing less than the relation of denotation – a name above all denotes something. (MB 250).

* * *

An even further difference between sign and symbol is that of time and identity. Sign is cause-effect, separated in space-time; sign and object are separate from each other. A stop sign precedes (and directs) the later action of stop. Koko's sign for banana precedes (and points to) the action of receiving the object of banana.

With symbol, the word (symbol) does not precede the object; they are coupled, as one and the same, inside the human (the coupler), and they exist simultaneously in space-time. "But assertion – the giving of a name to a thing, this is water, or the declaring of a state of affairs, the water is cold – is not a sequence. It is a pairing or identification of word and thing, class and thing, thing and attribute and so on" (MB 205). The pairing occurs, as indicated by Percy's triangle, within the third element, the coupler, the organism perceiving the object within the word. The symbolic event does not "come about" nor is caused by the organism, but rather is "discovered" by the organism. "The symbol is already within the logos" (KK). Cause-effect is dyadic; discovery is triadic. The discovery is the discovery of the essence of the signified within the signifier.

Language is outside the realm of dyadic science for this reason.²⁵ Dyadic science is about things that are separated by space and time. Event A happens, which causes Event B, however, soon afterwards, but it does occur afterwards. They are separate entities. Symbol is a simultaneous identification – one does not interact or cause or affect an other – but **IS** an other. It is not the IS of

²⁵ Ketner asserts that Percy envisioned a Peircean triadic science, one that considers the "logic of relations" (KK). See Burch, Robert W. *A Peircean Reduction Thesis: The Foundations of Topological Logic*. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1991.

property ascribing, nor the IS of identity. It is the IS of symbol formation (KK). “What is completely left out of the behavioral or causal rendering of the symbol is the obvious but nonetheless extraordinary property of naming: the language symbol, above all, denotes something” (SE 57). Symbol is “denotation.” Percy explains:

A sign is a term in a causative schema directing the organism to an object. Signification is a sequential action which is explicable in terms of physical structures and energy transformations. Denotation is a peculiar relation which the symbol bears directly to the object – the symbol is the *name* of the object... it cannot be explained in physical terms. But explicable or not, a name denotes a thing, names it, and is not merely the signal that calls it forth.” (SE 58)

Dyadic science can’t explain this phenomenon, Percy says: “The question is this: Can denotation be derived by a refinement of behavioral reaction, or is it something altogether different? Can any elaboration of response issue in naming?” (MB 254). The response to a stimulus passes through space and time; however, naming does not:

In our ordinary theoretical view of the world, we see it [language] as a process, a dynamic succession of energy states.... But when a man appears and names a thing, when he says this is water and water is cool, something unprecedented takes place. What the third term, man, does is not merely enter into interaction with the others – though he does this too – but stand apart from two of the terms and say that one ‘is’ the other. The two things which he pairs or identifies are the *word* he speaks or hears and the *thing* he sees before him. (MB 157)

Pairing is denotation – implying the state of identification, utilizing the word “is.” Therefore, symbol is non-directive meaning. This implies that symbol is existential (it just “is”) rather than functional, to use Marcel’s terms. Sign is functional – performing some operation for the user of sign to fulfill a purpose, if only to direct attention to something else. Symbol is executed to *know* the object – though it may be useful to serve a functional purpose at times, the act of naming is existential – and is a standing back and reflection on what something *is*. Percy explains:

A symbol does not direct our attention to something else, as a sign does. It does not direct at all. It “means” something else. It somehow comes to contain *within* itself the thing it means. The word *ball* is a sign to my dog and a symbol to you. If I say *ball* to my dog, he will respond like a good Pavlovian organism and look under the sofa and fetch it. But if I say *ball* to you, you will simply look at me and, if you are patient, finally say, ‘What about it?’ The dog responds by looking for the thing; you conceive the ball through the word *ball* (MB 153).

Percy continues later, in his next manuscript, describing the difference between a dog's form of communication through sign, and a human's through symbol, from the dog's experience:

What the dog will never, never know is that James, the queer little sound, is the name of his master... The dog lives in a pure stimulus-response milieu: sign leads to thing. No matter what marvels of signification he can perform—so that to his audience he will appear “to know as much as people”—the one thing that will never dawn in his “mind” is that the word *ball*, a peculiar mouthy little explosion, is the name of the round rubber thing, or, in the sense which so scandalizes the positivists: that “is” a ball. (SE 58-59)

The pairing of object and word within the coupler creates a relationship of identity – so that one becomes contained within the other. Percy notes a long line of scholars who see object and word as one within the interpreter (the human); symbols are vehicles carrying the essence of the object within themselves. Cassirer says everything we know we know through symbolic media (MB 156), but he was not the first semiotician that Percy uses:

The Scholastics, who incidentally had a far more adequate theory of symbolic meaning in some respects than modern semioticians, used to say that man does not have a direct knowledge of essences as do the angels but only an indirect knowledge, a knowledge mediated by symbols.... John of St. Thomas observed that symbols come to contain within themselves the thing symbolized *in alio esse*, in another mode of existence (MB 156).

Percy cites Langer as well, who said symbols are the vehicles of meaning (MB 156); Langer sees symbol not as representing the object by “standing in” for the object, but as being “vehicles of conception,” so that, rather than pointing to the object, as sign does, and rather than replacing the object, as some might view symbol, they actually carry the essence of the object within themselves, what the Scholastics and Percy called *in alio esse*. In Langer's own words:

A term which is used symbolically and not signally does not evoke action appropriate to the presence of its object.... Symbols are not proxy for their objects, but are *vehicles* for the conception of objects. To conceive a thing or a situation is not the same thing as to “react toward it” overtly, or to be aware of its presence. In talking about things, we have conceptions of them, not the things themselves; and *it is the conceptions, not the things, that symbols directly “mean.”* Behavior toward the conceptions is what words normally evoke; this is the typical process of thinking.... Signs *announce* their objects to him, whereas symbols *lead him to conceive* their objects. (Langer 60-61)

We know the object through the word; the word is transformed and is no longer a sound, but another entity altogether – the object itself in another form of existence inside the symbol. Ketner elaborates that for Peirce, the conception is a type, the word is a token of a “type,” or a general. So, for example, there may be 50 actual instances of the word “the” on a book page, but all refer to the “the” that is the “type” – which is only one “the.” The type contains the potential, in the presence of an appropriate interpretant, to be the article which has that meaning we know it to have “as the semeiosis know as reading unfolds” (KK).

It is not the object itself that we encounter through symbol, only our conception of the object, always an approximation. Percy elaborates further, again using the Scholastics’ term, *in alio esse*, for the activity of symbol containing the essence of the object within itself:

But what is the nature of this pairing? The two terms, it is clear, are related in some sense of identification, yet not a real identity. To express it in modern semiotical language, the water is conceived through the vehicle of symbol. In Scholastic language, the symbol has the peculiar property of containing within itself *in alio esse*, in another mode of existence, that which is symbolized. Helen knows the water *through* and by means of the symbol. (MB 261)

The object exists *in alio esse* within the word: within the symbol is the essence of the object, “in another mode of existence.” Percy further clarifies when he quotes John of St. Thomas (John Poinsett) as saying, “What may be that element of the signified which is joined to the sign and present in it as distinct from the sign itself? I answer: no other element than the very signified itself in another mode of existence (*in alio esse*)” (MB 261). The signified (that which is symbolized) actually exists within the word; the word (symbol) becomes, and is, the signified.

Percy demonstrates with an example: say a word over and over again, one hundred times, and it loses its meaning. The essence of the object within the sound is lost, and the sound becomes mere syllables. It is no longer a word-symbol, but now, a mere sound that was hidden in its symbolic state. It “becomes” the word:

It is the peculiar property of a name, a class of sounds, not only that it can be coupled with a class of things but also that in the coupling the sound is transformed and ‘becomes’ the thing.

The word *glass* sounds brittle but it is not. The word *brittle* sounds brittle, but it is not. The word *sparkle* seems to sparkle for English-speakers but not for Germans. The word *funkeln* seems to sparkle for Germans but not for English-speakers. (MB 169)

The word takes on the qualities of the object, as though it were becoming transformed, or already transformed, into the object itself. As symbol, the word is now not an indicator of (or pointer to) an object outside of it, but it “becomes” the object itself in the human mind, and contains the concept of the object within itself (the word).

As explained previously, Percy talks about the incoherence in dyadic science when it comes to examining not only human language, but also, when it comes to examining itself, since it uses human language as part of its process – which is a pairing event and not a sequential event:

... it is the assertory act itself which is refractory to the scientific method. Since an assertion – mythic, linguistic, mathematical – is an immaterial act in virtue of which two elements are ***paired*** [my italics] or identified, and since the scientific method requires that elements be ordered serially, according to dependent functional ratios, the two are not commensurate. (MB 234)

Dyadic science studies relationships of things in the world, but “the coupling relation of a sentence is not like any other world relation. Yet – indeed for this very reason – it may symbolize any world relation whatever....” (MB 169). So sentences are used by science, but dyadic science can’t get outside them or outside itself to examine it with its own method. It can’t examine its own sentence uttering activities – it can examine only the rest of the world. “The issue is the validity of knowledge and the providing for this validity in one’s scientific world view. The difficulty is that knowledge entails assertions and assertions are beyond the grasp of the functional method.... The symbolic assertion cannot itself be examined as a world event unless it be construed as such, as a material event of energy exchanges, in which case its assertory character must be denied” (MB 235, 237).

Symbol is metaphysically different from that which is in the grasp of dyadic scientific understanding in two ways. Percy explains there are “two metaphysical relations: the first, the cognitive relationship of ***identity*** [my emphasis] by which a concept, a ‘formal sign’ comes to contain

within itself *in alio esse* the thing signified; the second, the relation of intersubjectivity, one of the favorite themes of modern existentialists” (MB 245-6). The relationship of identity is discussed above; the second is that of intersubjectivity – or the idea that all symbol-mongering takes place in community.²⁶

Langer makes clear that a symbol is a logical event, not a sensuous one and not an emotional one. While it may provoke emotions, it is itself a logical construction. In addition, symbol always conveys meaning. It is the source as well as the vehicle of meaning. Signs also give a kind of meaning, but sign does not contain meaning within itself; it can only direct you to the meaning, often a physical act or experience. Symbols ARE the meaning; they become the thing to which they refer. “Symbols are not proxy for their objects, but are vehicles for conception of objects... it is the conceptions, not the things, that symbols directly ‘mean’ ” (Langer 60-61).

2.4 SYMBOL AS EMPTY, DIFFERENT, AND ARBITRARILY DESIGNATED

A symbol must be unlike what it symbolizes in order that it may be transformed and ‘become’ what is symbolized. The sound cup can become a symbol for cup. A cup cannot be a symbol for a cup. (MB 169)

* * *

In symbol, two items are paired, by means of, or within, a third – a coupler. The two items paired are one “thing” of any sort (idea, principle, law, object, otherwise called the “signified”) – and another “thing” in the world (in the case of language, a vocable, called the “signifier”). The pairing takes place external to the object and its representation occurs inside the signifier, which is inside the communicator (though it can be externalized). The pairing can occur only if the signifier is **empty** of any kind of use and meaning to us, **different**, not similar to the signified, and **arbitrary**, that is completely unrelated to the signified.

²⁶ See Chapter 3.3 on intersubjectivity.

Vocables, or the human sounds that we call “words,” are naturally very good to use as symbols for their objects due to a variety of characteristics they possess – they are empty, different, and arbitrary. While anything can be a symbol, Percy calls the vocable the “perfect symbolic material” (SE 109) because it “possesses the unique trait of being... a sensuous thing and yet at the same time a thing extremely difficult of characterization in itself. As Mrs. Langer points out, the more barren and indifferent the symbol, the greater its semantic power—a peach makes a very poor symbol. A word [however] itself is utterly trivial” (SE 109). Barrenness is not the only thing that makes vocables good symbols. The characteristics that make good symbols are three: First, barrenness, emptiness or transparency, that is, lack of biological relevance; second, a clear and distinct difference from the object being symbolized; and third, arbitrariness.

The first principle is important – the vehicle of the symbol must have no biological use to us. If the symbol is biologically relevant, such as a peach, we will focus on its biological function and it will not serve well to contain and convey the essence of the object it is symbolizing. Its juicy delectability would distract us from anything beyond it. A peach as symbol would be far less effective than the random vocalizations that make up the sound of the word “peach” (or any other word acting as symbol for a thing in the world) – because we can eat the peach, and if we’re hungry, its edibility would be on our mind, distracting us from whatever symbolic meaning it might also convey. However, the **sound** of the word “peach” – or any word – has no biological relevance to us whatsoever. It would barely garner our notice devoid of its symbolic meaning. Langer explains:

Another recommendation for words is that they have no value except as symbols (or signs); in themselves they are completely trivial.... A symbol which interests us also as an object is distracting. It does not convey its meaning without obstruction... The more barren and indifferent the symbol, the greater is its semantic power. Peaches are too good to act as words; we are too much interested in peaches themselves. But little noises are ideal conveyors of concepts, for they give us nothing but their meaning. That is the source of the “transparency” of language, on which several scholars have remarked. Vocables in themselves are so worthless that we cease to be aware of their physical presence at all, and become conscious only of their connotations, denotations, or other meanings. Our conceptual activity seems to flow through them... (75).

The symbol, or word, or vocable, “peach,” carries the essence of the peach within it – but if the symbol for peach were biologically relevant, its physical interest to us would get in the way. If the symbol is something that has meaning to us on a physical or survival level (say, the peach, which can be eaten and can nourish us), it will be seen primarily as such and become opaque and block the object to be symbolized; it cannot do the job of representing another thing. So the first characteristic of good symbol – not biologically relevant – enables its transparency and therefore enables it to function as a good vehicle or carrier for another “thing,” the signified, to be conveyed *in alio esse*. The essence of the signified can now shine through the signifier. Its transparency allows us to see beyond it to the essence of the object it symbolizes, and much more easily be transmuted to carrier of the signified, and therefore, to symbol status. The symbol’s lack of participation in the physical world gives it more active status in the mental world, and elevates it to the realm of *meaning*, and therefore it becomes available to us as symbol.

Next, both Susanne Langer and Percy believe that the best candidate for symbol is the entity that has the least *physically* to do with the object it represents. If the symbol were similar to an object, it would become non-transparent as well. It would then be, either, merely a sign for the object or a reminder of the object, but does not elevate to symbolic status. Percy says “the symbol must be *unlike* the thing” (SE 99), quoting Cassirer: “‘The more the sound resembles what it expresses: the more it continues to ‘be’ the other, the less it can ‘signify’ that other... the aim of repetition lies in identity – the aim of linguistic designation lies in difference’” (SE 100). A picture of a glass of milk would only seem like “two” glasses of milk, as opposed to allowing a random vocable to BECOME the milk. “An isomorphic copy cannot be transformed. It remains a copy... it even inhibits the symbolic change.” (SE 101). A drawing of a peach – a peach-colored circle perhaps – does not carry the essence of the peach within itself – it mimics the peach. (Art is symbol, according to Langer, but the peach circle referred to here is not part of an artistic rendering.) Alternatively, the knife and plate one uses to eat the peach

cannot serve as symbol for it, as they will remind us of the actions that have to do with the peach – and they will be too muddled to carry the plain essence of the peach within them. “O! be some other name: / What’s in a name? that which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet;” says Shakespeare; true enough. But not just any name will suffice; a drawing of a rose is too much like the rose to have symbolic ability. It can remind us of a rose, but cannot carry the rose within itself “*in alio esse*.” The pleasant rose fragrance wafting towards us also reminds of a rose, but the rose fragrance does not carry the entire essence of the rose itself within it, nor can it, because it is only part of the rose.

Finally, if symbol and object symbolized are not physically related in any way, they are arbitrary. So arbitrariness is a third feature of a good symbol. Arbitrariness follows from symbol and object’s lack of relation or similarity. Object and word are paired within an interpretant (the human being) and without the interpretant, a relationship between the sound that is the word and the object does not exist – they are otherwise completely arbitrarily related, having nothing to do with each other. Various sounds emitting from the mouth, such as those that make up words and language, are purely arbitrary and do not aid in survival, nor do they have any biological or cause-effect connection to the peach. Marks on paper are the same. These random noises and scribbles can then be free to stand for and symbolize, to take on the essence of, the other object we wish to represent. Other physical objects besides sounds and scribbles can be symbols as well, but they must not have biological import. For example, words in sign language, the movement of hands in the air (or in Helen’s case, across the palm) are not biologically relevant nor related to the object symbolized. This also includes objects and productions of art, music, and religion.

Some things are not of biological import nor are they symbol. Langer explains, “The difference between a symbolic and a symptomatic act may be illustrated by contrasting the intentional genuflexion of a suppliant with the emotional quaver of his voice” (Langer 114). In this case, the genuflexion or “sign of the cross” is the symbol; the hand movements over the head and heart mimic the cross. They are not

symbolic of the cross, which they replicate and so are physically far too close. Rather than being a symbol of the cross, they symbolize what the cross itself symbolizes - something entirely different: salvation, redemption, grace, unconditional love, and so forth. The emotional quaver in a supplicant's voice as he recites the mass is merely the biological reaction to such things, and as such, is not a symbol.

2.5 SYMBOL AS "WORLD" AND MYTH

Symbol and meaning make man's world, far more than sensation. (Langer 28).

* * *

Jean Paul remarks somewhere: 'It seems to me that, just as animals drift through the outer world as though it were a dark undulating sea, so man, too, would be lost in the starry vastness of external perceptions, could he not divide that vague brightness into constellations by the agency of language, and thus resolve the whole into its parts for his consciousness.' This emergence from the vague fullness of existence into a world of clear, verbally determinable forms, is represented in the mythic mode, in the imagist fashion peculiar to it, as the opposition between chaos and creation. And again, it is speech that makes the transition from the featureless matrix of Being to its form and organization. (Cassirer 81)

* * *

Percy differentiates a world (*welt*) from an environment (*umwelt*). Animals live only in an "environment;" they do not have a "world." Humans do – due to their symbolic ability. Organisms who barter in sign live in an "environment," noticing only what is necessary for physical survival and well-being (MB 173, 203). "A sign-using organism takes account only of those elements of its environment which are relevant biologically...but a symbol-using organism has a world.... The world is simply the totality of that which is formulated through symbols" (MB 202).

A world has not only biologically relevant existences, but non-biologically relevant ones, even imaginary and non-tangible existences, like ghosts and bogeymen and God and Hamlet and fairness. These non-physical entities do not exist for creatures incapable of symbol – and even if they did, the creatures would not care. The world humans create is not filled only with isolated cause-effect events necessary for physical survival, but is continuous, and is a fabric of interrelated meanings and purposes that often have nothing directly to do with biological survival. A world entails explanations for events,

for what happened yesterday, for what happened in the beginning, and has no gaps. A world has myths.

“Chickens have no myths,” Percy explains (MB 202). He writes:

A signal is received by an organism in an environment. A sentence is received and uttered in a world.... An environment has gaps for an organism, but the world is global, it is totally accounted for, one way or another, rightly or wrongly, by names and sentences. A chicken will respond to the sight of a hawk but not to the sight of a tree. But a child wishes to know what a tree ‘is.’ A chicken does not know whether the earth is flat or round or a bowl, but a man, primitive or technological, will account for the earth one way or another. (MB 173)

Percy links this comprehension of a “world” out there to language capacity – the symbolic engagement is what allows us to “see” and create a “world”:

I’m looking for a way of thinking about people and things and symbols. The scientist thinks about interaction, energy exchanges, but the scientist who writes a paper can’t explain what he’s doing when he actually writes that paper. He’s writing a paper for somebody else to read, yet we literally don’t know what happens when two people are talking about something – we don’t know what language is. That’s why I like to start with chimps; I like to start with chimps who do hand signals and designate balls, and then think about what happens when human being suddenly put two words together and make a sentence – something very strange happens. Bam! That’s a world out there. (Con I 224).

The two – language and a world – are inextricably related. So language capacity enables a “world,” but conversely, a world enhances language capacity. Symbol mongerers, once they know there is a world, need to know what is in the world. “Once he knows what happened yesterday, he must know what happened in the beginning. Hence his cosmological and etiological myths” (MB 202). This same capacity and drive in humans, that is, symbolic capacity, that enables language, also enables music, art, literature, religion, and culture – elements of a “world.” These biologically useless activities, animals don’t have or need or desire.

Naming brings about a new orientation to the world. Prior to naming things, an individual is an organism responding to an environment; he is never more nor less than what he is; he either flourishes or does not flourish.... As soon as an individual becomes a name-giver or hearer of a name, he no longer coincides with what he is biologically. Henceforth he must exist either authentically or inauthentically... A person may flourish biologically while, at the same time, living a desperately alienated and anonymous life, or a person may be sick biologically and, at the same time – perhaps even as a result of it – live authentically. In the joy of naming, one lives authentically. (SSL 134)

A world is ontological and existential, in which a human is concerned about authenticity and fulfillment, rather than biological need-satisfaction.

Not all items in an environment are part of a world, and not all items in a world actually physically exist in an environment. For example, ultraviolet radiation exists in an environment, but if one has no knowledge of that, it doesn't exist in one's world; the idea of unicorn and boogey-man may be a part of one's world, but not actually exist in an environment. A world is unique to the world dweller. Each person has their own view of their "world" though they may be in the same "environment" as another, and though their worlds may overlap with others' worlds to a greater or lesser extent, their differences cause them to "be in the world in certain [distinct] ways" (Con I 222).

A world has no gaps. It is global, totally accounted for, and continuous:

The greatest difference between the environment (*umwelt*) of the sign-using organism and the world (*welt*) of the speaking organism is that there are gaps in the former but none in the latter. The non-speaking organism only notices what is relevant biologically; the speaking organism disposes of the entire horizon symbolically. Gaps that cannot be closed by perception and reason are closed by magic and myth. The primitive has names for edible and noxious plants; but he also has a name for all the others: 'bush.' He also 'knows' what lies beyond the horizon, what is under the earth, and where he came from. (MB 203)

A world without gaps is continuous and connected, just as Peirce's Thirdness is a continuity of relationships. This continuity is illustrated by Langer's and Percy's metaphor of "the fabric of life." Langer's inner "fabric of meanings," that is, human consciousness created by symbolic perception, becomes Percy's "fabric of life" that wears thin for his many protagonists as they seem to lose touch with meaning in their life and the world. The fabric is all important to human beings. Without fitting all percepts into the fabric of their world – whatever that fabric is for them – they become lost.

A symbol-monger is now a radically different creature than he was before he became a symbol-monger. Human consciousness created by symbol-mongering is the source of the perception of a “world” (*welt*) rather than merely an “environment” (*umwelt*).²⁷

2.6 SYMBOL AS ART, MUSIC, AND RELIGION

Art reestablishes community, even if you're reading a book alone. ...there is a community established between you, the writer and the words he's using. This is a double triadic relationship, like two triangles placed base to base, with the writer and the reader the opposing points. (Con II 91)

* * *

Any uniquely human activity has symbol as its foundation and its fabric. Not only are naming and language symbolic, but ritual, religion, art, music, and belief are all symbolic activities. Symbol “accounts for just those traits in man which he does not hold in common with other animals – ritual, art, laughter, weeping, speech, superstition, and scientific genius” (Langer 43). Our human life is full of both symbol as well as sign activities. It is “shot through and through with ritual, as it is also with animalian practices. It is an intricate fabric of reason and rite, of knowledge and religion, prose and poetry, fact and dream” (Langer 45). Symbol is the foundation of culture, including art, music and religion.

“Culture” in its narrower sense is a uniquely human activity as Percy defines it:

Culture, in its most characteristic moments, is not a catalogue of artifacts or responses to an environment, but is rather, the ensemble of all the modes of assertory activity. Culture has been defined as all human inheritance, material as well as spiritual. As such it would include hoes, baskets, manuscripts, and monuments, as well as the living language and art of the current culture. If we consider culture in a broader – yet more exact sense – the sense in which Cassirer considered it, we will see it as the totality of the different ways in which the human spirit construes the world and asserts its knowledge and belief. These are the “symbolic forms”: language, myth, art, religion, science.... If we examine Cassirer’s symbolic forms, we shall discover that each is, in its moment of actualization, an assertion. (MB 222)

²⁷ In the Preface of *Symbol and Existence*, Percy posits a stage theory of world views, from at first passive acceptance of reality at its surface, or life and people as puppets magically being pulled by hidden strings (II.C:1.1), to the scientific world view, which he criticizes on two fronts, both its oversight of the existential side of human nature and its conversion of a method into an entire all-encompassing world view (scientism), to finally, the semiotic world view, which he sets forth in his writings.

The real content of culture is not anthropological artifacts or biological impulses, but symbolic expression, assertions. Societal rituals are not spawned by physiological needs. Ritual is symbolic at its core; when humans live in a world of symbolic capacity, almost anything can become a ritual: “Eating, traveling, asking or answering questions, construction, destruction, prostitution – any or all such activities may enter into rites; yet rites in themselves are not practical, but expressive. Ritual, like art, is essentially the active termination of a symbolic transformation of experience” (Langer 45). Everything in culture takes place in context; language (and all symbolic activity) is also in this context:

A linguist may indeed spend his entire life compiling a dictionary of Kwakiutl without ever dealing with an assertion as such, as the phenomenon under investigation. But the fact remains that language, when it is spoken, is a tissue of assertions.... There is no such thing as an isolated word in speech; it is only to be found in dictionaries. (MB 223)

Percy defines art as symbolic in that it represents human feelings within the artwork. The artwork (visual or auditory, such as music) carries the feeling within itself *in alio esse*, just as the word carries the object within itself. Percy quotes Langer: “Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feelings. That is why [because it gives the forms of imagination] it has the force of a revelation and inspires a feeling of deep intellectual satisfaction, though it elicits no consciousness of intellectual work (reasoning)” (MB 289). Art is also not “...a direct sensuous pleasure. If it were, it would appeal – like cake or cocktails – to the untutored as well as to the cultured taste” (Langer 205). Percy again reiterates that these aspects which we consider part of culture – in this case, the artwork, is not the physical object studied by anthropologists, which is incidental, but a symbolic event inside the artist and the receiver of the art. “The art work is not the paint on the canvas or the print on the page; it is the moment of creation by the artist and the moment of understanding by the viewer” (MB 223). As far as judgment of the artwork, Langer says it is judged by truth or falsity, “according as it does or does not succeed in representing its subject” (MB 296). There are no degrees of literal truth, but artistic truth, which is all significance, expressiveness, articulateness, has degrees; therefore works of art may be good

or bad, and each must be judged on our experience of its revelation (Langer 263). Artistic truth is symbolic in nature, not physical or biological. Its creation is an assertion; judgment of it is an assertion as well.

Religion does not consist of its physical artifacts or buildings, but in “a living tissue of beliefs, professions, avowals. The central act of myth and religion is the act of belief or worship.” (MB 223). Music, too, is not the physical sound, nor even merely pleasurable sensation, nor is it an emotional *expression* or *response* or both. Langer acknowledges that music may do these things, but that is not its primary function. “If music has any significance, it is semantic, not symptomatic.... Music is not self-expression, but formulation and representation of emotions, moods, mental tensions and resolutions – a ‘logical picture’ of sentient, responsive life, a source of insight, not a plea for sympathy” (Langer 218, 222). Music is symbolic of human emotion – re-presenting these emotions and carrying them *in alio esse* within the music itself. Because the forms of human feeling are much more congruent with musical forms than with the forms of language, music can reveal the nature of feelings with a detail and truth that language cannot approach (Langer 235).

These aspects of culture fall outside the realm of dyadic science, and so Percy places them in the triadic realm of symbol. However, since culture exists in a physical world, Percy does not think that it is exempt from science, just that dyadic science is incomplete to describe the real foundation of culture, only its secondary characteristics. And science, as an aspect of culture itself, can’t fully describe itself. It uses language and assertions to operate, which are beyond its purview. “The heart of science is not the paraphernalia of the laboratory; it is the method, the hunch, the theory, the formula” (MB 223). It is not “cause-effect” or for biological sustenance, but rather assertory in nature:

The scientific method issues in statements about the world. Whether one is a realist, pragmatist, operationalist, or materialist, one can hardly doubt the various moments of the scientific enterprise – induction, hypothesis, deduction, theory, law, are all assertions of sorts. Even observation and verification are in the final analysis not the physiological happenings in which the retina and brain of the scientist receive the image of pointer readings – a dog might

do the same. They are rather the symbolic assertory acts by which one specifies that the perception, pointer on numbered line, is a significant reading.

It shall also be my contention, following Ernst Cassirer, that the main elements of cultural activity are in their most characteristic moments also assertory in nature. The central acts of language, of worship, of myth-making, of storytelling, of art, as well as of science, are assertions. (MB 215- 216)

2.7 SYMBOL AS EXISTENTIAL

The primary function of language is generally said to be communication.... [However,] the purely communicative aspect of language has been exaggerated. It is best to admit that language is primarily a vocal actualization of the tendency to see reality symbolically.... (Langer 109)

Percy believes that not only is human symbol-mongering not a biological need, it is not a need at all. With the first declaration, he is at odds with the biologists, anthropologists, and linguists. With the second, he is at odds with Susanne Langer. According to Percy's and Langer's view (and here they agree), one cannot subsume the basic human act of symbolization to basic biological needs for the purpose of, as he explains, "maintenance of the internal milieu and parturition" (MB 296).

Others, however, have argued differently. Artistic, linguistic, or symbolic fluency may attract superior mates and therefore assist in the individual's (and the species') survival and flourishing; for example, some say a poet uses his words to court women, thus enhancing his potential reproductive success. However, this assumes that the primary underlying reason – subconscious or not – that the poet writes or priest worships is for mating purposes, but it seems the case is otherwise. Certainly Catholic priest Gerard Manly Hopkins did not celebrate "Pied Beauty" for mating purposes, nor did he do so for greater acquisition of resources. More importantly, this begs the question as to how and why the artistic or symbolic activity became desirable in the first place. Art and religion do not practically assist in gathering food or resources. If indeed symbolic activity does attract more desirable mates or bestow higher social status, it is an arbitrary quality for accomplishing these goals. While it may have been given some value in human societies, it does not in and of itself aid in the greater acquisition of resources or more certain physical survival. (Animal sign communication can accomplish the same thing

as human language for survival purposes, reproduction, and acquisition of resources. Symbolic activity is not necessary for survival.) In fact, devotion to symbolic activity (say, the example of the starving artist or the monk who has taken a vow of chastity or poverty) may actually interfere with acquisition of resources or reproductive success.

Susanne Langer also says, like Percy, that symbols are outside the realm of scientific study and those activities humans engage in for survival of the species. They are never related to biological sustenance or prosperity; they are never necessary for the “increase of life.” Langer refutes the “utilitarian” view of symbol, ceremony, words, and what she sees as the beginning of human symbol-mongering, primitive “word-magic”:

Certainly no “learning-process” has caused man to believe in magic; yet “word-magic” is a common practice among primitive peoples, and so is vicarious treatment – burning in effigy, etc. – where the proxy is plainly a mere symbol of the desired victim. Another strange, universal phenomenon is ritual. It is obviously symbolic, except where it is aimed at concrete results, and then it may be regarded as a communal form of magic. Now all magical and ritual practices are hopelessly inappropriate to the preservation and increase at life. My cat would turn up his nose and his tail at them. (Langer 36)

To those psychologists who still say symbol (such as art) does have a kind of biological relevance apart from the survival purposes mentioned above, in that it is a form of the “play” of leisure, a “luxury product of the mind,” Langer says evidence proves otherwise (Langer 37). Artists starve to produce art; civilizations mourn over the loss of great works of art. Clearly, more than “play” is involved in symbol activity. And finally, the fact that all humans dream (a symbolic activity) during sleep – the mind is actively engaged in symbol production throughout the sleeping state – belies the “utilitarian doctrine” of symbol. When the symbolic activity continues in the human mind even during sleep, little practical purpose is served by this activity; little waking direction is charted in sleep (Langer 37).

Percy differentiates animal “fear” and human “anxiety.” “Fear” of an organism is roused by a sign of danger (a predator or some such) and is appropriate and works to optimize the organism’s survival chances. But the “anxiety” that humans have, and which Percy attributes to symbolic capacity,

is “ambiguous” (SSL 135). Anxiety, which Percy says can occur when something can “neither be ignored or named” does not serve to protect or nurture the human biologically. “The same anxiety may be destructive biologically – for it serves no biological function: one is afraid of nothing – and at the same time a summons to an authentic existence” (SSL 135-136). Percy elaborates: “A person may flourish biologically while, at the same time, living a desperately alienated and anonymous life, or a person may be sick biologically and, at the same time – perhaps even as a result of it – live authentically” (SSL 134). For Percy, the fact that there are these two measures of human success: biological and existential, indicates that humans have more than just biological needs. There is, in fact, another need that is as yet undefined. He elaborates “...a man who has satisfied every biological and cultural need that can be abstracted by the scientific method may nevertheless be desperately alienated from himself – that in other words, there are goals beyond the biological” (SSL 257).

Percy also refutes symbol as satisfying biological need; it definitely satisfies some kind of need, but not a biological one:

I am more satisfied to be given a name, even though the name may mean nothing, than to be given a scientific classification. If I see a strange bird, ask my bird-watcher friend what it is, and he tells me it is a blue-gray gnatcatcher, I am obscurely disappointed. I cannot help thinking that his telling me something about the bird – that its color is blue-gray and that it catches gnats – when I really want to know what it is. If he tells me it is a starling, I am satisfied.... It has to do with the new orientation that has come about as the result of naming. This orientation is no longer biological; it is ontological. It has to do with a new need – a need which is no longer an adaptive or reproductive need but the need to affirm the thing as being what it is for both of us. (SSL 133-134)

These refutations – Percy’s own and Langer’s – are of particular pertinence to Percy’s thesis that science cannot explain symbol. If art (also symbol) is *outside* the realm of science and “the physical propagation and sustenance of the species,” science simply can’t account for symbol activity.

Symbol activity is in fact far more compelling and fulfilling to humans than biological or physical activities for survival. Percy refers to Helen’s crossing of the symbolic threshold: “Not only does she have the sense of revelation, so that all at once the whole world if open to her, not only does she

experience a very great happiness, a joy which is quite different from her previous need-satisfactions..., but immediately after discovering what the water *is*, she must then know what everything else is" (MB 259). Percy clearly differentiates the need satisfied by symbolic activity from any other need: joy and happiness are not attained through satisfaction of biological needs – contentment, yes; relief, yes – all experiences of Langer's cat or James' dog. Helen's symbolic illumination in the garden was not of relief or contentment, but joy. A Hopkins poem does not produce relief or contentment; it is an expression of joy and is capable of conveying and producing joy in the reader. There is an unknown, mysterious need satisfied in both Hopkins' and Helen's symbol-mongering whose by-product is joy. Joy is of a different realm than the by-products of other need-satisfactions. What is the nature of this new need that symbol satisfies? "Is her joy a 'hallucinatory need-satisfaction,' an atavism of primitive word-magic; or is it a purely cognitive joy oriented toward being and its validation through the symbol?" (MB 260).

Percy identifies this joy as not only different from biological need-satisfaction, but it is also different from Langer's characterization of it as a more advanced kind of "word-magic." He feels she misses the point. Langer and Percy do agree that symbol's nature is not a kind of biological need; however, Langer proposes that symbol IS the new kind of human need:

I believe there is a primary need in man, which other creatures probably do not have, and which actuates all his apparently unzoological aims, his wistful fancies, his consciousness of value, his utterly impractical enthusiasms, and his awareness of a "Beyond" filled with holiness. Despite the fact that this need gives rise to almost everything that we commonly assign to "higher life, it is not itself a "higher" form of some "lower" need; it is quite essential, imperious, and general, and may be called "high" only in the sense that it belongs exclusively (I think) to a very complex and perhaps recent genius. It may be satisfied in crude, primitive ways or in conscious and refined ways, so it has its own hierarchy of "higher and "lower," elementary and derivative forms. *This basic need, which certainly is obvious only in man, is the need of symbolization.* [my italics] The symbol-making function is one of man's primary activities, like eating, looking or moving about. It is the fundamental process of his mind, and goes on all the time. (Langer 40-41)

Langer says symbol is this new and basic "need" of humans. Percy disagrees. He feels Langer does not answer the question of what she means by "need" or if and how this need is different from a biological one; in fact, she compares it to biological activities, "like eating." Here Percy has many problems with

Langer; one is simply a problem of semantics. The word “need” was fraught with behaviorist implications that kept it in the realm of a physiological response to most readers. Percy responds to Langer’s use of the word *need*:

[All needs are] reducible to the service of two basic biological requirements: maintenance of the internal milieu and parturition. Moreover, a response can be evaluated simply by the degree of success with which it fulfills the need. Now how can the basic human need of symbolization be subsumed under these valid biological categories? Can it be subsumed at all, except nominally: by calling it a “need,” a need of symbolization as there is a need of food? One represents things by symbols simply because one needs to do so. But a need in the biological sense is always but one term in a functional schema, thus, for example: Need: sex, manifesting as drive: sexual activity, serving the function: propagation of the species. Simply to call the symbolic transformation a need and let it go at that is to set up an autonomous faculty which serves its own ends, the equivalent of saying that bees store honey because there is in bees a need of storing honey. (MB 296)

Percy’s also clarifies here that calling symbol a need that satisfies the need to symbolize is a tautology which explains nothing.

Langer sidesteps the whole issue, and digresses to merely explain the character of symbol as not **creating** meaning but [re]presenting something that can be judged by truth or falsity in its representation. Percy says, “She drops the whole epistemological problem, so charged with implications, and turns to aesthetics” (MB 296). Symbol as need – and what kind of need – is left unexamined by Langer. In Percy’s words, Langer drops the ball:

I have tried to bridge this huge gap between the scientist’s view of man and the novelist-existentialist’s view of man, both of which I thought were valid. And the only way to do it – it came over me as a kind of revelation – was through language. About the same time I was reading Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer, and it seemed to me that this was the key, as Langer called it, only she picked it up and she dropped it, she didn’t do anything with it, she didn’t use the key to unlock anything. (Con I 137)

While Percy greatly admires Langer’s illumination of symbol in other ways, (it is not the behaviorist’s cause-effect reaction, she says, nor was it, on the opposite end of the spectrum, an idealist *logos* as Cassirer posits), he feels she doesn’t really get at the problem by calling symbol a new need. “What baffled Percy was that Langer could be so persuasive in saying what symbol was *not*, yet so confused in saying what it was” (Tolson 242).

When Percy explores whether symbol is need, he comes to a different conclusion than Langer. "There is, then, a prime cognitive relation between man and object, which has nothing to do with the categories of need-satisfaction. What are we to make of it? Will it suffice simply to label it, as 'autonomous focal interest,' or a 'need of symbolization?'" (SE 63-64). Percy says no to both. He feels there is a "new need" - but the need is not for symbol, but for something else. Symbol merely enables the satisfaction and fulfillment of that "something else."

It is here that Percy differs from Langer – Percy proposes symbol is a *means* to the need, but not the need itself. If, as Percy believes, the "symbolic transformation is not an end in itself, a 'need,' but a means, a means of knowing, then the consequences are serious indeed" (MB 296). Symbol is instead the doorway to the new, uniquely human need. "Something is wrong with Langer's assertions that symbol is a need – Symbolization is not a biological need, an 'elementary need' of the new cerebral cortex" (MB 295). Yes, the new uniquely human need is something entirely different than biology, but neither is it the need to symbolize itself.

It is Percy, not Langer, who correctly identifies and clarifies this need. Percy says the new basic human need is "epistemological" (MB 273), and "cognitive," that is a "need to know" (MB 296), in an "ontological" (SSL 134) and "existential" (MB 297) manner. Symbol itself is merely the *means* to satisfying this uniquely human cognitive need of "knowing" in a new and unique way – not facts about, but the essence of, the thing is known. In other words, he means knowing not in the sense of "possessing facts" but rather, of encountering the object, "in the Thomist and existential sense of identification of the knower with the object known" (MB 297). The "knowing" that symbol provides is of an entirely different sort than fact acquisition; it is a *transformation* that *arrives* at knowledge, and *NOT* "through the accumulation of sense data but rather through the *identification* of the knower with the object known, through an agreement between percept and object.... Language symbols transform

sensory content into the stuff of our ideas” (Tolson 243). The need is an identification with the being of the world, and it is an existential, ontological, and epistemological event.

Marcel’s functional category of the world, as other, as object, is a biological and survival mode of knowing. Knowing through symbol is Marcel’s ontological category of “I and Thou,” in which there is an empathic identification with the “other” and that which is known becomes “real” to us. Symbol thrusts us into this new world. While symbolic activity does not satisfy a biological need, it does satisfy – far more, in fact – in ways biological needs can never satisfy. Symbol satisfies this epistemological need which transcends the biological. Percy asks if Marcel’s ontological satisfaction at being given a name may “be dismissed as residue of name-magic, or is there a **radical epistemological need** of a something of comparable ontological weight (the sensuous symbol) to lay alongside the object in order that the latter be known?” (MB 273).

This human need of knowing is ontological: separate and independent of biology, it cannot be subsumed into a biological need or any other. Moreover, it is a need that even takes precedence over the biological, Percy implies here.

It is existential in that this need is for knowing the essence or existence of the thing encountered – and not the secondary characteristics or function of it, which are always in flux, always changing. “Therefore the activity of knowing cannot be evaluated according the ‘degree to which it fulfills a biological need,’ nor according to the ‘degree to which symbol is articulate,’ but by nothing short of Truth itself” (MB 297). Truth itself is found in symbol, in naming – and the truth known is the transcendent Being of the thing and of God himself which shines through the thing. Percy explains that:

Being is discovered by naming. If we must speak of a “need” in connection with human behavior, let us speak of it as Heidegger does: “The need is: to preserve the truth of Being no matter what may happen to man and everything that ‘is.’ Freed from all constraint, because born of the abyss of freedom, this sacrifice is the expense of our human being for the preservation of the truth of Being in respect of what-is” (Heidegger, *Existence and Being*, qtd. in Signposts 137-138).

3 PARADIGM FOUND: SEMEIOTIC: FROM SIGN TO SYMBOL

3.1 CHARLES SANDERS PEIRCE TAKES ON CHARLES MORRIS

It is the idealists and notably Ernst Cassirer who must be credited with the clearest explication of the nature of symbol; and it is Mrs. Langer's distinction to have rescued it from the toils of idealism. (MB 293)

* * *

I've been writing a series on la semiotique, on language. I do it from the point of view of a woman I started with, an American woman philosopher named Susanne Langer and of a German philosopher, Ernst Cassirer. He wrote Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. I also use another American philosopher, a very difficult philosopher, named Charles Peirce, who is now recognized as the biggest of American philosophers. He is the one who really put it on the map. It is a very amorphous, wide open, confused field and everybody does more or less what he likes. The French do straight textual analysis, structural analysis. They work in the direction of Levi-Strauss. Americans do it more along the lines of behavioral science. They worry about whether chimpanzees can talk. (Con II 57-58)

* * *

Walker Percy sought to create a “radical anthropology” by understanding human symbolic capacity through the lens of a theory of signs. However, he had little use for traditional semiotics. Semiotics needed an adjustment. He reached for other thinkers than the popular ones, and a different sign theory and accompanying anthropology than that of his day. Percy had to forge his own unique path in this area; current linguists and semioticians did not offer him much help.

He found he could best understand what was going on with symbol through the semeiotic²⁸ of 19th century founder of pragmatism, Charles Sanders Peirce. From the beginning of his career as a writer to the end, he was writing on or about Peirce, and investigating and exploring Peirce's theories throughout.

²⁸ “Semeiotic” is a triadic theory of signs and relations by Peirce; Charles Morris read Peirce and modified it to be something completely different from Peirce's theory by making it a linear, cause-effect and dyadic description of the language event. Morris's “semiotics” is behavioristic, radically different from what Peirce is proposing. See the rest of this chapter for a more detailed discussion of the difference between Peirce's “semeiotic” (largely overlooked today) and Morris's “semiotics” which has become the popular and well-known version of sign theory today.

Percy may first have been introduced to Peirce shortly after his marriage to Bunt. The two decided to live in New Orleans; after a brief visit, they rented a house in September of 1947 from Julius Friend, philosopher-author who had edited a New Orleans literary journal, *The Double Dealer*, that Percy's Uncle Will had contributed to; and more, he had co-authored two books of philosophy of science with James K. Feibleman, chair of Tulane University's philosophy department and an officer in the Charles Peirce Society (Tolson 200-201, Samway 148). Friend's extensive literary and philosophical library stayed with the house while the Percys occupied it, so Walker had at his fingertips works of philosophy of science and Charles Sanders Peirce – including Friend's gift of a book he co-authored with Feibleman, *Unlimited Community: A Study of the Possibility of Social Science*, which discusses Peirce (and may have been Percy's first introduction to Peirce), and he would have naturally been led to Feibleman's *An Introduction to Peirce's Philosophy: Interpreted as a System* (Samway 149).

Percy first wrote on Peirce in a 1959 article, "Peirce and Modern Semiotic," published much later in the Winter 2002 issue of *DoubleTake*, with an introduction by Peirce expert Kenneth Laine Ketner. If there was any doubt about Percy's early understanding of Peirce and his signs, and Percy's rejection of traditional semiotics from the beginning, it is heartily dispelled in this article. What followed was a thorough evisceration of the failings of present-day semiotics. Ketner explains, "Using Peirce's tools, Percy demonstrated the impossibility of dealing with meaning using only dyadic resources" ("To Take" 52).

Percy's career was bookended, from the 1950s until his death, by Peirce's semeiotic and by rejection of dyadic semiotics; his last few years were spent corresponding with Ketner as he worked through Peirce's theories, and Percy's last major work, his 1989 Jefferson Lecture (*Signposts in a Strange Land*), refers to Peirce again. Ketner received a letter from Percy a few months later, shortly before Percy's death, commenting on Milton Singer's *Peircean Anthropology*: "P.S. Only place Singer is wrong is listing Charles Morris as a proper heir of CSP. Morris is a dyadic subverter of CSP" (Ketner, "To Take"

53). But in 1959, Percy was subverting the subverter already: First he quotes Morris, “the basic terms of semiotic are all statable in terms applicable to behavior as it occurs in an environment” (“Peirce and” 54), and quickly gets to the crux of the issue: “What we must determine is in what sense, if any, one may apply the term symbol to both the behavioral sequence in Morris’s example and the contractual interpersonal event described by Peirce” (“Peirce and” 55). His answer is, in no sense at all does Morris’s dyadic interchange qualify as symbol. He continues that “Morris cites Peirce’s meaning-triad in support of current behavioristic semiotic. Yet this same semiotic cannot give an account of what Peirce considered the prime meaning-event in symbol-behavior” (“Peirce and” 56). As early as 1959, Percy’s grasp of Peirce’s semeiotic and its radical difference from Morris’s behavioristic semiotics was clear. And Percy’s argument is consistent throughout his career.

MODERN SEMIOTICS

In Percy’s *DoubleTake* article, he is trying to correct Morris’s hijacking of Peirce’s semeiotic and turning it into a dyadic and almost Skinnerian version of signs. Morris read Peirce, thought Peirce’s theory of signs was a good idea, but then he promptly rewrote it as raw nominalism (to which Peirce was radically opposed). Pragmatist John Dewey realized what Morris had done, as did Percy. In the *Journal of Philosophy* (Columbia University, which Percy read and published in), in a famous debate series, John Dewey argued back and forth with Morris; general opinion was the Dewey/Peirce position won at the time. Undaunted, Morris continued on in his same path and went on to become the father of modern semiotics. Morris’s semiotics, a nominalist theory of signs, was a complete misreading of Peirce, whose semeiotic is based essentially in a strong scientific realism.

For Percy, the semeiotic / semiotics divide was not a minor little quibble (though the nominalists thought so), but was a gaping San Andreas fault. Morris’s semiotics was picked up by the nominalists and eventually adopted by the postmodernists. Percy, however, was not a Morrison semiotician, nor a nominalist, and certainly not a postmodernist.

Present day semiotics is inadequate, according to Percy. The discipline of semiotics, as it stands now, is the failed attempt to bring together disparate disciplines of semantics, language, symbol, symbolic logic, and behaviorism. He criticizes the lone use of behaviorism or other physicalist views as an umbrella for understanding semeiotic, symbol, and language; the problem with that is the subset (science, behaviorism) subsumes its superset (semeiotic) and turns the whole thing “upside down” (Con I 292), so that other human characteristics accounted for by semiotics no longer have a place. He asks:

But how does syntactical analysis flow into behavioristics? One may make a syntactical analysis of sentences written down by a behaviorist, or one may study the sign response of a symbolic logician; but in what larger scheme may the two be brought into some kind of order? We find symposia written from either point of view, from the physicalist’s, who starts with matter and its interactions and tries to derive mind therefrom, or from the symbolic logician’s, who conceives the task to be the syntactical investigation of language of science. Far from the one flowing naturally into the other, the fact is that one has very little use for the other. (MB 247)

The mind-body problem is unresolved today, occupying a whole course in philosophy and countless articles in journals and books because no one has yet stumbled upon a sensible and coherent answer as to “what man is” or a “theory of man.” Neither the hard sciences nor the social sciences have a grasp on how a mind and body interact or who or what a human being is. Percy writes, “Modern anthropology deals with man as a physical organism and with the products of man as a culture member, but NOT with man himself in his distinctive activity as a culture member....Modern anthropology has been everything except an anthropology” (MB 239).

Traditional anthropology fails to present an adequate theory of man, so a “radical anthropology” is needed. Percy outlines some necessary characteristics:

A radical anthropology must take account of ontological levels more radical than the scope of the functional method.... Anthropology must be willing to accept not only functional criteria: what social and biological purpose is served by this or that cultural element or aesthetic criteria: whether or not a cultural element conforms to the prevailing cultural pattern and contributes to “cultural integration,” but a normative criterion as well. It must not be afraid to deal with the fact that a man may flourish by one scale and languish by another – that he may be a good organism and an integrated culture member and at the same time live a trivial and anonymous life (MB 240-41).

Percy illustrates this existential dilemma not only through his non-fiction, but in his fiction as well. His novels portray socially successful characters who are spiritually empty or unfulfilled; unsuccessful, struggling characters in their world who are spiritually full. His novels also show the mistaken solutions to psychological splits, engendered by current flawed anthropology and the misguided physicalist resolution of the mind-body split. His characters' inner rifts are healed by lapsometers (*Love in the Ruins*) or the right medication and dosage for sodium imbalances (*The Second Coming*) or chemical substances in the water causing behavioral efficiencies on the one hand, and behavioral malfunctions on the other hand (*The Thanatos Syndrome*). But, for Percy, these solutions fail to create a truly "fulfilled" individual and are based in an errant understanding of what a human being is.

Other responses to the mind-body problem do not offer any more adequate a resolution than physicalism or Cartesian dualism, as evidenced by the continued and unresolved debate on the topic. Philosophers' many options for resolving the problem range from idealism to physicalism, and variants in-between, but none receive a majority acceptance as a viable solution.

This task of uniting Descartes' unnatural division is Percy's obsession, and he thinks, the key to resolving the issue is found in an examination of language:

Would it be possible, I was wondering then in Louisiana, to use the new key [language] to open a new door and see in a new way? See man not the less mysterious, but of a piece, maybe even whole, a whole creature put together again after the three-hundred-year-old Cartesian split that sundered man from himself in the old modern age, when man was seen as a "mind" somehow inhabiting a "body," neither knowing what one had to do with the other, a lonesome ghost in an abused machine? Perhaps it was not a case of exorcising the ghost, as the scientists wanted to do, but of discovering a creature who was neither ghost nor machine. (MB 44)

Percy's goal was a paradoxical one and therefore a difficult one. His doubts about his success expressed in his National Book Award speech at the beginning of his career would never be relieved. Even one year before his death at the presentation of his last significant essay given at his last public speaking event, the Jefferson lecture in 1989, he would still be searching. That essay, "The Fateful Rift: The San

Andreas Fault in the Modern Mind,” published posthumously in *Signposts in a Strange Land* (with Percy’s first draft in *A Thief of Peirce*), summarizes the apex of his lifelong unfinished intellectual journey. It continues his constant primary assertion made throughout his life that our worldview and the sciences of man are incoherent when it comes to an accurate picture of human beings. This incoherence, this gap, this “fateful rift,” is present when science tackles the non-material entities such as “self,” “ego,” “consciousness,” and “mind” – entities that clearly seem to be a part of the cosmos, but cannot be adequately measured or analyzed by traditional science. The source of the incoherence he identified as within science itself, or rather a Newtonian science as well as Cartesian dualism which separates mind from matter; the answer was in the science of the 19th century founder of pragmatism, Charles Sanders Peirce.

Percy’s introduction to linguistics begins with his discovering that the field failed to get at the most important things, the things that might give insight into the nature of man. His primary focus of investigation was something much different from most other linguists and semioticians who failed to account for what he considered the most important parts of language – specifically the first language event, ***naming***, a single instance of a symbolic activity. Percy sees that current linguistics has three areas, three sciences of language:

- 1) Men responding to each other by means of signs (the science of behavioristics)
- 2) Men applying signs to things as names (the science of semantics)
- 3) Men analyzing the relations between signs (the science of syntax or symbolic logic). (SE 48)

None of these areas are a focus on the understanding of the symbolic event. The objective empiricist view is one that “amounts to the most monumental naiveté in the history of scientific thought or the most willful omission for everything that one’s theory can’t explain.... The phenomenon which is left out is absolutely central to an understanding of language, and more important, absolutely central to an understanding of man” (SE 49). That phenomenon is the naming event.

Therefore, Percy dismissed the behaviorist view in semiotics as well, and he did not spend much time examining the sentence of language (syntax). His direction means that he is less concerned with analyzing complicated grammatical syntax of various languages and how symbols are put together to create sentences (though he does do a little of this in *Message*). Grammarians and linguists had covered this already from a variety of different angles, yet they move us no closer to understanding the nature of the language act itself, and tell us nothing about what a symbol actually is. His concern was with that single thought, or naming – the single incidence of the symbolic act: the individual word and its ontological and metaphysical character.

Percy's exploration of that most mysterious first language event led him down many paths of investigation. He asks, "What are we to make of this peculiar act of naming? If we can't construe it in terms of space-time events, as we construe other phenomena – solar eclipses, gland secretion, growth – then how can we construe it?" (MB 154). How is it different from what animals do when they communicate? How does this difference inform us of man's difference from animals in other ways? How does it transcend mere biology? What happens inside of man physiologically when he names? What happens when the child utters his first word, a name of a thing? And then continues to learn and name his entire world? If naming is symbol, what is a *symbol*? How does it differ from *sign*? How important is symbol to a human being and his or her life? What exactly goes on in the process of symbolizing? How can this unique process of symbolizing help us to understand more about who human beings are and why they are "here"? Percy had a collection of questions no one in modern semiotics had explored, at least not with any kind of depth or breadth – although Peirce HAD explored them in semeiotic.

Percy was familiar with linguists Noam Chomsky and Ferdinand Saussure and cites them as influential to his explorations in language, but he usually contrasts his ideas with theirs, especially with Saussure's dyadic approach (*two* entities – word and object) to the language event. While Chomsky has

a third element – the Language Acquisition Device, or LAD – coupling the other two elements, Percy felt Chomsky still had far to go to adequately describe the language event, however.²⁹ Percy points to the structuralists after Saussure as responsible for turning him “upside down” (Con I 292). Percy believes Saussure was on the right track by including linguistics within the field of semiotics, but

once the structuralists turned it around, adopted the linguistic model as primary, to which semiotics must conform, then you’ve got all the problems the structuralists ran into: inability to account for the data of L-acquisition, the confinement of the semiotician to the strait-jacket of text and textual analysis. And you end up with some rather silly structural analyses of such things as fashion, even cooking, which is made to fit into, of all things, the phonological model of binary oppositions. (Con I 292)

The consequences are severe: “Mention the word ‘self’ to a structuralist or deconstructionist and you get not only a blank look but a dirty look. ...Levi-Strauss and Foucault aim for the exact opposite; to get rid of self” (Con I 292-293). In this upside down semiotics, the self is not explained, but rather, disappears.

Regarding other popular linguistic and semiotic perspectives, Percy clearly disagreed with most of them. Their more behaviorist, cause-effect, dyadic approach missed the essential point; they failed to adequately describe the language event in almost all ways, especially the first language event of “naming,” which they mostly disregard as a subject of study. The parsing and analysis of language units and combinations by transformational grammarians omits the primary event that makes all other language events possible: the first identification of thing with word, or naming. “Transformational grammarians do not have a theory of sentences. They have a rule of sentence structure. ... A theory of sentences must account for more than textual items, e.g., it must also account for indexical signs, percepts beheld in common, the status of the copula, uttered or unuttered, in naming sentences as well as NP-VP sentences” (Con I 291). Naming is usually completely ignored.

Percy also notes the problem of the polarization between laymen’s and professional linguists’ attitudes to language, with the naming act overlooked by both:

²⁹ See chapter 3.7 for a more thorough discussion of Percy’s view of Chomsky’s LAD.

To the layman, language is a transparent humdrum affair. Where is the mystery? People see things, are given the names of things when they are children, have thoughts, which they learn to express in words and sentences, talk and listen, read and write. So where is the mystery? That's the general lay attitude toward language.

On the other hand there are the theorists of language, who are very much aware of the mystery and who practice such esoteric and abstruse disciplines as transformation generative grammar, formal semantics, semiotics and who by and large have their heads up their asses and can't even be understood by fellow specialists. They remind me nothing more than the Scholastics of the fifteenth century, who would argue about the number of angels that could dance on the head of a pin. (Con I 178)

The present split between laymen and linguists reflects the larger split in the entire field of science.

There are "two kinds of people, laymen and scientists" (SSL 419). The former embrace "pseudo-mysteries" that (SSL 421), for Percy, have little basis in reality; the latter reject mystery in favor of subtly varying theories of materialism or physicalism, including those describing human behavior.

Laymen accept that human beings are a "mystery" that is beyond the scope of natural science, but laymen also follow all kinds of unexamined silly and magical hocus-pocus to describe humans, that are clearly not true (at least to Percy's scientific training), such as "the Bermuda triangle, UFOs, hypnotic regression, Atlantis, astrology" (SSL 421). On the other hand, scientists and other intellectuals often have a materialist or mechanistic view of the nature of humanity and the language event – seeing a human being as a chemical-biological system, a purely physical substance, solely subject to and explainable by the cause-effect scientific laws of physics and biology. Human thinking and communication, if not exactly replicable by computers, is at least not so dissimilar to computers. The result of this conflict is that a realistic understanding or explanatory model of the greatest mystery of all, the "Mystery of Language" (MB 150), is unexplored.

PEIRCE'S SEMEIOTIC

But in the midst of these divided camps – the "superstitious" general populace and the more academic linguistic theorists, who are generally more empirical, behavioral, and materialist – Percy did find some thinkers who could guide him. He read and abandoned the traditional icons of the field for three lesser known philosophers. Those Percy felt were closest to the answer were the medieval

Scholastics, Ernst Cassirer, Susanne Langer, and Charles Sanders Peirce. Percy explores these philosophers, and formulates the beginning of a theory quite different from that of most semioticians and anthropologists of his day.

In his first and primary expression of his theory of symbol and language, *The Message in the Bottle*, he repeatedly states that he draws principally from the works of three scholars in symbol or semiotic matters: Ernst Cassirer (primarily *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*), and Susanne Langer (primarily *Philosophy in a New Key*), and the semeiotic of Charles Sanders Peirce. Percy says, "Cassirer's thesis was that everything we know we know through symbolic media, whether words, pictures formulae or theories. As Mrs. Langer put it, symbols are vehicles of meaning" (MB 156). These semeioticians were the ones whom Percy did not use as a springboard for disagreement, but rather, as Pied Pipers whose work led him down a fruitful path.

Susanne Langer was the seminal influence in this regard. Percy did begin his career writing fiction (a largely unknown short story, "Young Nuclear Physicist," written in 1937, and two unpublished novels written much later, in the 1950s, *The Charterhouse* and *The Gramercy Winner*), but his first published success was as a philosophical essayist, particularly on language and symbol. While the discovery that his second daughter, Ann, was deaf also did much for his interest in language and symbol (Con I 193), Percy says over and over that Langer was the one who inspired his journey into linguistics and semeiotic theory.

In 1954, he wrote his first review, of Susanne Langer's *Feeling and Form*, referring also, even then, to her more famous book, *Philosophy in a New Key*. While Langer herself credits "physical science, logical positivism, mathematics, Freudian Analysis, German idealism" (MB 293), Percy found similarities between Langer's work on symbol and that of the scholastics, specifically Thomas Aquinas and the more current Jacques Maritain, as well as others, including Ernst Cassirer and the idealists (if not direct influences, they were at least saying similar things). Yet it is Langer who recovers symbol from the "toils

of idealism” (MB 293), making it more respectable to the hard-nosed scientist types, including Percy. More importantly, Percy is most impressed with the remarkable fact that she has perhaps initiated a “‘heresy’ for an empirical science of man: Has she exposed a fatal weakness in an exclusively empirical semiotic and anthropology, deliberately in the former and perhaps inadvertently in the latter? Is her heresy, in short, an apostasy?” (MB 291). Langer’s book accomplished several breakthroughs about symbol that rescues it from positivism and scientism. She shows that symbol “did not merely signal basic biological ends or announce objects but instead made knowledge possible” (Tolson 242), and as such, an understanding of symbol could offer a new epistemology and a better understanding of human beings (later to become Percy’s “radical anthropology”). Percy reiterates, “The naturalist orthodoxy of *Philosophy in a New Key* is widely known... but what is not recognized as widely is the thorough wrecking job done on behaviorist theories of meaning” (MB 291).

Percy builds on this from his own unique stance; he differed from Langer in that he saw human capacity for symbol as qualitatively different from animal capacity. Symbol, for Percy, is a tool or a means to the unique human need of existential “knowing” an other; symbol is not the need itself. It is more than a basic human need as Langer would have it – instead of being an end in itself it is a means of knowing, and it is a knowing by becoming, by “having” and “fixing” it from flux; it is evaluated by “Truth,” not by biological need or articulatory success.³⁰ Percy finds and voices several characteristics of symbol, characteristics that are either not identified or are unexplainable by scientists or semioticians of the day: it is different from “sign;” it is a uniquely human activity; it is non-empirical and non-behaviorist; it represents both “thing” and “self;” it is an identification, a pairing, a simultaneous event; it is intersubjective, requiring an “other” with whom one communicates; it is a vehicle of conception of an object and of meaning; it satisfies the need for more than information; it is transformative; it

³⁰ See Chapter 2.7 for a discussion of symbol as the means to knowing.

secondarily produces joy and delight.³¹ It is, ultimately, a mystery, in that a sensory articulation (the vocable) can “mean” or represent something. In this review, he laid the foundation for his language ideas that he would continue to articulate for the next forty years.

Langer as a pivotal influence for Percy is often overlooked in Percy studies, but in this particular area (language), it was she who was the first influence and who sparked his studies in Peirce, Cassirer, and others who later refined his ideas. Clearly Langer was an important influence his interest in language theory and “a new way of looking” at symbol and human beings through triadic theory, semiotic theory, semeiosis (SSL 117).

Langer and Cassirer sparked Percy’s interest in language and the uniquely human activity, as Percy saw it, of symbol. But it is from Charles Peirce that Percy’s triadic theory eventually emerges and thoroughly permeates his writing with layered meanings. It is an explanation and description of the symbolic event, but it is also far more, representing meaning and purpose, the human and the divine, love and spirituality, as we will see later.

Charles Sanders Peirce is the next major influence on Percy’s language theory, and the primary one. Though Percy later called himself merely a “thief of Peirce” in his years-long epistolary conversation with Director and Interdisciplinary Professor of the Institute for Studies in Pragmaticism at Texas Tech University, Kenneth Laine Ketner, chronicled in the book of the same name, it was Peirce’s view of symbol as triadic rather than dyadic that was the foundation of Percy’s views.

The dyadic (stimulus-response, cause-effect, behaviorist) and triadic (symbolic) distinction is the crux of Percy’s argument, and it was Peirce who introduced the idea to Percy. Peirce’s view was, to Percy, radical and unique:

Peirce’s distinction between dyadic and triadic behavior has been noted before, but so pervasive has been the influence of what might be called dyadic behaviorism that Peirce’s “triadic relation” has been recognized only to the degree that it can be set forth as congeries of dyads. Morris, for example, interprets Peirce’s triad as implying that in addition to response and

³¹ See Part Two for further discussion of human joy and delight at symbol-mongering.

stimulus there is a third factor, a “reinforcing” state of affairs. This is like saying that Einstein’s special theory will be accepted only to the degree that it can be verified by Newtonian mechanics. ...dyadic theory can account for perhaps 98 percent of natural phenomena. Unfortunately the phenomenon of talking-and-listening falls in the remaining two percent. What would happen if we took Peirce seriously? (MB 162)

Percy DID take Peirce seriously, and so Peirce’s ideas of the dyad to represent sign and the triad to represent symbol and explain human language would dominate Percy’s works, both non-fiction and fiction, from this point forward. In fact, Percy always intended to write a book on Peirce and his theory of language (TP xvi). Percy writes in 1971 a letter to Shelby Foote about such a book:

100 years from now it could well be known as the Peirce-Percy theory of meaning... this guy laid it out a hundred years ago, exactly what language is all about and what the behaviorists and professors have got all wrong ever since—laid it out, albeit in a very obscure idiosyncratic style. I propose to take his insight, put it in modern behavioral terms plus a few items of my own, and unhorse an entire generation of behaviorists and grammarians. (TP xvi-xvii)

As usual, Percy put that project aside for another novel, but a book on language theory *was* written later (*The Message in the Bottle*, 1975). In 1977, Percy reemphasized to Foote his interest in pursuing the “Peirce-Percy semiotic” (TP xviii). Ketner picks it up in several papers, calling it variously the “Peirce-Percy Conjecture” (TP 266) and the “Peirce-Percy Principle” (TP 273, 282). Clearly Percy agreed with Peirce’s theory of signs and symbol, and he wanted to pursue Peirce’s semeiotic, adopting it as his own.

Percy explains his impression of the importance of Peirce in a letter to Ketner:

My own feeling is that what I could call Peirce’s “triadic” theory is of seminal importance as a formal schema for making sense of that distinctive human behavior which involves the use of symbols (sentences, literature, art, etc.) and that it has not even begun to be explored – despite all the lip service to CSP by present-day semioticians – nor by literary theorists – nor by psychiatrists. (TP 14)

While Percy, the “thief of Peirce,” focused on Peirce’s triads and semiotic philosophy of signs and claimed not to have much affinity with the rest, the truth is, he didn’t know or read exhaustively about Peirce (whose prolific scholarship culminated in over 50,000 pages of writing). However, Percy’s knowledge of Peirce’s triadic theory, and his categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness became the ground for Percy’s view of the language events.

In fact, Percy considered Peirce's writing on signs "to be ancillary to his metaphysics of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness" ("Peirce and" 54). He also considers Peirce's classification of signs to be derived NOT from an empirical observation of human behavior (and thus behavioristic or dyadic as Morris would have it), but from Peirce's own metaphysical categories ("Peirce and" 54). Thus, the monad, dyad, and triad have their foundation in Peirce's concepts of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. Specifically, Percy focused on Peirce's differentiation between Secondness and Thirdness, or dyads and triads. "Accordingly, like Charles Peirce, I insist on the irreducible difference between dyadic and triadic phenomena," Percy says (SSL 283).

The triad (illustrating Thirdness) is the primary and most important description of the world and of human beings – while Firstness and Secondness are, ironically, secondary. While dyads represent two objects interacting in a discontinuous cause-effect manner, triads are a continuity of relations, a web of relations creating a fabric of life. Ketner elaborates for Percy: a Cenopythagorean (literally, a "new Pythagorean"), besides viewing the world through number, believes the "basic stuff of the cosmos is relation; ... the cosmos is a bunch of relations and worlds and the like.... Matter, in other words, is a just a certain kind of relational pattern or system (as is everything, says the Cenopythagorean)" – impacting science and religion significantly, and making 'spirit' real (TP 32-33). Firstness and Secondness then follow after Thirdness.

These concepts can preliminarily be summarized as follows: **Firstness** is represented by a "monad" and is simply a "quality" of an event or thing; Ketner says, "A *monad* is a one place relation such as described in 'This item has some property,' or for a concrete example, 'This thing is Green'" (KK). **Secondness** is represented by a "dyad," or two material entities that react upon each other, and it is, simply, a cause-effect reaction among discontinuous tangible material entities; Ketner clarifies a *dyad* as a relation connecting two items: "Some item is in relation with some other item," for example: "Jerold kicked a football" (KK). **Thirdness** is represented by a "triad," and it is essentially relationship – between

anything, whether abstract principle or material entity or both – and it creates “continuity” in the world; a *triad* is a three-place relation such as described in “Some three items are in a relation,” for a concrete example, “Sam sold his car to Bob” (KK).

Another Peircean doctrine is that Thirdness is primary and basic to the world – not Secondness, as is classically believed. A classical physicist sees separate and distinct atoms or particles and their underlying elements as the first and primary components of the physical structure of the universe; a Peircean physicist sees relationship and connectedness (among any and all entities) as the primary component of the universe – which includes physical structure and far more.³² Peirce applies this concept to human beings as well. All else, including atoms and individual human beings, are secondary to relationship. And, all is related.

In Peirce’s words: “First is the beginning, that which is fresh, original, spontaneous, free. Second is that which is determined, terminated, ended, correlative, object, necessitated, reacting. Third is the medium, becoming, developing, bringing about” (qtd. in Houser and Kloesel I, 280). To examine more thoroughly Peirce’s meaning of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness:

Firstness is the quality of a thing – many of these qualities describe and comprise the thing itself. However, Firstness is not a material entity itself, nor actually “existing” in the universe, but rather a perception that is registered *before* the concept can be apprehended. Peirce explains:

The first [category] comprises the qualities of phenomena, such as red, bitter, tedious hard, heartrending, noble; ... these are not qualities of things and are not in the world at all, but are mere sensations.... The qualities merge into one another. They have no perfect identities, but only likenesses, or partial identities.... The qualities, in so far as they are general, are somewhat vague and potential. (Peirce 77)

We can never have immediate consciousness of these qualities – as soon as we are aware of them, they have already passed. Everything has a “quale-consciousness” which is not just our awareness or sensation of it, but it is within the thing itself – “without reference to any other” (Sheriff 6). Firstness

³² See, R. G. Bell and K. L. Ketner, *A Triadic Theory of Elementary Particle Interactions and Quantum Computing*, Lubbock: Institute for Studies in Pragmatics, 2006.

also is freedom, chance, or spontaneity. “The idea of First is predominant in the ideas of freshness, life, freedom. The free is that which has not another behind it, determining its actions.... Freedom can only manifest itself in unlimited and uncontrolled variety and multiplicity” (Peirce 78-79). Firstness is potentiality and possibility – eternal and infinite – and from possibility, being or existence springs.

Secondness is what we think of when we think of actual reality, the physical world, that which acts according to the laws of Newtonian physics. “The idea of second is predominant in the ideas of causation and of statical force. For cause and effect are two; and statical forces always occur between pairs. Constraint is a Secondness” (Peirce 79). Secondness is what happens when physical, material qualities knock into each other; Secondness is undeniable. When two billiard balls or two cars hit each other, there is a cause-effect reaction that is consistent, orderly, and predictable (given that we have the capacity to completely and correctly gather and evaluate all the facts and information involved). The world of Secondness is the world that traditional science examines and describes:

The second category of elements of a phenomena comprises the actual facts.... An occurrence is perfectly individual. It happens here and now. A permanent fact is less purely individual.... Facts also concern subjects which are material substances. We do not see them as we see qualities, that is, they are not in the very potentiality and essence of sense.... But we feel facts resist our will. That is why facts are proverbially called brutal. Now mere qualities [Firstness] do not resist. It is matter that resists. Even in actual sensation there is a reaction. Now mere qualities, unmaterialized, cannot actually react.... In the idea of reality, Secondness is predominant; for the real is that which insists upon forcing its way to recognition as something other than the mind's creation. (Peirce 77, 79).

Secondness includes cause-effect reactions that take place in different times and spaces. One billiard ball, in one space, begins at one point in time. It travels through space and time, and hits another ball in another space and time, causing a reaction.

Peirce's differentiation between Secondness and Thirdness illuminate the naming event for Percy. Many linguists describe the language event in a manner similar to two billiard balls hitting each other. The word that is the name, and the object being named, exist at separate points in space and time. For Percy, this is inadequate to explain human language and human behavior. In the human

symbolic event, the word and the object are actually ONE, occurring simultaneously, united within the individual by a coupler. There is no space-time separation. To a human being, the word IS the object.

Quantum physics today also finds that viewing physical interactions solely in terms of Secondness is inadequate. It sees the world in terms of Thirdness or continuity. Quantum particles do not interact in a predictable Newtonian cause-effect manner.³³ Even Newtonian science itself is not solely in the realm of Secondness – it describes the material world in terms of Secondness, but it uses the concepts, such as laws and principles, and human abilities, such as sentences, language, that are “Thirdness” to describe them. Percy’s repeated complaint about traditional science’s inadequacy was this: the activity of science examines the world of Secondness, but presupposes and requires the human endeavors of Thirdness. Since classical science is capable only of examining Secondness, it cannot get outside itself to examine (or even perceive) its Thirdness activities. So what is Thirdness?

When these material cause-effect reactions (Secondness) become regular and predictable, we can create “laws” or general principles about results of these interactions. These consistent and repeated reactions of two particles or entities result in **Thirdness** – or the laws of the “habit-taking tendencies” of things. Newton’s laws and what we generally think of science – physics, yes, but also the social sciences such as behaviorism – rely on the principles of Secondness to make sense, but the laws themselves, the laws that material entities follow and exhibit, are examples of Thirdness.

Note that Thirdness describes things that are real in the universe, but that are non-material. For example, the law of gravity is a reality in the universe, but it is not tangible. One cannot see the law of gravity with one’s five senses, only the results of that law. The law of gravity cannot “bump into” anything and create a reaction, but it does describe and affect items in the world (e.g.: if I release the ball I am holding, it will fall to the ground.) Freedom is really found in the universe, and its presence

³³ See Appendix B on quantum physics.

makes a clear difference in the universe, but it is still non-tangible. Hamlet is also real in the universe, but he, too, is non-tangible. Peirce explains:

Take, for example, the relation of *giving*. A *gives* B to C. This does not consist in A's throwing B away and its accidentally hitting C, like the date-stone, which hit the Jinnee in the eye. If that were all, it would not be genuine triadic relation, but merely one dyadic relation followed by another. There need be no motion of the thing given. Giving is a transfer of the right of property. Now right is a matter of the law, and law is a matter of thought and meaning. (Peirce 92)

Furthermore, "...every genuine triadic relation involves meaning, as meaning is obviously a triadic relation.... a triadic relation is inexpressible by means of dyadic relations alone" (Peirce 91). Percy realizes, like Peirce, that Thirdness is directly related to meaning – and human capacity for symbol entails the human existential need for meaning and ontological knowing – meaning of the word, meaning of the event, meaning of life.

CENOPYTHAGOREANISM

Percy was consumed with understanding Peirce's concept of Thirdness – Firstness and Secondness notwithstanding. For Percy, the concept of Thirdness was the answer to his existential questions about who and what human beings were that differed from all other creatures. His participation in a years-long correspondence (1984-1990) with Ketner was founded on that compelling curiosity.

Ketner also associates Percy's particular number classifications of dyads and triads with Peirce's. The letters of Percy and Ketner chronicled in *A Thief of Peirce* begin with Percy's second letter to Ketner in which he says: "I take pleasure in being called a Cenophythagorean [*sic*]" (TP 3). The question is, of course, what is a Cenopythagorean? Peirce's term, "Cenopythagorean," is translated literally as a "new Pythagoras." (Peirce's predilection for inventing awkward and clumsy neologisms gave rise to the term, a name he also gave himself.) The famous Greek mathematician and philosopher Pythagoras believed that "all is number," that the world could be understood through number, and that it was structured by number. Pythagoras applied mathematics to music, and desired to unify all the sciences, from theology

to physics, through mathematics. Number was divine, according to Pythagoras, and he felt that it underlay the understanding of the entire universe. Briefly, for a Cenopythagorean, **number** determines the metaphysical quality of all entities and of the entire world. The name echoes the fundamental urge to picture, analyze, and understand the world by numbers, graphs, and pictures of those numbers – which Ketner recognized in Percy. Peirce’s view was not dissimilar; all entities in the universe can be understood as a monad, dyad, or triad, or combination thereof.

Ketner identifies Percy as a Cenopythagorean because of his ground-breaking work in unifying philosophy, literature, and semeiotic. At first Ketner calls Percy an independent discoverer, but Percy denies it, saying he came at it through Langer and Cassirer, “before landing on Peirce” (TP 12). *Thief* editor Patrick Samway interprets Ketner’s remark to mean Percy was “a new American Pythagoras who, in this case, attempts to make a breakthrough in uniting philosophy, literature, and semiotic” (TP x). However, Percy’s Cenopythagoreanism was far more than merely uniting these sciences. It was a new framework of fundamental basic working hypotheses to replace the inadequate dyadic framework. It was a framework for understanding the entire world – and ultimately seeing the world as a “fabric of life” in which ALL that is is united, related, and connected – just as Cenopythagorean Charles Sanders Peirce saw it. Percy, like Peirce and like Pythagoras, sought to explain the world in terms of number, which – as new Pythagoreans Peirce and Percy clearly saw, is a sub-type of relation.

3.2 VALENCY ANALYSIS

A Cenopythagorean sees number and relations as basic to understand the world. In Peirce’s case, he begins with “valency analysis.” Peirce says “that classification of basic concepts should be according to external valency” (TP 228). Ketner explains valency in detail in his essay, “Peirce’s ‘Most Lucid and Interesting Paper’: An Introduction to Cenopythagoreanism” (TP 195-231), reconstructing Peirce’s valency analysis and presenting the doctrine of Cenopythagoreanism as Peirce understood it. Valency can refer to many things – the number of chemical bonds formed by an atom in chemistry, the

number of arguments controlled by a predicate in linguistics, or the quarks (and anti-quarks) which give rise to the quantum numbers of the hadrons, or valance quarks, in physics. Note that in all cases, valency refers to the number of some entity – and that number determines the differences between entities in a field. In Peirce’s case, valency refers to the number of bondable ends on a diagram of logical relations.

Valency analysis, or Cenopythagoreanism, provides an objective method for classification of phenomena. Ketner explains valency to the reader with Peircean diagrams (or “valental graphs”), noting that Peirce considered only three valental graphs to be primary and basic: monads, dyads, and triads, each having distinctly different qualities. They are illustrated as follows:

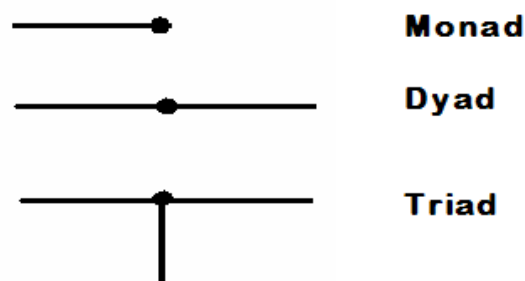


Figure 15: Peirce’s Monad, Dyad, and Triad Relation Forms

Note that the name and number of each graph corresponds to the **number of open ends** the graph has. These numbers of loose ends a graph has refer to its “valency” (hence the term, “valency analysis”) (TP 205). These three basic valental graphs can then be combined to create ones of greater or lesser number, but cannot be reduced (cannot be “taken apart”). All graphs included medads (no open ends); as well as monads, dyads, triads; and then, combinations of triads, creating tetrads, perissids (odd valents, or an odd number of ends), and artiads (even valents, or an even number of ends). However, all valental graphs are ultimately reducible to the three basic ones: monads, dyads,

and triads. Significantly, for Peirce and later for Percy, a triad can never be reduced to a group of relations comprising only dyads.

While Cenopythagoreanism is commonly considered to be applied to Peirce's theory of categories, which also uses numbers (the primary categories are Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness), according to Ketner it cannot be equated **only** with that (TP 216), as it is "clearly something much broader than that, for we find Peirce classifying according to external form in many areas of his thinking" (TP 206). Peirce applied valency analysis to understanding entities in terms of number and relation to **all** phenomena in the universe. All there is can be viewed and classified in terms of "valency." Peirce used number to understand the interactions and relations of the entire world.

Valency analysis originates in mathematical science, and Peirce's classification of the sciences considered the discipline of mathematics the most basic and fundamental one. Ketner quotes Peirce: "Mathematics is the one [science] which deals with relations in the abstractest form; and it never deals with them except as embodied in a diagram or construction, geometrical or algebraical" (qtd. in TP 217). The other disciplines, philosophy, phenomenology, ethics, metaphysics, as well as the physical sciences, follow from mathematics. Valency analysis then makes its way down the scale, and as a result, anything in the sciences can be described by valency analysis. Ketner says valency is "fundamental to Peirce's existential graphs" of all kinds (disciplines) (TP 207). Ketner also believes Cenopythagoreanism was "central and fundamental" in Peirce's thought, and that this leads to "far-reaching consequences" (TP 217), including "that mathematics, the science of diagrammatic thought, provides a way to 'see into' (comprehend) mind, which is a semeiosis, a bundle of relations. As a telescope is used in astronomy, so mathematics is the 'scope' of phaneroscopy" (TP 217).³⁴ Ketner quotes Peirce discussing valency analysis:

³⁴ According to Ketner, "A phaneron is 'whatever is before our minds in any sense whatsoever'" (TP 8). In Peirce's own words, "the Phaneron, ...[means] the totality of all that is before or in your mind, or mine, or any man's in any sense in which that

In classification generally, it may fairly be said to be established, if it ever was doubted [*remember Peirce was an expert in scientific classification*], that Form, in the sense of structure, is of far higher significance than Material. Valency is the basis of all external structure – as in the classification of elementary concepts – valency ought to be the first consideration. I term [this] the doctrine of Cenopythagoreanism. (qtd. in TP 205, 243)

Valency analysis comes first; his doctrine of categories and signs (at its most fundamental, Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness) is a mere byproduct, though an important one. The triad (illustrating Thirdness) is the primary and most important description of the world and of human beings – while Firstness and Secondness are, ironically, secondary. While dyads represent two objects interacting in a discontinuous cause-effect manner, triads are a continuity of relations, a web of relations creating a fabric of life. Ketner elaborates for Percy: a Cenopythagorean, besides viewing the world through number, believes the “basic stuff of the cosmos is relation; ... the cosmos is a bunch of relations and worlds and like.... Matter, in other words, is a just a certain kind of relational pattern or system (as is everything, says the Cenopythagorean)” – impacting science and religion significantly, and making ‘spirit’ real” (TP 32-33). Firstness and Secondness then follow after Thirdness.

Undergirding Percy’s existential observations of the naming event was a language theory using a numerical model derived from several sources, but especially Peirce’s concepts of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, which influenced Percy’s understanding of communication events in terms of dyads or triads. Percy also added the tetrad for further development of the human language experience.³⁵ In addition, these language theory numbers were to become integral to Percy’s last three novels.

3.3 TWOS AND DYADS – CAUSE-EFFECT SIGN

What I object to is the social scientist – what I would call a “triadic” creature, which is what all men are – demoting his subject to a “dyadic” creature. Con II 59

* * *

expression is ever used.” (qtd. in TP 214). A “phaneroscope” is to the “world of the sign user” what a telescope is to astronomy (TP 7).

³⁵ See Chapter 3.5 for discussion of the tetrad.

I am mainly interested in a semiotic model. I claim along with Charles Peirce that you can't account for language without accounting for non-lexical items such as looking at, pointing – everything that happens between two people when they speak. Con I, 129

* * *

Dyadic events are composed of two entities. They are linear, energetic phenomena (MB 39), meaning one entity follows the other, and they occur in the world of matter and energy, space and time:

It is a sequence of space-time events occurring in a causal order and mediated through physical structures. Thus sign (any sensible: sound, sight, smell, gesture) *leads to* wave disturbance (atmospheric or electromagnetic) *leads to* sensory reception at appropriate afferent sense organ (eye, ear, skin) leads to electrical impulse in afferent nerve *leads to* excitation of engram [residual trace of past conditioning] in central nervous system *leads to* electrical impulse in efferent nerve *leads to* appropriate response (muscular, glandular, etc.) (SE 53-54).

A dyadic event, or "sign," entails a space-time **separation** between word and object. (In contrast, a triadic event in communication, a symbol, has no separation between word and object.)

Traditional science explains the physical world through dyadic models: "Dyadic events are, presumably, those energy exchanges conventionally studied by the natural sciences: subatomic particles colliding, chemical reactions, actions of force-fields on bodies, physical and chemical transactions across biological membranes, neuron discharges, etc." (MB 162). This works very well for most of the world:

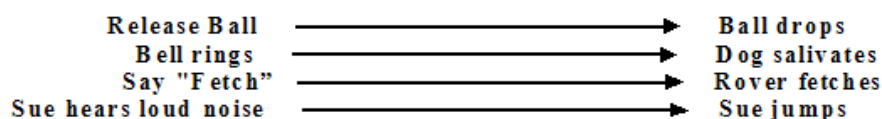


Figure 1: Dyadic Interaction

All well and good, and in the "energetic" world of classical matter, it works.

Structuralists and other language theorists transfer this model to communication. In the case of communication, a dyadic event includes two things as well, the signified (object) and the signifier (word). Percy uses the following example to show dyadic theory of communication, as when the father points to a balloon and tells his child that that is balloon (MB 43); in this picture, the father utters the word "balloon" and the child then looks for the balloon:

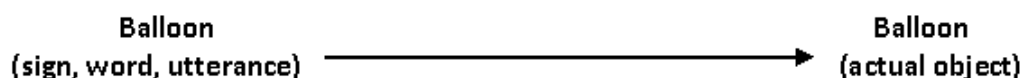


Figure 2: Balloon Dyad

For Percy, however, this is not an accurate description of the human language event of symbolism, of naming, which includes a third element. Dyads, for Percy, represent primarily animal communication – human language is a different matter entirely. The Atlanta zoo’s gorilla, Koko, was taught perhaps one hundred words in human sign language,³⁶ but Percy argues that she was using *sign*, not symbol. When Koko signed “banana,” it was a dyadic event, an action or motion merely in order to get the banana:

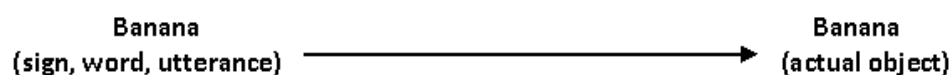


Figure 3: Banana Dyad

Koko’s signing had only *two* components – the object “banana” and the word “banana.” Her communication was a biological event, for survival, explainable by science. She signed “banana” to trainers in order to GET a banana – for her, it was a cause-effect event. The sign “banana” did not *become* the banana and *mean* the banana in Koko’s mind (as a symbol does in a human’s mind). The sign was an action that produced a result; it caused the banana to come to her. The sign (the cause) produced the banana (the effect), and they occurred at separate moments in time, one following the other.

The event is not metaphysically different from two billiard balls hitting each other. The purpose of the event was physical need, and not existentially or ontologically driven. Koko did not sign banana to wonder about the banana or know the banana or to communicate thoughts on the existence of the

³⁶ According to Percy here, that is. Her trainers say she learned 1000 signs over the years and could understand 2000 English words; her gorilla partner, Michael, could sign 600 words. Pinker feels this number may be exaggerated, however. At any rate, it is exponentially less than the human child’s fluency in language acquisition.

banana to another being – she signed it to satisfy her hunger. It was a biological act with biological significance, fully explainable by the traditional scientific method. Percy explains:

The essential requirement of signification is that there be an organism in an environment capable of learning by effecting an electrocolloidal change in the central nervous system and as a consequence responding to a stimulus in a biologically adaptive fashion. (It is also true of a human responding to the shout “Fire!” in a crowded theater.) (MB 256)

Sign is a result of conditioning; therefore sign function is particularly attractive to behaviorists and empiricists:

It was inevitable that sign function, which is clearly the elementary form of intelligence in animals and man, should offer itself as the prototype of all meaning structure. For it possesses the incomparable virtue of being inexplicable in terms of structure and function; it conforms to established causal principles and observable energy exchanges, and so is continuous with all other processes in the universe; it is verifiable; it is, and surely no-one would disagree, a matter of fact. A great deal of human behavior can be understood as a response to signs. Pavlov’s dog can be conditioned and so can man. (SE 54)

Many linguists take this behaviorist view of “symbol,” viewing it as merely a dyadic sign interaction and no more. Ogden and Richards, Stuart Chase, and Alfred Korzybski rule out a direct relation between name and thing, and postulate causal relations as the only “real” relations, discarding denotation as “wrong” (SE 73). Signification is thus the only basis of meaning for them; the symbol merely “calls up” the reference in the mind (SE 73). Or, according to Chase, the human act is merely “giving it [the object being named] a label” but the human cognition is the same as the cat’s. Percy explains of these linguists:

Naming is viewed as a sort of option, a semantic convenience. There is left out the whole epochal event in which the organism apprehends something as and only as it is associated with the symbol which is given him and which he in turn can produce. Knowing is no passive reception or reaction to a thing but the active creation of meaning through the production and mediation of the symbol—the subjective component which is so indispensable that Cassirer in his discovery of it, went to the opposite extreme, dismissed the thing as noumenon and pronounced the symbol the whole knowable reality (SE 75).

While idealists like Cassirer divorce symbol entirely from the physical world, behaviorists see symbol as purely physical, and this kind of physical sign is then their foundation of symbol, “the prototype of all meaning structure,” and that “...the symbol must be conceived as a kind of sign, and

symbolic meaning, involving words and thoughts, is seen as a refinement of the causal order of signification" (SE 54). Not so for Percy.

3.4 THREES AND TRIADS: UNIQUELY HUMAN SYMBOL

Something usually went wrong with the behaviorist S-R model whenever it was applied to a characteristically symbolic transaction, telling a story and listening to a story, looking at a painting and understanding it, a father pointing at a ball and naming it for his child, a poet hitting on a superb metaphor and the reader "getting" it with that old authentic thrill Barfield speaks of.... To be blunt about it, it doesn't work. (MB 32)

* * *

The behaviorist model fails, according to Percy, on many accounts to explain the productivity of language, naming, and sentences (MB 32). Symbol is a qualitatively different transaction than the behaviorist and structuralist model for symbol and sign. And it entirely fails to get at the real nature of symbol, as opposed to sign. A symbol is not a linear, cause-effect interaction contained solely within the physical world, nor is it up for investigation by science. Furthermore, a symbol's word and object are not separated by space-time as a cause-effect sign interaction is; symbol is a pairing, a simultaneous identification in which the symbol actually BECOMES the object symbolized. The object is contained *in alio esse* within the word:

But what is a symbol? A symbol does not direct our attention to something else, as a sign does. It does not direct at all. It "means" something else. It somehow comes to contain within itself the thing it means. The word ball is a sign to my dog and a symbol to you. If I say ball to my dog, he will respond like a good Pavlovian organism and look under the sofa and fetch it... But if I say ball to you, you will simply look at me and, if you are patient, finally say, "What about it?" The dog responds to the word by looking for the thing; you conceive the ball through the word 'ball'. (MB 153)

And symbol-mongering is conducted not for biological sustenance (for which "sign" would suffice) but is existential in nature.

Percy explains what a different kind of event "symbol-mongering" is. It entails triadic events that are not reducible to dyadic ones:

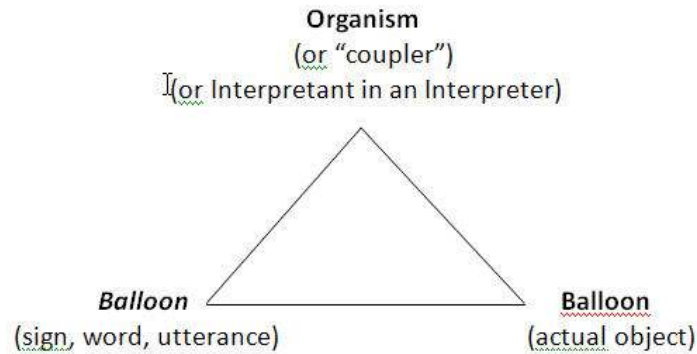


Figure 4: Triadic Interaction

Percy retains traditional structuralists' first two elements and adds a third, "a coupler," which transforms this communication act from sign to symbol. The coupler changes the makeup and interaction of the first two elements; in fact, it enables the interaction of the first two elements.

Percy first draws this triad in *Message in the Bottle* when using the example of blind and deaf Helen Keller's sudden insight and realization in the garden that the word "water" her teacher was signing in her hand "WAS" the water flowing over her hand. It did not represent the water; it did not signal water in order for her to acquire water; it *WAS* the water (MB 40):³⁷

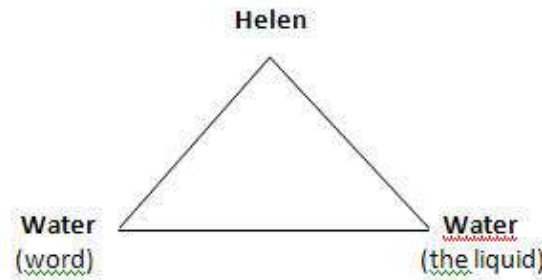


Figure 5: Helen-Water Triad

When Percy originally draws this triangle, he turns it on its side, perhaps because what comes first for Helen was Annie Sullivan's sign for water – which she had signed for Helen multiple times before. This time, however, something different had happened. Helen realized that the word was not a signal for

³⁷ See Chapter 2.1 for a detailed description of Helen's experience.

biological needs, but a symbol representing the existence of water. He draws this triad much later, in *Lost in the Cosmos*, in greater explanatory detail and from a different angle (MB 95):

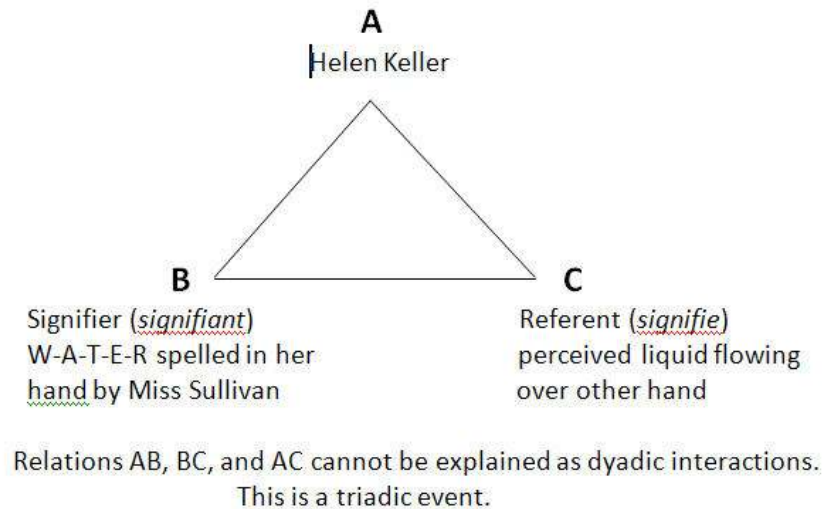


Figure 6: Helen-Water Triad II

Triadic symbol differs from dyadic sign in that the latter is a cause-effect, stimulus-response interaction, whereas the former is not (which is why a coupler is needed). With dyadic phenomena, two entities directly relate to and interact with each other on a physical level; with triadic symbol, there is no direct causal relation of signified and signifier. They are connected only through the third element, a coupler. Percy elaborates:

Naming the objects in one's world is a triadic phenomenon. He's [Charles Peirce is] not saying it's anything mystical; it's not magical; it is a certain kind of reality – just as real as Pavlov's salivating dogs. But it's different. It is qualitatively different. It's not the same sort of thing. I don't care what kind of phenomena you're talking about either: stimulus-response psychology, radiation of the sun on the earth, earthquakes, supernova, or the collision of galaxies. They can all be explained by action and interaction. They can all be set up in nice models, with arrows showing **A** hitting **B** or **B** hitting **A**. This applies to chemistry, to particle physics, to stimulus-response psychology; it applies to all standard sciences. It does not apply to triadic phenomena. (Con II 85)

Symbols, as triadic events, or relations, are not reducible to dyadic ones. Without the third element, the coupler or the interpretant, the connection between the first two, sign and object, would not be a reality in the world. It is a relationship of "quasi-identity," a semantical one. Symbol and object

otherwise have no biological or physical relevance to each other; their relationship is purely arbitrary. That is, no real connection takes place until the third element enters the picture (the organism, interpreter, self), realizing not only that a connection will take place, but which sign to connect with which object, and what the nature of that connection is. The interpretant is necessary to make the connection between object and word because the object-word relationship does not occur physically or dyadically, within a merely “energetic” world.

Percy elaborates on the nature of symbol by drawing another, modified picture of the dynamics of “symbol,” this time demonstrating more accurately the relationship of quasi-identity between sign and object (which in dyadic theory is considered the only relationship), and the *real* relation between sign and organism, and organism and object (MB 251):

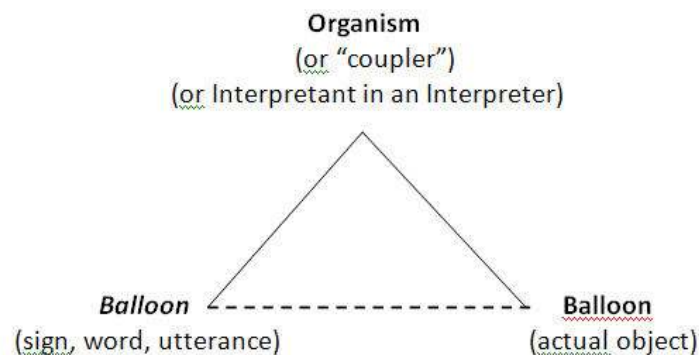


Figure 7: Relationship of Quasi-Identity

The solid lines represent *real* relations that are actually occurring in the world. “Real” means a “material happening among natural existents” (MB 253); with sign, there is a material or dyadic relation between sign and object. The dotted line here represents the relationship of quasi-identity – the lack of direct physical relation between the object and word. With symbol, there is NO material relationship between symbol and object, but there is a relation nonetheless. The relationship only exists between the two because of the presence of the relating third element; without the organism or interpretant there

would be no connection of meaning (relationship) at all. In fact, according to Percy and Langer, the best sign (symbol) is an arbitrary one, one that has nothing to do with the object it represents.³⁸

Other qualities that symbol has that differ from sign are that symbols do not “direct” our attention to an object, but are rather a “vehicle of conception” that carries the essence of the object within it (united by the third element, the interpretant, or coupler). Symbols don’t “announce” or “point” to an object, they, essentially “are” the object. Percy explains of Langer’s view of the difference between sign and symbol:

Mrs. Langer has made clear the generic difference between [sign and symbol].... Signs announce their objects. Thunder announces rain. The bell announces food to Pavlov’s dog. When I say James to a dog, he looks for James; when I say James to you, you say, “What about him?” – you think about James. A symbol is the vehicle for the conception of an object and as such is a distinctively human product. (MB 292-93).

To clarify, Percy draws another triangle of a commonly mistaken impression of symbol. The triangle shows arrows from sign to organism (as the organism hears the sign) and then from organism to object (as the organism’s attention is then directed toward the object). He is indicating a linear process of “symbolization” – one which is still erroneous when describing human symbol-mongering (MB 199, 252):

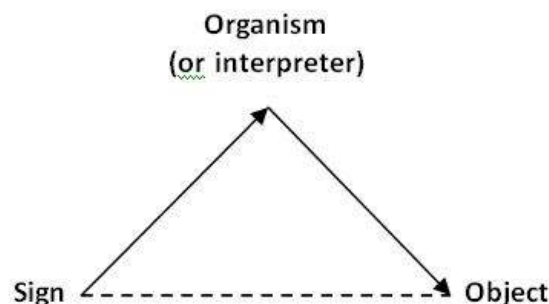


Figure 8: Linear “Symbol”

He diagrams what some might think – that is, what is erroneously described as – Helen Keller’s experience in the garden (MB 36):

³⁸ See Chapter 2.4 for greater discussion on the arbitrariness of symbol.

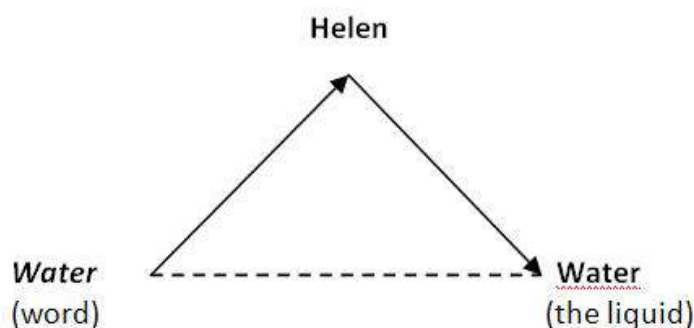


Figure 9: Helen-Water Linear “Symbol”

The dotted line is an imputed relation; the solid lines represent a relation of cause. However, the second arrow is pointing in the wrong direction, according to Percy. The message (sign) does not merely “pass through” the organism as this drawing implies. This is not one triad, but rather, two dyads. It is still a diagram of a linear and energetic event, still cause and effect – sign to object, just going through a third party, the organism – just another way of drawing dyadic “sign,” merely with a human filter. In this mistaken view, sign and object are still separate, in both time and space, not united within the individual, but merely passing through the individual.

The correct depiction of sign is with both arrows going directly to the organism, so that they are united within the individual **at once** in space and time. The sign event does not “pass through” the individual; in fact, without the individual, the sign event does not even exist. It actually occurs within the “organism” or individual or interpretant. The sign does not point to anything, but it **becomes** the object in symbolization within the organism. The timing is simultaneous.

Percy illustrates this using Helen’s famous epiphany in the garden, where she learns triadic symbol – though she had been signing all along to dyadically communicate and get what she (biologically or emotionally) wanted. However, it was only at that moment in the garden that she experienced and used *triadic* symbol: “It wasn’t the case that Helen had received the word **water**, which had then directed her attention or behavior toward the water. That wasn’t what happened. What happened was that she received **both**, both the sensory message from the hand Miss Sullivan was

spelling into and that from the other hand, which the water was flowing over” (MB 37). So Percy reverses the second arrow, drawing an entirely different metaphysical event. He draws Helen’s new symbolic comprehension as such, correcting the previous diagram (MB 37):

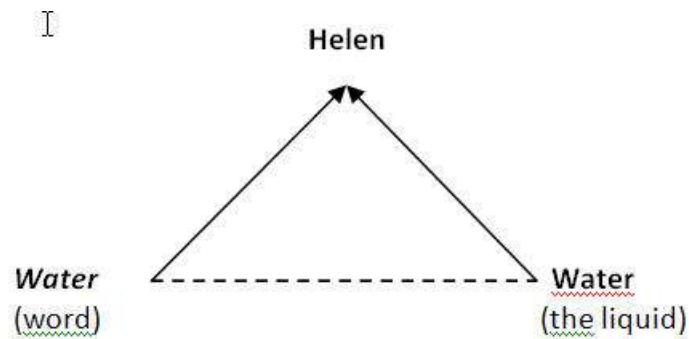


Figure 10: Helen’s Simultaneous Reception of Water (Word) and Water (Liquid)

For ALL human symbolic events, it can be drawn:

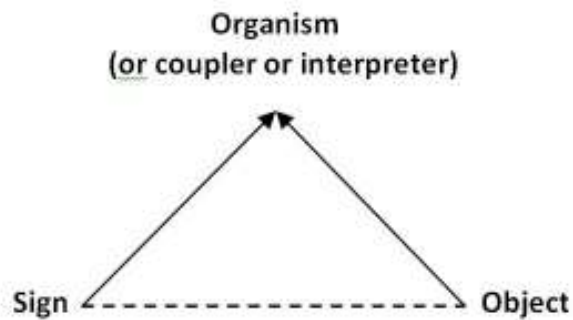


Figure 11: The Human Symbolic Event

It is never the case that the organism, or interpreter, receives the sign (say, for “water”) which then directs attention or behavior toward the water itself. What happens is that the organism receives **both**, both the sensory message of the word, and the perception of the word itself, and then transforms both (MB 37).

Word and object are “coupled” by the third element, something inside the interpretant, the organism, or in this case, Helen. That is, no real connection takes place until the third element enters the picture (the organism, interpreter, self, or in this case, Helen), deciding not only that a connection will take place, but which sign to connect with which object, and what the nature of that connection is.

The interpretant is necessary to make the connection between object and word because the object-word relationship does not occur physically, within an “energetic” world. Without the third element, the connection between the first two doesn’t exist; the connection is arbitrary and only exists due to the presence of the interpretant, the third element. It is a relationship of “quasi-identity,” a semantical one.

Percy writes at length of the mystery of what the third element, the coupler may be: an act? a brain location? a spiritual or divine entity?– but whatever it is, it still must exist.³⁹ He triangulates its existence; he extrapolates from the existence of two elements the necessary existence of a third. If the symbol occurs, there must be something enabling that occurrence.

A triadic event is out of the realm of cause and effect or biological needs, understandable by traditional science. This is a uniquely human capacity; all other physical events, including animal communication (according to Percy), is dyadic, not triadic. Koko the gorilla signs “banana” in order to GET a banana to eat. The diagram of her communication, even if drawn as a triadic one (for she is an organism), would still illustrate a cause-effect, linear event of dyads joined together, as in:

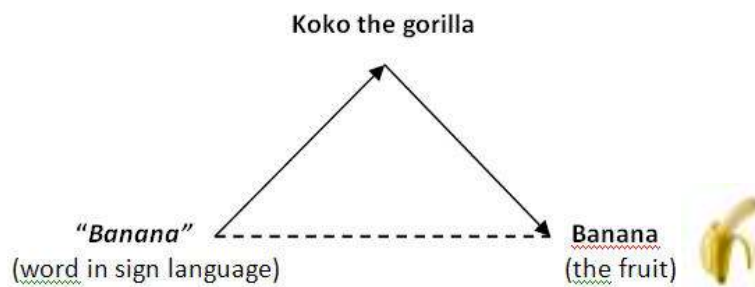


Figure 12: Koko’s Linear Communication to Get a Banana

Note that the arrows don’t arrive within Koko; they follow one another in a relation of cause to the end result of a physical banana to satisfy biological needs. The banana is experience **external** to Koko.

However, humans say banana for a variety of other reasons. We wonder at the banana, we wonder at the banana’s existence (as well as our own), we have awareness of the banana’s limited lifespan - its eventual end (as well as our own inevitable end), which brings great anxiety. Anxiety is a

³⁹ See chapter 3.8 for further discussion of the nature of the coupler.

human experience, a human “emotion,” due to an existential awareness made possible by capacity for symbol. The physical banana itself is not the end result. “Banana” becomes an ontological existence within the human and is experienced, through the symbol, *within* the human, not without:

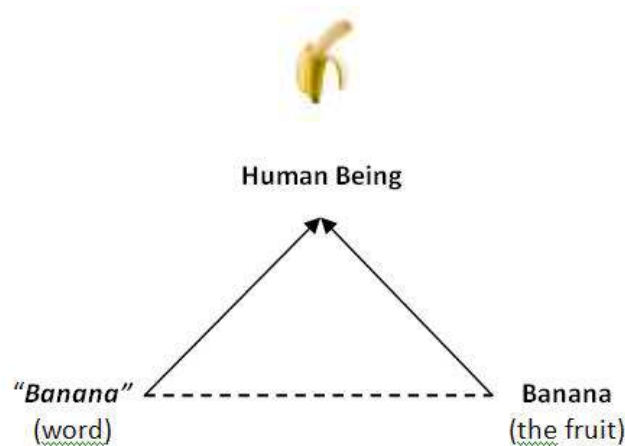


Figure 13: Human Symbolic Experience of “Banana”

The physical banana here is not obtained by the human due to symbol-mongering, just as water was not obtained by Helen due to symbol-mongering. Helen already had the water flowing over her hand; she merely realized the symbol WAS the water – a completely different epistemological experience than had been occurring with her sign-using before. Her eager repetition of the word afterwards, and eagerness to know the name of as many things as she could immediately afterwards, was not to receive the water, which she already had, but joy at recognizing the water, *in alio esse*,⁴⁰ within the symbol and within her. The same experience occurs with Victor of Aveyron and the French word for milk, *lait*.⁴¹

Percy further clarifies this difference in his own words, and he adds another element of symbol, intersubjectivity,⁴² or the fact that symbols are communally learned and agreed upon, that language never develops in isolation:

⁴⁰ Meaning, not directly or absolutely, but “in another mode of existence.

⁴¹ See chapter 2.1 for a discussion of both Helen’s and Victor’s experiences.

⁴² See Chapter 3.5 for a definition and greater discussion of “intersubjectivity.”

Nor does the symbol refer to its object in the same mode as the sign does. True, one can use the word *mean* analogically and say that thunder means rain to the chicken and that the symbol *water* means water to Helen Keller. But the symbol does something the sign fails to do. It sets the object at a distance and in a public zone, where it is beheld intersubjectively by the community of symbol users. As Langer put it, say James to a dog, and as a good sign-using animal he will go look for James. Say James to you, and if you know a James, you will ask, “What about him?” (MB 203).

The dog’s communication, sign, is a sound that is a pointing or directing the dog’s attention to the object; symbol, however, is a mutually agreed upon entity – by at least two people, if not the whole community – that becomes transformed into the object it symbolizes and stands in its stead. It is an “encounter with” not “pointing to.” In an “encounter with,” the symbol-monger experiences the object itself within the symbol, which is within self. Symbol is ontological, not biological.⁴³

The difference between sign and symbol is qualitative, not quantitative, according to Percy. As an individual event and as a species characteristic, human symbol use is qualitatively different from sign; for one thing, it did not progress slowly and evolutionarily from sign. It is a completely different entity:

The genesis of symbolic behavior, considered both ontogenetically and phylogenetically, is an all-or-none change, involving a symbolic threshold. As Sapir observed, there are no primitive languages. Every known language is an essentially perfect means of expression and communication among those who use it. As Helen Keller put it, once she knew what water ‘was,’ she had to know what everything else was. (MB 203)

This “productivity” is yet another characteristic of human symbol-mongering. Animals, such as Koko, may actually learn sign language, but the most signs Koko learned, despite the constant years-long efforts of trainers, is about a hundred or so in a decade, no more than a thousand in her lifetime. With sign acquisition, no joy is demonstrated at the symbolic experience, no eager compulsion to learn more and more words rapidly and abundantly – as human children, and more obviously, late language learners, including both Helen Keller and Victor of Aveyron, demonstrate so definitively.

Symbols can’t be explained by science because language (symbol-mongering) is instead a “non-linear, non-energetic natural phenomenon” that Percy calls the “Delta factor” (referring to the triangle

⁴³ See Chapter 2.7 for a greater discussion of symbol as ontological and existential.

created in diagramming this phenomenon) (MB 39). It is not cause-effect (therefore, non-linear), and it is without matter or energy (non-energetic). Without energy or matter, language doesn't have a material substance that can be examined by traditional or dyadic science. But, just like Peirce's concept of real but not existing, that doesn't mean language or symbol is not "real."⁴⁴ Triadic symbol, though non-tangible and non-existing in the material world, is as real as any dyadic event in that it affects our life and the entire world, regardless of our wishes otherwise.

So Percy puts forth several characteristics of symbol: it is triadic, entailing a coupler, an interpretant within the third element, the organism (human) who symbolizes. It is not a sequential pointing of sound to object, but a simultaneous identification and pairing of sound and object within the coupler. It cannot be examined through the means of dyadic science because the sound and object do not have a direct linear material relation, and the symbol does not "exist" physically, although it is "real" nonetheless. It did not "evolve" from sign, but is qualitatively different from sign. Symbolization produces joy and immense productivity. Symbol is uniquely human and indicates a "spiritual" side of humans. Rather than isolated and biological, it is intersubjective and ontological. Symbol is existential.

3.5 FOURS AND TETRADES OR DIAMONDS: SYMBOL AS INTERSUBJECTIVE COMMUNICATION

*Nevertheless, it [naming] is a pairing, an apposing of the word and thing, an act the very essence of which is an 'is-saying,' an affirming of the thing to be what it is for **both** of us. (MB 156).*

* * *

The I think is only made possible by a prior mutuality: we name. (MB 275).

* * *

Every sentence is uttered in a community. (MB 172)

* * *

But the fact remains that language, when it is spoken is a living tissue of assertions. Religion is not a museum of cult objects but a living tissue of beliefs, professions, avowals. There is no such thing as an isolated word in speech; it is only found in dictionaries (MB 223).

* * *

⁴⁴ See chapter 3.8 for a discussion of "real" vs. "existing."

Percy's use of twos and threes and dyadic and triadic drawings to describe his language theory was not unusual. The dyad with arrows was drawn by Saussure, the triangle was used by Ogden and Richards. Charles Sanders Peirce used a triad rather than a triangle,⁴⁵ but he still uses three elements to picture the language event. Percy's interpretations of triadic communication augmented their concepts, but he didn't stop there.

Percy added the tetrad, representing the human community that is necessary for language to occur. Our "feral children" Victor (and metaphorically, Helen) did not achieve language in their social and sensual isolation, respectively. They needed a community of humans to attain symbolic ability. Language occurs only in community. The symbolic act – a triadic event – does not occur alone. Percy expands on his "triadic" theory of language, creating in the end a "tetradic" theory of language.

Fours are next in Percy's language theory. In addition to the first three elements, that is, the signifier (word), the signified (object), and the coupler (whatever it is in the human that "couples" the word and object), there is a fourth element – the receiver of the symbol, the other human:

Without the presence of another, symbolization cannot conceivably occur because there is no one from whom the word can be received or meaningful. The irreducible condition of every act of symbolization is the rendering intelligible; that is to say, the formulation of experience for a real or an implied someone else. (MB 257)

Symbol, mind, and consciousness are social realities, not isolated realities. Feral children, isolated from other language speakers, do not learn the language of symbol, unless and until they are reunited with their human counterparts. "It is inconceivable that a human being raised apart from other humans should ever discover symbolization" (MB 279). For symbol to occur, consensus or agreement is needed that an object is to be called something that both hearer and listener have learned and agreed upon.

Not so for sign. Percy clarifies:

Mead's two dogs quarrelling over a bone exist in a conversation of gesture, a sequential order of gesture and countergesture. But a namer and hearer exist in a mutuality of understanding

⁴⁵ See 3.8 for a discussion of Peirce's triad.

toward that which is symbolized. Here the terminology of objective science falls short. One must use words such as mutuality or intersubjectivity, however unsatisfactory they may be. But whatever we choose to call it, the fact remains that there has occurred a sudden cointending of the object under the auspices of the symbol, a relation which of its very nature cannot be construed in causal language (MB 257).

We only learn what a word means because another human has designated it as such to us and we agree to such designation and meaning – we say “yes” to the other’s designation, and so we say “yes” not only to that symbol but also to the world created by community. We participate in community and affirm the “other.” “The second person is required as an element not merely in the genetic event of learning language, but as the *indispensable and enduring condition of all symbolic behavior*. The very act of symbolic formulation, whether it be language, logic, art, or even thinking, is of its very nature a formulation for *someone else*” (MB 200).⁴⁶

Therefore, symbol is not just existential, it is also communal. Percy explains, “By the very nature of symbolic meaning, there must be two ‘organisms’ in the meaning relation, one who gives the name and one for whom the name becomes meaningful” (MB 256). In addition to the “I” or the human being who names, there must be a “thou” to whom the “I” speaks. The other human being must be conceived, not as another object in the world (Marcel’s “it”), but as a co-celebrant (a “thou”).⁴⁷ Percy says:

Every act of symbolization, forming an hypothesis, creating a line of poetry, perhaps even thinking, implies another as a co-conceiver, a co-celebrant of the things which is symbolized... a new and indefeasible relation has come into being between the two organisms in virtue of which they are related not merely as one organism responding to another, but as namer and hearer, an I and a Thou. (MB 257)

The other person, the “thou,” understands the “I” because both have agreed upon the name for the object and understand that to be so. This is the concept of “intersubjectivity.” Percy’s tetradic drawing for this interaction is:

⁴⁶ Peirce’s conclusion in 1868 is similar. See CP 5.354-357.

⁴⁷ See Chapter 1.3 for more discussion on I and Thou relationships.

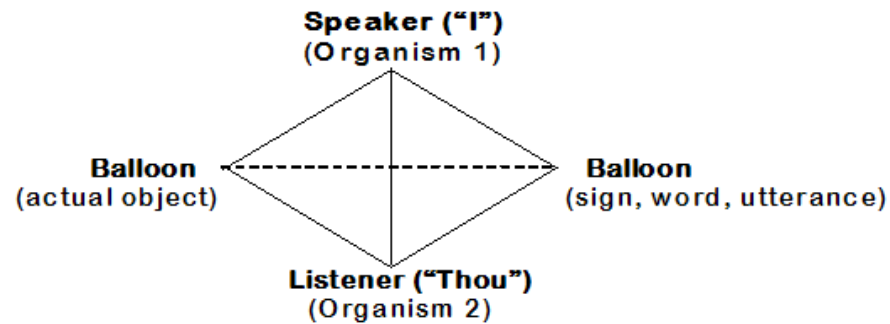


Figure 14: Tetradic, or Intersubjective, Communication

The horizontal axis is still a relationship of quasi-identity (noted by dotted line), seeming to convey connection and identity, but it is actually not a direct connection or identity; the identity is only possible through the presence of the other two – the speaker and listener, or rather, the namer and hearer of the name. The vertical axis, indicated by the solid line, is the relationship of intersubjectivity between the two human beings, and has a real being in the world.

For Percy, what happens along the vertical axis defines and makes possible what happens along the horizontal axis. “Between the sign and organism, organism and object, ‘real’ causal relations hold. The line between sign and object is dotted because no real causal relations hold but only an imputed relation, the semantical relation of designation” (MB 252). Percy explains:

Symbolization is of its very essence an intersubjectivity. If there were only one person in the world, symbolization could not occur (but signification could); for my discovery of water as something derives from your telling me so, that this is water for you too. The act of symbolization is an affirmation: Yes, this is water! My excitement derives from the discovery that it is there for you and me and that it is the same thing for you and me. Every act of symbolization thereafter, whether it be language, art, science, or even thought, must occur either in the presence of a real you or an ideal you for whom the symbol is intended as meaningful.... Hocking⁴⁸ suggests that the symbol arises from the direct experiential knowledge that “We are.” But surely it is that the “We are” follows upon and is mediated by the symbolization, the joint affirmation that this is water. (MB 281)

This tetrad, like the triad, is not a cause-effect reaction, but part and parcel of the real nature of symbol as identification. Symbol is a mutual realization between two people that the name means the

⁴⁸ William Ernest Hocking, 1873-1966, was a student of Josiah Royce, an objective idealist philosopher who was influenced by Peirce. Some say Peirce’s ideas entered the academy through Royce’s and his student’s teachings and writings.

object – but it extends beyond giving “life” to the object itself, to giving life to the other being as a “Thou,” and so a celebratory communion between the namer and hearer. “The two are suddenly no longer related as organisms in a nexus of interaction but as a namer and hearer of a name, an I and a Thou, co-conceivers and co-celebrants of the object beheld under the auspices of a common symbol” (MB 271). They are “co-knowers” and “co-affirmers” (MB 271).

There is an affirmation between the two, a yes-saying – of the ontological presence of the two communicators, as well as of the object. “Symbolization... is the co-intending of the object by its symbol. It is always the fathoming of intent, an ‘Oh, I see [realize, understand, comprehend] what you mean!’ Its characteristic tone is affirmatory, a ‘Yes! Yes! I understand!’ It is in no wise a reaction but a sharing, a participation. ... an indefeasible bond” (SE 78). This is Buber’s I-Thou and Marcel’s “intersubjectivity” (MB 258). The communicators bond in their identification and affirmation of the object. Intersubjectivity is not some intangible ethereal process, it is “by no means a reducible, or imaginary, phenomenon, but is a very real and pervasive bond and one mediated by a sensible symbol and a sensible object which is symbolized” (MB 258).

Percy clarifies the qualitative difference between sign interaction and symbol interaction between communicators:

in the sign situation or organism in an environment, symbolization cannot possibly occur. No amount of complex sign interpretation can ever issue in the simplest name-giving because there is no name-giver, or else no-one for whom the name shall be intended as meaningful. The objection immediately arises: but I symbolize perfectly well alone; in fact, it is only when I am alone that I create new meaning, by the making of the art symbol, by the naming of new species, by the formulation of a scientific hypothesis. True, but the irreducible condition of every symbolic act, and the very essence of the truly creative effort, is the rendering intelligible, that is, the formulation of experience for a real or implied someone else. If a Robinson Crusoe is able to formulate the experience of twenty years alone, it is because he has already learned the social trick of symbolizing, that is, of rendering public his experience. The simplest or most complex symbolization, a pointing out a thing and naming, or the sudden apprehension of a great line of poetry, requires as a minimal condition of its operation, the Two – a Namer and a Hearer, whether real or posited. (SE 72)

Percy elaborates that not only is Crusoe's (or our) symbolization dependent on an "other" for its origination, it is dependent on an "other" for its continuing process.

But not only are the two a genetic requirement of symbolization – as the presence of two is a genetic requirement of fertilization – *it is its enduring condition*. Even Robinson Crusoe writing in his journal after twenty years alone on his island is performing a through-and-through social act. Every symbolic formulation, whether it be language, art, or even thought, requires a real or posited someone else for whom the symbol is intended as meaningful. (MB 270-71)

The soulful imperative of this human need for intersubjectivity and community is illustrated in a more modern version of the Crusoe story - the film *Castaway*. The protagonist, Chuck Noland, played by Tom Hanks, is washed ashore, alone, on a deserted island after a plane crash. Various items have also washed ashore – and of one, a volleyball, he creates an imaginary companion (Percy's "posited," not real, other), that he names Wilson – thereby creating for himself an intersubjective community, creating an "other" to whom he talks in his years of isolation. In one scene, he is devastated when, after years of talking to the ball, of ontological affirmation of his companion and his experiences through his intersubjective relationship, Wilson accidentally floats away and Noland is left entirely alone, existentially – though he has been so, physically, all along.

3.6 SYMBOL AS CONSCIOUSNESS

Not only is language a communal act for Percy, language is necessary for consciousness. Thought does not enable symbolization. Rather, symbol is an act of the mind that is prior to and enables thought. Langer explains, "As a matter of fact, it is not the essential act of thought that is symbolization, but an act essential to thought, and prior to it. Symbolization is the essential act of mind; and mind takes in more than what is commonly called thought" (41). Consciousness literally means "knowing with" and Percy says, in true Peircean fashion, that consciousness as such is "not a state of affairs, but a relation, or rather two relations, the relation of knowing and relation of with" (SSL 124). We are not merely in a state of being conscious – we are always conscious OF something, and we can be conscious of something because it has a name. The name is given to us by an "other" and is spoken by us to

others. (Percy's examples of Helen Keller and Victor of Aveyron are perfect illustrations of this principle.)

Symbol cannot occur without community – the intersubjective relationship – and thought cannot occur without symbol that relies on this community. “The *I think* is only made possible by a prior mutuality: *we name*,” Percy explains (MB 275). Susanne Langer before him emphasizes that there is no thought without symbol: “For if the material of thought is symbolism, then the thinking organism must be forever furnishing symbolic versions of its experiences, in order to let thinking proceed” (Langer 41). Naming is “the warp and woof of the fabric of our consciousness,” Percy says (MB 154), a phrase he gets from Langer:

The modern mind is an incredible complex of impressions and transformations; and its product is a fabric of meanings that would make the most elaborate dream of the most ambitious tapestry-weaver look like a mat. The warp of that fabric consists of what we call “data,” the signs to which experience has conditioned us to attend, and upon which we act often without any conscious ideation. The woof is symbolism. Out of signs and symbols we weave our tissue of “reality.” (Langer 280)

Percy's “fabric of life” in his novels is embedded here – and it is symbolism that is the thread with which we weave that fabric. Dyadic sign alone is merely directed toward and allows for biological sustenance but it does not extend to those human perceptions of a “world” and “meaning.”⁴⁹ The addition of symbol-mongering creates a perception of a fabric of life, a web and place for signs, that gives our world content, substance, meaning, and connectedness.

Percy lays the groundwork with his triadic model for symbol: the concept of the object is not in the outer world, but the essence of the concept exists *in alio esse*, within the sound, the vehicle conveying the concept, within the organism, which is always (for Percy) a human being. Thus words (symbol) are necessary for conceptualization; without them we do not have the means to think about (wonder about, meditate on) the object other than our perception of its biological usefulness.

“Awareness is thus not only intentional in character; it is also symbolic.... The act of consciousness is the

⁴⁹ See Chapter 2.5 for Percy's discussion of “world.”

intending of the object as being what it is *for both of us* [my italics] under the auspices of symbol" (MB 274). The intersubjective community, the Hearer and Namer, mutually designate ("co-affirm" and "co-intend") the object to be what it is, through symbol, and thus become "aware" and "conscious" of it above and beyond its biological significance (if any):

The conscious act is always intentional: One is never simply conscious, one is conscious of this or that.... It is not enough to say that one is conscious of something; one is also conscious of something as being something. There is a difference between the apprehension of a gestalt (a chicken perceives the Jastrow effect⁵⁰ as well as a human) and the grasping of it under its symbolic vehicle. (MB 272)

It follows then that, since symbol is necessarily communal, consciousness is only possible in community through shared symbol, the only kind of symbol there is:

I am not only conscious of something, I am conscious of it as being what it is for you and me. ... conscious ... means a *knowing-with*.... Intersubjectivity must be constituted at the very heart of consciousness... Consciousness and intersubjectivity are seen to be inextricably related; they are in fact aspects of the same new orientation toward the world, the symbolic orientation. (MB 274)

Human beings need another human for symbol; therefore, uniquely human consciousness can only occur with another human being. Mind is a social reality, not an isolated reality; there is no awareness of reality that is not agreed upon. Percy elaborates:

Sartre would amend the Cartesian and Husserlian formula for the original act of consciousness, *I am conscious of this chair*, to read, *There is consciousness of this chair*, both of which single out the individual consciousness itself as a prime reality. An empirical study of the emergence of symbolization from the biological elements of signification suggests the further revision of Sartre:

This "is" a chair for you and me.

Which co-celebration of the chair under the auspices of the symbol is itself the constituent act of consciousness. (MB 276)

The "cointending" of the symbol for the chair creates agreement, affirmation, and becomes a celebration of life. Symbol-mongering creates a connection between the two humans engaged in the

⁵⁰ Joseph Jastrow, 1863-1944, was a fellow in psychology at Johns Hopkins from 1885 to 1886 where he was a student of Peirce's and assisted him in experiments in experiments in psycho-physics.

symbolic communication; it creates connection between the individual's consciousness of the world and the world itself, and it creates connection within the world. All events and objects in the world, all that exists – become connected through symbol. It creates a “fabric of life.” The world is now a completely different place – no longer a cause-effect entity (Peirce's Secondness), but a set of relations (Peirce's Thirdness).

This Thirdness, awareness of the world as something beyond biological sustenance, as a connectedness, as a set of relations, a web of relatedness, is a distinctly human capacity and one that creates uniquely human characteristics. Symbolization creates joy and a “world”:

What, then, is changed in the semiotic relation by Helen Keller's inkling that this *is* water? ... Not only does she have the sense of a revelation, so that all at once the whole world is open to her, not only does she experience a very great happiness, a joy which is quite different from her previous need-satisfactions, but immediately after discovering what the water is, she must then know what everything is. (MB 259)

Percy says this symbolic and communal consciousness then “delineate[s] and transform[s] all sensory data into intentional symbolic forms” (MB 283); the world is no longer of biological import, but it now has existential import. With symbolic consciousness, the world is now rendered “formulable” (MB 283). This means Marcel's description of the celebratory co-intending of naming carries with it an entrance into this “existential and figurative” world (MB 283), that heretofore did not exist.

The significance of the act of naming cannot be underestimated – not only does it merely satisfy a basic human need, but it is what makes the individual a human being – it creates consciousness itself. With the act of naming, the individual becomes conscious and becomes a human being. Symbolization is the “very condition of our knowing anything” (SSL 132), and through naming, we are able to know everything else. Percy says it is without precedent in human history. With naming, whether it is the event 40,000 years ago when the human species acquired language, or the individual toddler who goes around pointing in joy at common household objects and exclaiming its name, not only is this an event

in which “something new has happened, but ...the event is probably the most portentous happening in the development of a person” (132).

3.7 THE COUPLER: DYADIC SEMIOTICIANS FAIL TO DESCRIBE A TRIADIC ELEMENT

The apex of the triangle, the coupler, is a complete mystery. What it is, an ‘I,’ a ‘self,’ or some neurophysiological correlate thereof, I could not begin to say. (MB 327)

* * *

THE THEORISTS

The nature of the coupler plagued Percy throughout his career. He ends his book on language theory questioning what it could possibly be; he finally seems to give up in his second language manuscript, but he really never stopped wondering about it and searching for some kind of explanation of it. At the end of his life, his correspondence with Peirce expert Ketner still was largely consumed with what the coupler might be. The coupler, the interpretant, is more important than it seems at first glance: it not only can explain what happens in the language event (how the word becomes object), but is actually the crux of the mind-body dilemma. To solve the nature of the coupler is to solve how a mind and body interact (or at least have a good start in understanding it). The coupler was an important, often central, part of Percy’s search to understand symbol, one that remained unresolved even until his death. So what is the coupler? It is the third element of a triadic entity that joins the other two elements.

The world is triadic, and primarily so, according to Peirce – Thirdness is the foundation for Firstness and Secondness.⁵¹ Three is pattern, order, and relatedness, which Peirce saw as the nature of the world. Three is also predictability of Secondness or the physical world; with three, one can predict the fourth, fifth and sixth number or event - and the effect of a cause. The concrete material world of visible cause-effect dyadic reactions is Secondness. But existing in a triadic world, these dyadic events have greater significance. They become signs of a third.

⁵¹ See chapter 3.1 for discussion of Peirce’s Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness.

Further, if three exist but only two can be perceived, one can, through examining the characteristics of the two, “triangulate” to determine the existence of the invisible third. Triangulation, using two points to determine the location and presence of a third (or determine something about it), reveals a point that we cannot see or know otherwise – except that the first two imply its necessary existence. In this world, we can only triangulate for the presence of God, we cannot empirically test for God. And this world has signs that we can pay attention to (or not) to see and detect this presence. Percy’s novels are replete with these “signposts in a strange land” that point to the existence of a “third” – or God – in the world.⁵²

Language, for Percy, is the same. The presence of the object and the word – the symbol for the object – indicates a third presence, that of the coupler, echoing the divine presence. The coupler must exist if the word exists. “Without the third element, the connection between the first two does not take place. The third element, the interpretant, is the human element and as such, it contains many elements that cannot be grasped...it is a mystery” (MB 150). The communication or message, the symbol of the object, is filtered, understood, and modified through the third element. Only something that is uniquely human enables language and naming to occur, but what that is, so far, is unknown. Percy’s triangle of sensible word, or signifier, and sensible object, or signified, has a third unseen or unsensible element which combines the two. It is obviously present, but it is an unknown mystery. He describes a boy who hears the word “balloon” from his father:

For it is not the case of the boy being the site where certain interactions and energy exchanges take place, arrows flying along neurons and jumping synapses. Something else happens. However many arrows fly along the boy’s neurons (and they do), he does something else. He couples balloon with balloon. But who, what couples? Who, what is the coupler? Do you mean some part of his brain does the coupling? I could not say whether it is his brain which couples, his “mind,” his “self,” his “I.” All one can say for certain is that if two things which are otherwise unconnected are coupled, there must be a coupler. (MB 44)

⁵² Peirce’s article, “A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God” (CP 6.452 F.), argues similarly as Percy here.

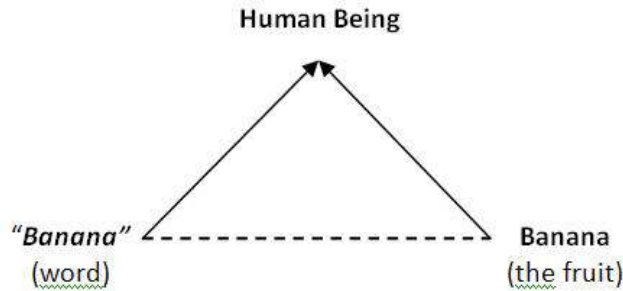


Figure 16: Triadic Interaction

In fact, the third element is so mysterious Percy can't come up with a term for it. It is something inside the human being – or is it the essence of the human being, the whole person? Even up to the end of his life, Percy was confused as to what to call it. In a letter to Ketner, he writes: "I need a word. What would you call the entity which asserts an assertion, interprets an interpretant, receives and understands a name (like Helen Keller), constructs a model, etc.? There are dozens of names, none any good – e.g., interpreter, namer, soul spirit, self consciousness person, etc.... Am tending to person" (TP 51, 52).

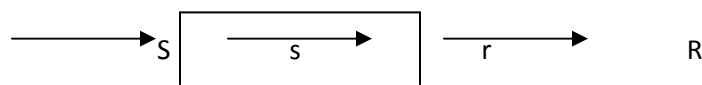
Percy's concern is then this: what is inside the human being, what is in what linguist-philosopher Noam Chomsky called the "black box" or "language acquisition device" (LAD) in the mind of man that enables him to comprehend language (MB 15). Percy feels little progress has been made in solving this mystery in the past 300 years:

I wonder if... we have not given up on the attempt to put man back together again, if indeed he was ever whole, or whether man isn't like Humpty Dumpty, who fell off the wall three hundred years ago, or rather was pushed by Descartes, who split man into body and mind – two disparate pieces which, incidentally, Descartes believed were connected through the pineal body. As a matter of fact, I'm not sure we've made a better connection between the two since. (SSL 115)

While Percy does refer to top linguists Noam Chomsky and Ferdinand Saussure as influential to his explorations in language, he usually veers widely from the perspective of these two linguists, often contrasting his ideas with theirs, especially with Saussure's dyadic approach (*two* entities – word and object) to the language event. Although he feels Chomsky, who realizes the complexity of language and

notes the failings of Saussure's dyadic paradigm, has a more accurate view on the topic because Chomsky postulated a third entity, a kind of coupler of the first two, Percy still found Chomsky's metaphorical language acquisition device (LAD) – the hypothesized “black box” inside the human mind where language processes take place – was inadequate to describe what was really happening. Chomsky concludes first that the black box is “mind stuff” and then “computer-like elements” (MB 16). For Percy, what is contained in this black box is entirely different than what Chomsky labels it. “What seems fairly obvious, however, is that despite claims to the contrary this schema is in no sense an explanatory model. It is no more than a statement under investigation. The ‘LAD’ appears to be a black box whose contents are altogether unknown” (MB 301-302). Percy speculates at length as to the “contents of the LAD: Cartesian mind-stuff, S-s-r-R neuron circuitry, or both?” (MB 321). Percy does speculate on a physical location and structure in the brain for language and symbolic activity – Chomsky's LAD – however existential and non-dyadic other aspects of its operations may be. He ventures into possible physical explanations as to what this “coupler” might be on a neurophysiological/anatomical level:

[It is] *not* a neuron circuitry transmitting S-R arcs with little s's and r's interposed (what Peirce would call a series of dyads) of the following order:



but rather a structural-functional entity with the following minimal specifications: (1) It must be, considering the unique and highly developed language trait in man, something which is present and recently evolved in the human brain and either absent or rudimentary in the brains of even the highest nonhuman primates. (2) It should be structurally and functionally triadic in character, with the “base” of the triad comprising what must surely be massive interconnections between the auditory and visual cortices. What else indeed is the child up to for months at a time when it goes around naming everything in sight – or asking its name—than establishing these functional intercortical connections? (MB 324-326).

Percy then refers to the work of Norman Geschwind: his discovery of a “recently evolved structure, ‘the human inferior parietal lobule, which includes the angular and supramarginal gyri, to a

rough approximation, areas 30 and 40 of Brodmann” (MB 326). Percy elaborates that Geschwind finds that this structure is not present in the macaque, and only rudimentarily present in higher apes. As late as his last novel, Percy refers to this brain structure, implying that it is not only responsible for speech, but also differentiates animals from humans:

By accident or not, are there not signs of a suppression of cortical function in Mickey and Donna? I’m thinking particularly of the posterior speech center, Wernicke’s area, Brodmann 39 and 40, in the left brain of right-handed people. It is not only the major speech center but, according to neurologists, the locus of self-consciousness, the “I,” the utterer, the “self” – whatever one chooses to call that peculiar trait of human by which they utter sentences and which makes them curious about how they look in a mirror—when a chimp will look behind the mirror for another chimp. (TS 22)

Thomas Sebeok criticizes this move: “Rather prematurely, and, I think, uncritically, Percy grasps at an idea proposed by the late Norman Geschwind, who allegedly uncovered in the cortex the neurophysical substrate for the triadic structure of the symbolic act” (Sebeok 43). Sebeok thinks Percy is on the wrong track.

However, Percy’s language theory ultimately disagrees with both the Skinnerians and the Chomskians. He did not think either had the answer. And Percy himself was never consistent with what he thought the coupler was. In the end, the idea of a purely physical LAD (or even a purely abstract LAD) did not sit well with Percy either; these solutions did not solve the mind-body problem but led him directly back into physicalism or dualism:

... Noam Chomsky is frank to admit our nearly total ignorance on the subject. He does draw a picture. He indicates the central phenomenon of language by a black box, contents unknown, labeled LAD, the “language acquisition device,” which receives the random input of language a child hears and somehow converts it into the child’s capacity to utter any number of sentences in language. So certain indeed is Chomsky that what happens inside that box cannot be explained by the S’s and R’s of psychologists that at one time he saw fit to resurrect the old idea of Descartes that only mind, a mental substance, can account for the extraordinary phenomenon of language. The black box was full of mind stuff, according to Chomsky. Later he said it probably contained computer-like elements.

What is the black box then, a ghost or a piece of machinery? (MB 15-16)

Percy does conclude with fair certainty that the LAD is like a “coupler” – though the nature and the functioning of this “coupler” continues to be a great mystery to both Percy and Percy scholars alike.

He even ends *Message in the Bottle*, his primary text on language, with his classic triad -representation, a triangle, whose “apex,” the coupler, is represented by a question mark (MB 327).

Percy’s understanding of the nature of humans includes things that the behaviorist or structuralist does not include, at the least, and at the most dismisses with disdain. Percy says that language theory must consider the existential aspects of human nature, the search for meaning and myth. His philosophy includes the tenet that for him, the modern age questions: that man has a “soul, mind, freedom, will, Godlikeness” (MB 7). This characteristic of humans is what transforms these mere physical objects into symbols. For him, “Earthlings seem to spend most of their time trafficking in one kind of symbol or another, while the creatures of earth – more than two million species – say not a word” (13). He wonders what is the cause of this, and perennially wrestles with what to call it:

To begin with, what to call it, this entity which *symbolleins*, throws together word and thing? As we have seen, Peirce used a number of words: interpreter, interpretant, asserter, mind, “I”, ego, even soul. They may or may not be semantically accurate, but for the educated denizen of this age they suffer certain semantic impairments. “Interpretant” is far too ambiguous, even for Peirce scholars. “Soul” carries too much furniture from the religious attic. “Ego” has a different malodor, smelling as it does of the Cartesian split. (SSL 288-90)

Percy is always extremely divided on this subject of what the coupler might be: At times he seems to call it a physical thing, other times a “spiritual” thing, and other times an action, and not a thing at all. In his last years, he wrote Ketner that he was chasing the “interpretant;” on his deathbed he still had little idea of what it was, just as his concluding essay in “The Message in the Bottle” years earlier. Percy was not alone in his search – the poststructuralists, upon discovering the work of Peirce, were fascinated with “the nature of the interpretant, a concept they have added to a glossary that draws more often on the phenomenology of Georg W. F. Hegel (Derrida, de Man) or psychoanalytic sign systems (Lacan, the French feminists, much film study of the 70s and 80s)” (Sebeok 6). No one had an answer.

Were Percy still investigating language theory today, he would undoubtedly be current and conversing with the newest thinkers in the field. Since his death, the conversation in the field has

changed radically in a couple of ways – as all academia has changed, due to the prolific and free exchange of information on the Internet, but specifically because as he predicted so many years ago, language science is now a fertile area, rapidly growing and flourishing with new developments. The recent explosion in genetic research has gleaned important findings in the language field. Had Percy been alive, he would certainly have been interested in this new direction. And like Percy, most sources attribute the origins of language with the emergence of the first humans – some 40,000 years ago (some cite 50,000 (Wade), others cite 30,000 (McCook). Dr. Richard Klein of Stanford says a specific neural change occurred in the human brain about this time that conferred a survival advantage and allowed it to spread throughout the population (Wade).

Until recently, linguists have been reluctant to explore the biological origins of language and language evolution; some attribute this to Chomsky's, the leading linguist's, silence on the subject (Wade). However, now linguists are being joined, even led, by researchers in the fields of archeology, psychology, psychiatry, human behavioral ecology, and biology.

New research in this area has resulted in confirming some of Percy's directions towards finding a physical brain location for language as well as the discovery of new physical causes for language. A December 6, 2002, issue of the journal, *Science*, cited a study of babies' brains, showing that as early as three months old, "left angular gyrus" of these babies' brain regions "became more active when hearing words in their own language than when the words were read backwards" – as is true of adults' brains (McCook), indicating Percy and Geschwind were "onto something" as early as 1975. The right prefrontal brain region (which Percy does not mention) is also more active in babies when listening to words rather than non-words, just as in adults' brains.

However, the study also found that "while many brain regions focus on language, the brain is highly adaptable; so even if babies experience brain damage in one of the areas normally used to process language, it can be overcome. 'Everything is plastic,' Dahanne-Labertz [researcher] said"

(McCook). Researchers have discovered fluidity of language processing in brain locations; no longer do scientists believe it has to be confined to a single localized brain area:

Exactly how our ancestors took this leap is possibly the hardest problem in science, Szathmari says. He points out that complex language - language with syntax and grammar, which builds up meaning through a hierarchical arrangement of subordinate clauses - evolved just once. Only human brains are able to produce language, and, contrary to popular belief, this ability is not confined to specialised regions in the brain such as Broca's and Wernicke's areas. If these are damaged others can take over. Szathmari likens language to an amoeba, and the human brain to the habitat in which it can thrive. "A surprisingly large part of our brain can sustain language," he says. (Nowak)

Steven Pinker discusses both brain location as a possible source of language as well as the new idea of a genetic mutation as the culprit in causing human language. "If the 1990s will be remembered as the Decade of the Brain and the dawn of cognitive neuroscience, the first decade of the 2000s may be remembered as the Decade of the Gene and the dawn of cognitive genetics.... Two recent discoveries of genes tied to language and thought will probably be the first of many...." (Pinker 255). One discovery is the FOXP2 gene in 2001. About half of a large British family, the KE family, inherited an impaired FOXP2 gene along chromosome 7, now called the SPCH1 genetic region. The members that lacked this gene showed they lacked language development; the members that had the gene spoke normally. The FOXP2 gene is now linked to speech and language disorders and seems to influence the acquisition of language significantly (Wade).

In 2007, Geschwind identified another gene, CNTNAP2, that he thinks may also be responsible for human language capability:

More is known about regions that subserve language, especially frontal and posterior perisylvian cortex, but few of the molecules involved in patterning these areas in humans have been identified. Because aspects of language are asymmetrically distributed in humans, we and others have worked to identify the molecular basis of cerebral asymmetry, demonstrating gene expression asymmetries in perisylvian cortex during human development. The development of human cognition also builds on the significant bilateral expansion of densely connected circuits involving frontal, temporal, and parietal association areas in non-human primates, as well as the likely elaboration of novel functionality in humans.

Although some aspects of human-elaborated circuits are present in other mammal, the homologous structures, even when present, are less developed and are unable to support the functionality typical of our species. Thus, it is important to understand what aspects of cortical

patterning are conserved in mammals, and which may involve human-specific specializations. Contactin associated protein-like 2 (*CNTNAP2*), in which mutations are known to cause autism, epilepsy, and language delay, showed a remarkable pattern of anterior-enriched cortical expression in human that was not observed in mouse or rat. These data highlight the importance of expression analysis of human brain and the utility of cross-species comparisons of gene expression. Genes identified here provide a foundation for understanding molecular aspects of human-cognitive specializations and the disorders that disrupt them. (Abraham, et al.)

Researchers feel this is key to understanding both the evolution of man's higher intellectual capacity and language:

The capacity of the human brain for tasks involving abstract thought, creativity, and language is a key feature of our species' evolution. Although the gross anatomical substrates for some of these features are at least partially known, the underlying circuitry and its molecular basis remain obscure.... Because differences in gene regulation are thought to drive phenotypic divergence among species, finding genes for which transcript distribution in human is distinct from other species would inform our understanding of brain evolution and disorders involving higher cognition. (Abraham, et al.)

Some speculate that the development of this gene in the evolution of the human race caused the development of language. This and further studies on the gene refute the idea that language is merely a handy by-product of having a large brain. "It suggests that language is an adaptation, a product of natural selection," according to Pinker (Randerson).

Chomsky's view is broader than Geschwind's and other brain researchers, seeing the study of language as interdisciplinary. He says,

There is, however, an emerging consensus that, although humans and animals share a diversity of important computational and perceptual resources, there has been substantial evolutionary remodeling since we diverged from a common ancestor some 6 million years ago. The empirical challenge is to determine what was inherited unchanged from this common ancestor, what has been subjected to minor modifications, and what (if anything) is qualitatively new. The additional evolutionary challenge is to determine what selectional pressures led to adaptive changes over time and to understand the various constraints that channeled this evolutionary process. Answering these questions requires a collaborative effort among linguists, biologists, psychologists, and anthropologists. XX

Percy's sources Geschwind and Chomsky continue along the same lines as they had been when Percy was alive; Geschwind is interested in brain locations still, and using gene research, noting that missing genes, such as *FOXP2* and *CNTNAP2*, cause language delay or difficulty, while in 2002, Chomsky

postulates FLB and FLN – the faculty of language in the broad and narrow sense respectively. Animals have FLB, and only humans are capable of FLN. The unique properties of FLN include recursion, infinity, discrete units, no longest sentence, no upper bound to sentence length. He suggests further research to establish the validity of the hypothesis and to answer whether animals might have recursive cognitive abilities in other areas besides language, and why they did not develop recursion in communication. Chomsky's and Geschwind's conclusions are the same as Percy's on a surface level – human language is different from animal sign communication; humans are more advanced. Terence Deacon (*The Symbolic Species*) also approaches Percy's same thesis and captures his view almost exactly, except from a neuroscientific perspective.

However, all these are physicalist or behaviorist views that Percy would have, in the end, found insufficient to describe completely what was going on in the language event. Percy didn't coincide much with the purely scientific language researchers, like Chomsky, Geschwind, and Deacon, even if he uses them in places and even if they came to the same conclusion as he regarding the qualitative difference of human and animal language capabilities. In the end, the dyadic scientific approach to language, just like this approach to human beings, might be able to inform a study of language somewhat, but it would always be lacking as a sole perspective in Percy's eyes. Percy's self-proclaimed mission is exposing the "antinomy of the scientific method" (MB 215). While acknowledging the validity of the scientific method, Percy also sees its limitations in this area, and seeks to find something outside science, though not contradictory to it, but in addition to it, to explain language as well as human beings. He seeks a new science – a triadic science.

Percy scholar Mike Frentz says that "Percy, and a very small minority of only partially connected or disconnected others (e.g. Peirce, Lonergan, Aquinas), seem to be adding something in coming from a humanistic perspective that a purely scientific perspective (e.g. Deacon, Minsky, Chomsky) seem to be oblivious of.... I think there is probably much in current scientific advances that could add to the track

that Percy was pursuing” (Frentz e-mail, 2-23-04). Percy’s triadic approach to the issue occurred in an era and culture not conducive to such. While the linguistic advances close to and since Percy’s death would have added much to his search with these many new developments in language theory and language evolution Percy would have found valuable to his investigations, most of these approach language from a traditional scientific approach and are the lacking triadic understanding of Percy.

So Percy could not be grouped with the dyadic linguists. Even scientists acknowledge dyadic research has its limits. Steven Pinker and other linguists/brain researchers have done many experiments – including Positron Emission Tomography (PET) and functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) to discover how and where language is processed in the brain. However, Percy’s desire to find the coupler – an “LAD,” what it is and where it is – likely won’t be fulfilled through scientific investigation, even with the rapid progressions in language research today. Even Pinker agrees. “It would be nice if we could pinpoint a patch of brain devoted to rules and another patch devoted to words, but that fantasy will never come true” (Pinker 242). While the brain is analogous to the computer in that information is processed, it is not that simple. Any mental activity requires “millions of synapses of an intricately structured network” (Pinker 243). And, like a computer, when a software is loaded onto the machine, even a single program doesn’t dump all in one place – “hundreds of files [are] scattered all over the machine to coordinate the program with memory, input, output, and other programs” (Pinker 243). Pinker compares language word and rule system to “an octopus with tentacles” extending not just throughout the brain, but throughout the human body (Pinker 243).

Ultimately, the process some neuroscientists and others are now going through, that is, searching for a physical brain location for language, has made progress but doesn’t go anywhere towards solving the problem of how thought is created or how it arises from the physical brain. In other words, maybe the FOXP2 gene really is responsible for language. Does that really tell us any more about the language phenomenon? “Dyadic progress” does not really get us any farther into understanding

HOW this triadic process happens. One Percy scholar, Ken Armstrong, summarizes this problem succinctly:

Dyadic brain structure does not create thought..... Keeping a close focus on the dyadic of the brain will bring all sorts of wondrous insights into the physical processes that accompany thinking and speech, but cannot answer what it is that creates thought. Percy addressed something similar in *Message in the Bottle* when he noted that the physical explanation for triadic phenomena regresses until proponents are brought to the idea of homunculi pulling the strings of the brain, etc. We can know more and more about the dyadic, but, to paraphrase, there is no progress in the triadic. (Percy listserv, 3-02-04)

For Percy, even though certain brain locations or genes may be connected to language processing, they do not answer the question as to what the problem is; they are only part of the problem. The real problem, how “thought” arises, remains unanswered. For one, the coupler Percy was looking for was not material, and so a physical entity could never fully explain the non-material entity or act:

But what is the entity at the apex of the triangle, that which links the other two? Peirce, a difficult, often obscure writer, called it by various names, interpretant, interpreter, judge. I have used the term them by the relation which we mean by the peculiar little word “is.” It, the linking entity, was also called by Peirce “mind” and even “soul.”By whatever name one chooses to call it – interpretant, interpreter, coupler, whatever – it the third element is not material. It is as real as a cabbage or a king or a neurone, but it is not material. (SSL 286-287)

Here he uses “real”⁵³ here in Peirce’s sense. While in other places he seems to be dabbling with the idea of a brain location, he never truly commits to that; here he tends towards the idea of the coupler as immaterial, insisting that:

No material structure of neurons, however complex, and however intimately it may be related to the triadic event, can itself assert anything. If you think it can, please draw me a picture of an assertion. A material substance cannot name or assert a proposition. The initiator of a speech act is an act-or, that is, an agent. The agent is not material. Peirce’s insistence on both the reality and the nonmateriality of the third element...we know now, at least an increasing number of people are beginning to know, that a different sort of reality lies at the heart of all uniquely human activity, speaking, listening, understanding, thinking, looking at a work of art – namely, Charles Peirce’s triadicity. ...Indeed, it may well turn out that consciousness itself is not a “thing,” an entity, but an act, the triadic act by which we recognize reality through its symbolic vehicle. (SSL 287)

⁵³ See chapter 3.8 for Peirce’s definition of “real.”

Percy speculates now that this third element may simply be an “act” rather than a physical brain location or brain activity. “The coupler remains a mystery, and in my opinion, it will never be accounted for mechanistically, or according to stimulus-response psychology, simply because the coupler has the freedom to couple any elements of the language” (Con I 132-133). Again, this implies action. He also speculates it is an “agent,” similar to an “I” or “self,” but the nature of which he does not discount as possibly mechanistic:

Percy: And that is that the prime element of the theory of language which I propose is, at least for me, a mystery. That is to say, in the explanatory model for linguistic behavior, it is more or less obvious that there is such a thing as a “coupler,” an agent which couples, just as in Descartes’ Cogito, there is an “I” which thinks.There is the ultimate mystery of who or what is the coupler. I think this is superior to Descartes’ Cogito ergo sum because you can’t see Descartes thinking, and so you can’t prove his self. But I can see and hear you uttering a sentence. I say if there are elements of a sentence and if they are coupled, there is a coupler.

.....

NOR: If neurophysiological research does indeed establish a coupler, and establishes it as some kind of mechanistic thing, where does that leave us? Is that it? Still talking?

Percy: That’s the joker of the last chapter. (Con I 131-132)

The question that results is, do we still have the Cartesian dilemma of how a mind and body interact: or, how does a physical dyadic structure create mental triadic (symbolic) activity? In the same way, man, a physical creature, has needs and characteristics that transcend the physical realm and are not explainable only by physical theory. In fact, an understanding of how the physical (dyadic) coupler works to create symbolic (triadic) behavior/phenomenon would go far to explain unexplained human characteristics, such as need for meaning. For Percy, a solely physicalist theory of mind, a theory of man, is insufficient and must include the idea of a self or soul – but not as Descartes would have it, separate from body, or we find ourselves right back in the Cartesian dilemma.

Other Percy scholars have engaged in the search and speculated after him as to what the coupler might be. Recently, Desmond (2000) states that the coupler is the “Holy Spirit,” a move that the scientist Percy might have found too abstract to embrace and still leaning towards the “ghost in the machine” dilemma. Desmond cites Percy’s 1988 interview with Sister Bernadette Prochaska, in which

Desmond believes Percy says the coupler is God: “It’s Catholic that the discovery of one’s being does not occur in a solitary enterprise. It involves at least two people, one being another person, and the second, the third member of the community of course is God, which the novelist has no business mentioning” (Percy, qtd. Desmond 26). However, Percy here is speaking of community and relationships between people mediated by the divine, not word-object relationships mediated by a person, an individual interpretant. The Incarnation – the ultimate symbol – has the essence of the signified (God) within the signifier (Christ), just as a word does. (Hence the assertion in John 1:14 that Christ is the Word of God.) In this way, Desmond’s assertion that Percy felt the coupler is the Holy Spirit makes sense, just as the Spirit is the coupler of the believer and God. Yet there is an oversimplification here, and Percy himself was not content to stop there.

Although a parallel can be made, it is a stretch to assume these are qualitatively the same events, and that the interpretant in the word-object-interpretant relation is the same as the divine in the human-human-divine relation. Nor do I think Percy thought this either – his search for the coupler continued after that statement and is chronicled in his letters to Ketner and others. At any rate, even Desmond continues that Percy’s search for the coupler did not stop there. Desmond brings out Percy’s science/religion dilemma:

While maintaining the ‘mystery’ of the interpretant as a key to the mystery of the human self, Percy also wanted a clearer scientific description of its nature and role in human communication. But of course a clear scientific explanation, even if theoretically possible, runs counter to the Christian view of the mystery of the Incarnation and of the human person as a unique mystery to whom the ‘good news’ is personally addressed, both staple beliefs in Percy’s Catholicism. His struggle was to find a way to integrate the science of semiotics with his religious belief, to unite human knowledge and faith. While believing that God was the coupler, Percy as a natural scientist could not ‘name’ God as a demonstrable element in a semiotic diagram. (Desmond 27)

Eckert (1999, 2004) goes in the opposite direction, seeking a bio-physiological solution – a brain location, along the lines of Percy’s Geschwind and Wernicke investigations. Eckert later modified his

thoughts and discoveries based on new brain findings, but still continued the search at Percy's personal challenge to Eckert to "draw me a picture," a challenge he presents in many places (Eckert, MB 14).

...please tell me how it came to pass that matter in interaction, a sequence of energy exchanges, neurones firing other neurones like a binary computer, can result in my being conscious, having a self, being able to utter sentences which are more or less true and which you can understand. Please excuse my stupidity, but would someone **draw me a picture** [my italics]? Or just tell me in principle how this could happen. Or, if there is a soul, please tell me what evidence there is that it exists, and if it does, how it is connected with this compact mass of billions of neurones which is my brain. (LC 165)

Percy's oft-repeated phrases of "draw me a picture" – as early as *The Message in the Bottle* and as late as *A Thief of Peirce* – challenges his reader, his correspondent, or his colleague, to diagram the coupler. This phrase has a certain attitude for Percy, one of challenge, skepticism, doubt, but an open mind that does not completely rule out the fact that a picture might be able to be drawn. Percy does not close the door entirely. Yet, in *A Thief of Peirce*, he "def[ies] anyone, Skinner included" to draw a picture (42). In the draft of his Jefferson lecture, he repeatedly challenges his audience to "draw a picture" of the speech act (TP 104, 105, 108):

One can draw a picture with things (matter) and arrows (energy) connecting them setting forth the behavior both of the chimp Washoe and the pre-language human infant with its responses to sights and sounds, its crying for mama and milk. But one cannot draw such a picture of an eighteen month old human who looks at mama, points to cat and says *da cat*. The new picture one draws has to have at least one triangle, showing that something, some entity, has put together *symbollein*, cat and *cat*. (TP 104)

Percy's late life correspondence with scholar Robert Eckert contained the same question: "Draw me a picture" and Eckert took him up on the challenge, researching brain locations for language activity.

But no one has ever successfully met Percy's challenge. The problem with pictures, as Percy well understood, is that they keep one in the realm of the material – it is difficult to draw a picture of something "real but not existing."⁵⁴ We still have Cartesian dualism, Percy says. "Such a project is too uncomfortably close to Descartes' search for the seat of the soul, which I believe he located in the pineal gland" (TP 108). Even Percy's triangle can only go so far in conveying the speech act. Arrows

⁵⁴ See also chapter 3.8 for a greater discussion of Peirce's concept of "real but not existing."

(representing energy) can't accurately convey a "nonenergetic" event. The picture that Percy has drawn conveys only a part of the language event – the coupler remains unportrayed and unexplained, beyond the realm of picture making.

3.8 THE COUPLER: WALTZING TOWARD THE INTERPRETANT⁵⁵

Percy in a letter to Ketner: "My ambition to use CSP's semiotic to develop a coherent anthropology... But here is where CSP let us down. He plays a shell game with the interpretant. In one place he says this: 'The symbol is connected with the object by virtue of the idea of symbol, using mind without which no connection would exist.' Also 'interpreting mind.' Then he's into 'interpretant' being determined by sign, etc. 'Interpreter' and 'mind' seem to have disappeared.... With all your fancy semiotic, you're still stuck, as you should be with a mind, my res cogitans?" (TP 48)

* * *

This mystery that plagued Percy his entire scholarly life served as an impetus for his seven year correspondence (1984-1991) with Peirce authority Ketner, whom Percy hoped would help answer his question: "What is the interpretant?" He gets answers, but not the ones he wants.

Percy first gets an overview, a crash course, on some of the basics of Peirce's philosophy and how Thirdness affects his metaphysics – metaphysics in the Peircean sense, not the "new age" sense. Peirce understood metaphysics as a science that explores general, fundamentally, and often unmentioned working hypotheses of science research (KK).⁵⁶ Ketner volunteers much of this information to Percy because he sees how it is integral to what Percy wanted to know; Percy doesn't always see its relevance. He is interested in little of it, unless he thought it might help him get to understanding Thirdness and discovering the identity of the coupler.

THIRDNESS IS REAL, BUT NOT EXISTING

Letter from WP to KK, October 26, 1988:

⁵⁵ Ketner, *Thief of Pierce* 15

⁵⁶ Much of Peirce's vocabulary is easily confused, lending to misunderstanding. For example, at various places and times in his career, he uses the term sign to represent either a dyadic signal (Percy's sign) and a triadic symbol (Percy's symbol), two very different entities. His use (and Percy's use) of the term metaphysics refers to real, logical relations and events in the world and a logical framework of working hypotheses that are overlooked by dyadic scientists and cause-effect oriented behaviorists. Metaphysics as commonly understood can be dogmatic, but the best science, metaphysical or otherwise, adheres to the scientific method of testing hypotheses and maintains an attitude of fallibility.

"What do you mean, a thing can be real but not existing?" (TP 74).

KK to WP, Oct 29, 1988:

Existences are by and large properties of Secondness; Realities that are nonexistences are by and large matters of Thirdness.... I always thought George Lucas came close to P [Peirce] with "The Force." (TP 78-79).

* * *

Ketner further answers Percy's question:

The real is that which has the properties it has independently of any single person or group of persons who wish or hope or dream that it have those properties. The properties are not arbitrary, but are there to be discovered. ... Secondly, all existing things are real.... But, there are some real things that don't exist.... Crudely put, you can kick existing things, and sometimes they kick you. But you can't kick real nonexistents such as your constitutional rights, or Aunt Susy's bank account, or the saltiness of as yet untasted salt (TP 77).

Thirdness encompasses things that may not have a physical existence, but still impact our reality, the workings of the universe, the world in which we move about – though we may not be able to touch them. Still it is not an imaginary experience we've made up because it is fully and completely *independent of our wishes or individual perceptions*. Real things (that don't exist) are, for example, scientific laws, fictional events, mind, the law of gravity, the dream I had last night, God, consciousness, and a plethora of other things: "Jealousy, language, the chain of command, mathematics, employee's rights to a nonsexually oppressive work environment, a herd of nonmaterial entities" (TP 78). They are *real*, because their properties aren't malleable and changeable or subject to the whims of any individual. They are outside of any human being. However, they don't *exist*. "Existences are by and large matters of Secondness; Realities that are nonexistences are by and large matters of Thirdness," Ketner writes to Percy (TP 78). Something that "exists" is in the realm of CSP's Secondness and is therefore material. However, real things that are in the realm of Thirdness may be nonmaterial, yet still as influential to us as any material object (which "exists"). Real things (whether existent or not) stand outside the perceiver, retain their qualities despite the perceiver's accuracy of perception or desires for those qualities or not.

And the important element of Peirce for Percy's interest is, not only are minds and God in the "real but not existing" category, but signs (Percy's symbol) are as well. A sign relation does not have a physical embodiment. We cannot touch it. But it still is real, present, "there," and affects us profoundly.

WALTZING TOWARD THE INTERPRETANT

Ketner defines the interpreter, the individual human, as secondary, or derivative. The interpretation, the sign [symbol] that the interpreter interprets, is primary. "The interpreter is just the material cause. Hence interpreters are secondary, interpretants are primary" (TP 11). So, even if all humans were dead, signs (Percy's symbols) would still exist:

...now both Rene [Descartes] and Father Mersenne are dead. There is, in their case, no more interpreter. Neither can interpret the other due to mortification. Yet their signs (models, signifiers) survive, and the powers of these signs survive. Their signs still have the power to activate the general habit-type, even though they, as individual interpreters, are dead. Those signs would still have the power even if we were all dead. So it is the general habit-type that makes the signs go. (TP 11)

As Shakespeare writes in Sonnet 18: "When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:/so long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,/So long lives this, and this gives life to thee" (11. 12-14). The poem outlives the subject of the poem. Peirce says, yes! Ketner goes on to say of the effects of signs (Thirdness) "'But where do these habit-types live, exist, stay, or reside,' says a skeptic. 'Why they are what make up the intelligible cosmos and their sum total (vast) = God'" (TP 12).

Ketner's answer doesn't satisfy Percy. Ketner is saying what the interpretant DOES, but not what it IS. Percy is frustrated, but on target: "What is the 'interpretant'? Is he talking about a physiological brain-state? Or does he mean something like the transcendental ego, or mind or an 'I'? Why in the hell doesn't he make himself clear on this?" (TP 13), and a month later: "Am waiting for you or CSP to tell me what an interpretant is. Draw me a picture" (TP 12). Percy senses that hidden in Peirce's theory is the answer, something "of seminal importance as formal schema for making sense that distinctive human behavior which involves the use of symbols... and that it has not even begun to

be explored" (TP 14). Ketner's responses, however, remain inadequate for Percy's satisfaction. While both acknowledge that a Kuhnian paradigm shift is needed (TP 18, 41), no more detail comes from Ketner than an explanation of Thirdness' quality of "real but not existing." Yet Percy knows Ketner must have it somewhere in him: he won't let it go. A year later, he writes to Ketner:

But what I need to ask you, since you are a Peirce scholar and I'm not, is how I can find some clarification about it. He is ambiguous about it. For example, in one place he'll say that the sign or the representamen creates its interpretant in the mind of the receiver of the sign, where it stands for its "object." This sounds fairly deterministic, indeed not much different from what the old behaviorists would call the "engram" in the brain, a neuronal pattern, created by the reception of a sensory stimulus toward the end of affecting the behavior of an organism toward an object. This, of course, is purely and simply "dyadic" behavior – chimps responding to banana by making sign, etc. But then he will speak, in his theory of speech acts, very clearly about an *assertion*.... (TP 13)

Ketner later clarifies with references to essays and attempts to answer Percy, who has stated his intention to write on Thirdness. Percy remains dissatisfied. The source of their miscommunication is their orientation – Ketner, the philosopher, attempts to give Peircean metaphysical explanations; Percy, the doctor, clearly admits that he wants "a biological approach to human and subhuman behavior" (TP 13). Percy is interested in what is going on INSIDE the human being when "Thirdness" (symbolization) takes place:

My source of confusion and my question to Peirce and, short of Peirce, to you, is: What is the "interpretant"? Is he talking about a physiological brain-state? Or does he mean something like the transcendental ego, or mind or an "I"? Why in the hell doesn't he make himself clear on this? Clearly if a sentence is asserted in a speech act, a peme, there must be an "assertor." (TP 13)

Ketner merely explains how symbol is possible and how it works, continuing with his references to logical relations. Thirdness is unlike Secondness, which remains solely in the world of cause-effect, material presence and physical interaction only impeded by other physical actions (the ball coming towards you will be stopped by your baseball mitt or your body, but will not stop in midair if you think or wish it to). Thirdness, however, is still real, though not always material. It is the world of relations. Ketner explains:

I did the following experiment in my upper-division philosophy of social science class the other day. I put 10 paper clips in one box and another 10 in an identical box. I held up the two boxes, and told the students what was in them, “10 identical paper clips in each of the identical boxes, and no other object in either box.” I then asked the student if the contents of both boxes were the same. They knew it was a trick, but in the end, they had to say, “contents are the same.” But they weren’t the same, for in one box were 10 loose clips, and in the other was a chain of paper clips. In other words, the second box had in it 10 clips plus a relation. That they could not even think of the relation as a possible item of content shows in a small way how nominalistic our age is. But we buy and sell relations – computer software. A blank computer disk costs less than a dollar, but put some relations between magnetic particles on that disk, and you can sell it for a lot of money as software. Ditto with a blank ream of paper. ...all the talk by CSP about mathematics is not really about technical mathematics. It is about the spirit of mathematics, which is perhaps the purest and simplest instance of the world of Thirdness. (TP 22-23)

Percy is full of questions. Ketner’s response isn’t adequate for Percy; he is just illuminating Thirdness, but Percy writes back, “there’s this business of the interpretant” (TP 24), and that Peirce is in no way clear about what that is. Ketner, for his part, says he

could not grasp why “The interpretant is a general habit of interpretation” was rejected by Percy as an answer to his interpretant question. Habits are real, and routinely impact each of us. Gravity is the habit of the cosmos which we use in many ways, and which if we ignore in certain situation, our ignorance can kill us. Or socially, if I go looking vigorously and openly for Bin Laden’s current location, habits of his praetorian guard will eventually lead to my death... There is nothing metaphysical (in the common sense of metaphysical) about either example. Each are daily, down-to-earth realities which do not exist. They fit that nonmaterial, nonenergetic specification Percy gave in the Delta Factor. (KK)

But for Percy, Peirce is not consistent – at times the interpretant seems Skinnerian; at other times, an agent performing an act (synonymous with “interpreter”). Behaviorism isn’t adequate; Percy wants to disprove that. Yet perhaps the “agent” solution doesn’t escape Descartes idea of mind/soul. Can CSP’s interpretant be as clear an entity as Eccles’ “Brodmann 44,” a brain location? Can CSP draw a picture of, not Thirdness, but the interpretant itself? (If the interpretant is a general habit, as Peirce says, then the answer is no.) And does the idea of the interpretant, in the realm of Thirdness, a non-chemical, non-material, non-electrical agent, merely land “us back in Descartes’ old dualism, the mind-body split, the only progress being that instead of locating the mind in the pineal gland, now we can locate it in

Brodmann language area” (TP 25). Ketner responds with more “goodies” – papers and books – but

Percy isn’t satisfied:

You didn’t answer the question about CSP which bothers me most. His greatness I concede, of course, and for me it mainly consists in his great distinction between dyads and triads, Secondness and Thirdness. It is gospel to me. But what does he mean by this often-quoted statement, “the sign addresses somebody... creates in the mind of that person... the *interpretant*. The sign also stands for something, its *object*,” etc.

Please tell me why this isn’t a fancy form of Skinnerism! Stimulus (leads to) conditioned brain (leads to) response.

What I’m asking you is where does CSP speak of the triadic event as an act, performed by an agent. After all, if a sentence is uttered, there must be an assertor.

I know CSP does in places speak of an “interpreter,” but does he ever really address this problem? (TP 26-27)

Ketner finally addresses Percy’s persistent questioning with a voluminous return letter, vowing to show why it “ain’t Skinnerian a-tall” (TP 27). His letter has four essential points:

1) The triad vs. the triangle, OR cause-effect reactions vs. triadic relational systems:

Ketner to Percy: You say you only accept one percent of CSP. I think the percentage is higher. But who’s to quibble. You picked the right one percent!!! (TP 135)

* * *

While Percy and Peirce agreed as to the triadic nature of symbol, they disagreed on many aspects of that, including how to draw it. Percy draws a triangle, or a delta symbol, as “ Δ ”; Peirce draws a point where three lines meet and from which these lines emanate with no connection to one of their ends, each of which represents an aspect of a triad, so that the Peircian triad looks like a “Y” rather than a triangle. There are a myriad of models of the language event, all varying in kind and complexity to some degree or another. Thomas Sebeok details and draws a few of the more well known “Primary Modeling Systems,” including that of Ogden and Richards, Buhler, Shannon and Weaver, Sebeok (himself) and Uexkull. While Percy is most influenced by Peirce (and Langer and Cassirer) in his theory of symbol, he borrows Ogden and Richards’ triangle as a variation of Peirce’s triad (MB 252-253). Percy

uses that diagram throughout, including when he is elaborating on the communication act in the form of tetrads which is pictured as two triangles juxtaposed.⁵⁷

Ketner argues that the triangle is a misleading model, and Peirce's triad is more accurate. Ketner clarifies the difference between Percy's triangle and Peirce's triad (**Y**). Therein lies the rub, according to Ketner. "I believe what you say, not what you draw," says Ketner to Percy (30). Peirce considered the triangle an inaccurate representation of a true symbolic triad, because it looks as though a triad is nothing more than three dyads joined together. A triad, for Peirce, is not reducible to a dyad, which is a geometric representation of something logically different than a triad. The triangle is nothing more than a combination ("a daisy chain") of several dyadic relations – the triad is something qualitatively different. Percy's triangle, according to Ketner, is actually composed of three dyads, three lines with two points each, and doesn't ever escape the world of reaction – reaction – reaction. Skinnerian, indeed.

While Percy agrees with Peirce that triads are not reducible to dyads, he holds fast to his "delta" triangular representation, even when Ketner, points out the "error," saying that the triangle would be, according to Peirce, three dyadic relations joined together (TP 28). Percy gives no explanation for his choice of drawing a triad, other than:

...I am less interested in the precise nature and status of CSP's little triadic node than in seeing what would happen if one came up with a halfway decent semiotic model which would legitimize a phanerescopy of semiotic self – and see what would happen if one applied the model to the almost total incoherence of present-day 'social science' – including linguistics and psychology-psychiatry (TP 43).

Despite his triangle, he still agrees with Peirce that a triad is not composed of three dyads, and represents a unique metaphysical entity unexplainable by conventional dyadic means, such as a purely physical and scientific view. Language, as triadic behavior, can't be understood by a dyadic science or scientism. However, Peirce's science, which allows for triadic relations, CAN grasp language.

⁵⁷ See Chapter 3.3 for a diagram of a tetrad.

However, the triangle worked well for Percy for many reasons – though whether he consciously or subconsciously intended these reasons, is not known. He does defend it to Ketner: “I know you think my triangle, sign-referent-interpretant is not an accurate presentation of Peirce’s valencies, but I find it most useful in demonstrating the irreducibility of triadic behavior, or as Peirce would say: No combinations of dyads can make a triad” (TP 13).

Another way it may have worked well for Percy is metaphysically; the triangle is a closed system containing a space inside whereas Peirce’s triad has three open ends (that then connected to other ends). The triangle is a whole, enclosed unity. The three lines create a whole unit; Peirce’s three lines do create a “system” as Ketner calls it, but meet at a point, rather than create a space. The space inside a triangle can be considered its own part of the triangle that is created by the three lines (as opposed to a point in Peirce’s triad) – indicating that what is created with the three connecting lines of the triangle is greater than the sum of its parts. In the space, which seems empty, is the inaccessible, ineffable wholeness of the union of object, word, and interpretant. The transformation takes place due to the interactions of all parts of symbol – word, object, interpretant.

Thirdly and more practically, the triangle worked well in Percy’s fiction; there are all sorts of triangles in nature and our everyday life that can be used with symbolic implications. Triangles are far more common and easier to describe than triads and so easier to employ as symbol in one’s novels. Triangulation is another theme in his fiction that alludes to his triangles – and would not work with the triad.

Ketner speculates as to why Percy rejected the triad, and Ketner defends the triad, years later, in 2011:

I thought that Walker Percy rejected CSP’s picture because it did not fit something about which he was unwilling to change; for my money, CSP’s three-legged snakes are indeed a successful completion of Walker Percy’s quest for a proper picture – the snakes don’t diagram materials, they diagram relations, and relations are non-material reals just of the kind Walker Percy needs and the kind his scholastic heroes used. And what is a relation? It is a real general consequence that can help or hurt you, which one can be aware of or not, can be discovered by objective

communities, and in terms of actions, it takes the form of “If one does this, that will happen (really)” (KK).

Peirce’s triad of three lines that meet in the center (forming a “node” or one point in the center) works better to show entirely different – qualitatively different – things than the triangle. A triad is a “*system*” of relations, not reactions (30). Moreover, one can put several triads together to create a whole web of relations: a triad is a small aspect of a bigger overall connected system. Put dyads together, and you get a chain reaction. Put triads together, and you get a web of relations. This is integral: “The fundamental thing in CSP’s semeiotic is triadic relational forms” (TP 31). Ketner explains some thing of a sign as an isolated entity, the carrier of the message (the vocalized word in language). But no – it is not isolated. “A sign is the *entire* [my emphasis] triadic relation whereby Something is represented by Something to Something” (TP 32). Ketner explains that Percy’s difficulty was that he wanted the interpretant, to be “somebody or some biological doo-dad” (KK), when it is just another relation pattern. In some instances, the relational system IS a person, but that Peirce warns, “don’t mistake the abbreviation for the complex item that it abbreviates” (KK). The relational pattern can be many other things.

Not only that, each of these signs (relational entity) are in relation to other signs (other relational entities). Moreover, it is a relation of relations that extends infinitely in every direction (past and future; east, west, north, and south). “Is there a logically first object? There is a similar *ad infinitum* on this end as well. The alpha and omega are infinities. There is no first object” (TP 37).

There is no final relation either – Peirce speaks of a “final interpretant” not as the last one, but as a whole reality “drawing a fair-minded scientist to it in a telic (final) manner” (TP 36), a reversal of normal cause-effect reactions. Instead of the first billiard ball hitting the second billiard ball, the first ball thereby causing the second ball to move, the impetus comes from elsewhere: the end. The web of relations draws all reality to it. In cause-effect, the first object pushes the second object with force. For Peirce, the final interpretant draws or entices all reality towards itself.

In Peirce's paradigm, the last object, or reality, is drawing the scientist to itself in an interaction of intention and relation, not cause-effect. "If one reads [Peirce's use of the term] 'determines' in the causal sense, one gets the feeling there is a cause emanating from the object" (TP 36). In a triadic relation, this would mean the cause originated with the object, then "passing through the sign (message medium) to the interpretant, making the interpretant to be a particular thing, which no matter what it is, would be the end result of a dyadic causal chain" (TP 36). So for Peirce "determine" means not "cause and effect," as in X determines Y, but rather "to increase (or decrease, as the case may be) the definiteness of." So X makes Y more definite. Ketner offers an example: "Thank you for your message from Tripoli and your information that the ferry full of Americans (X) has left Tripoli harbor (Y). Now I can tell the captain of the aircraft that I have determined the ferry of Americans has safely left the harbor. No causation, [just] increases or decreases of definiteness" (KK).

2) Mind/Matter stuff vs. relational stuff:

The "stuff" of the cosmos is not matter, as the materialist would say – nor mind and matter, as the Cartesian dualist would say. "For P, the basic stuff of the cosmos is relation" (TP 32), and Ketner goes on to hint at the profound implications of that statement to both science and religion. Peirce is an:

... "objective idealist" for whom "matter is just effete mind, too weak, too hide-bound with habit to be vigorously interpreting mind. Spirit then becomes as 'real' as matter, both being relational patterns (the primary stuff of the universe) – with real being defined not as tangible, but as "those properties something has no matter what we hope or desire or wish those properties to be. (Peirce, qtd. in TP 33)

Since for Peirce, matter and mind are not fundamental to reality as Descartes proposed, human organisms are therefore not fundamental. Relations are. This is Percy's "traditional battleground" of metaphysics that he intentionally avoids in his second language study, *Symbol and Existence*, yet it resolved the mind-matter problem he struggled with for so long.

Quantum physics is saying the same thing Peirce was – that the stuff of the cosmos is not matter, nor mind and matter, but relation. Ketner explains:

These computer keys I am pressing with my fingers and those fingers are mostly empty space. Why then do I feel resistance, and not that my fingers do not pass through the vacuumity of the keyboard? It is because some relations, as I recall, named the Energy Potential... – rather like that separating force felt when two magnets of opposite poles (a relation) – are brought together. Reverse the poles (change the relation) and now one has to exert force to keep them apart.

Semeiotic does require a complete paradigm shift, ... [a] shift from one set of fundamental hypotheses (materialism, nominalism) that have been disconfirmed as our inquiries progress, to some other fundamental hypotheses that get tested over the upcoming long run. (KK)

Quantum physics, while it runs counter the reigning paradigm, actually adheres to the real science of the scientific method more fully than materialism and “scientism” of the day.⁵⁸ Ketner calls for a Kuhnian paradigm shift. Unfortunately, Percy, being more comfortable with biology than physics, sidesteps this in his investigations.

Related to this is the concept that:

4) Individuals are secondary and derivative vs. sign relations, which are fundamental and basic:

By this Ketner means that individual humans are explained or understood in terms of something else. In the potentially infinite network of relations, individuals are not fundamental, but secondary. Relations (triadic semeioses) are fundamental. Since humans (interpreters) are also “triads,” they are merely an “abbreviation for something that is more basic, a particular web of semeiosis, and one that is changing all the time” (TP 33). Ketner refers to Allie in Percy’s fifth novel, who has little memory and so little connection with the world around her; that is, little semeiotic relation with that world: “I have a kind of identity in that the emerging relations have (usually) a prior set of relations to refer back to (but sometimes even that is absent or marginal, as in your electroshocked heroine in *The Second Coming* – her semeioses were almost nil)” (TP 33). In this view, community, a web of relations, is fundamental, individuals are derived from that.

⁵⁸ See Appendix B for discussion of quantum physics.

Ketner finally answers Percy's integral question about the identity of "the interpreter":

"Interpreter is just a convenient name we use when the interpretant is a web of triads that is also a living person. All interpreters are interpretants, but not all interpretants are interpreters" (TP 37). In other words, human beings are all symbol-mongerers, or interpretants. Interpretants – or triadity – are realities in the world without humans as well. Humans, however, are always interpretants because they only exist in relation and can be perceived and have consciousness, in relation.

Percy's philosophy also emphasizes the importance of community, and though he may not have placed the individual as "derivative," he does place consciousness and symbol-mongering capacity as derivative of community. This idea of community is integral to his language theory. Symbols must take place in intersubjectivity. A system is a community, and Percy's language theory is ultimately tetradic, or Intersubjective, including four elements: symbol, object symbolized, and two individuals communicating to each other. Symbol cannot occur except in community, speech does not occur in isolation, and Percy writes at length of "feral children," without community, abandoned as children or babies, sometimes raised by wolves, who are later discovered without language and without symbolic activity.

4) Signs [symbols], including individual humans, are "hypostatic abstractions" (TP 33):

A hypostatic abstraction is a perceptual slowing down of real, moving things (which all of life is) to a solid concrete state that can be captured by the mind and comprehended. We are "flowing processual relational beings" that are, by hypostatic abstraction, turned into a "me" and a "you" (TP 34). All semeiosis (all of the universe, that is) is flowing relations, that are by hypostatic abstraction "changed into substantives like sign, or object, or interpretant, according to the interests we have at the moment" (TP 34), and is then able to be perceived and understood (TP 34).

This is naming: stopping the "chaos" for a moment, and organizing and labeling and categorizing it into the web of perceptions in the mind, and thereby perceiving it and "understanding"

life.⁵⁹ This concept also is similar to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. In quantum physics, a light particle is everywhere at once, behaving as a wave, until it is observed, when it collapses into a particle. Thus experiments shooting a light particle through a box with a divider screen that has two holes show the particle to have gone through both holes to the other side as if it were a wave. When the particle is observed, it only goes through one hole. When you look at it, you name it. It becomes finite. Life is infinite until it is observed and grasped by the human mind – until it is named. A sign stops the relation flow for a moment, solidifies it, but in the process, also limits it. The process of hypostatic abstraction explains Percy's description of the four stages of symbolic transformation.⁶⁰

Ketner is gently leading a reluctant Percy to a new way of looking at the coupler – a logical perspective rooted in physics, not a biological perspective. Percy is not comfortable with this, though he does grasp Ketner's idea of "real but not existing" which corresponds to his earlier treatise on the coupler as a non-linear, non-energetic phenomenon.

The language event "was 'real' enough all right... as real as any S-R sequence, as real as H_2SO_4 reacting with NaOH , but that what happened could not be drawn with arrow. In short, it could not be set forth as a series of energy exchanges or causal relations. It was something new under the sun, evolutionarily speaking. It was a natural phenomenon but a nonlinear and nonenergetic one. (MB 39)

Later Percy and Ketner have this out, to the same conclusion:

KK: I agree that interpreters, judges, minds, and souls are entities that are real. They, however, do not exist...

WP: What do you mean a thing can be real but not existing? ...

KK: The real is that which has the properties it has independently of any single person or group of persons who wish or hope or dream that it have those properties. The properties are not arbitrary, but are there to be discovered.... But, there are some real things that don't exist.... Crudely put, you can kick existing things, and sometimes they kick you. But you can't kick real nonexistent things such as your constitutional rights, or Aunt Susy's bank account or the saltiness of as yet untasted salt.... Scientific law was the initial focus of CSP's realism.... Minds don't knock together like dyads, like billiard balls.... existences are by and large matters of Secondness; Realities that are nonexistences are by and large matters of Thirdness. ... in other words, nonmaterial entities everywhere, a plague of them. Jealousy, language, the chain of

⁵⁹ See Appendix A: The Four Stages of Symbol Transformation for Percy's discussion of symbol that is very similar to Ketner's description of "hypostatic abstractions."

⁶⁰ See Appendix A.

command, mathematics, employee's rights... a herd of nonmaterial entities.... So God is real, but doesn't exist: The cosmos is God's embodiment perhaps; God is the intelligibility of the universe (TP 77-79).

Percy's draft of the Jefferson Lecture, his last speaking engagement, the year before his death, echoes Ketner's explanation of things that are "real but not existing," a class into which he places the elusive coupler. Percy, only a thief of Peirce, adopts this idea of Peirce, but much of the rest, he simply ignores. Ketner claims Peirce refutes Descartes, but when it came to his metaphysical perspective, Percy simply doesn't buy it – or perhaps even "get it."

The answer was before him, in Peirce's Thirdness and a logical and physical, rather than a doctor's biological, answer. Peirce says the fundamental stuff of the universe is not things or material objects which quantum physics says as well. The material composition and actions of a quantum particle seems not to follow the laws of Newton - laws to which material things "must" obey. Things only "seem" material when they are slowed down by our perception, just as a quantum particle only exists and acts predictably when we perceive it. Integral to the mind-matter problem is whether particles that are the basis of everything are material or immaterial. According to Ketner, a strict materialist is worshipping the abbreviations of relations (which are equations in physics) (KK). However, if they are in fact immaterial, there is no dualist dilemma; monism describes the world – and Peirce was a monist, or an objective idealist according to Ketner. If there is no "matter," if all is relation, there is no duality to solve, and the resolution is accomplished by the logic of Peircean metaphysics as well as modern science in which relations are basic in both paradigms.

While accepting some portions of Peirce, like the "thief of Peirce" he was, he remained closed to some of the greater implications of a Peircean science and philosophy. Percy accepted that relations were real, and that they were observable, but he can't seem to see beyond that to Peirce's belief that relations are basic, which requires a paradigm shift about the nature of the universe. Ketner says in 2011:

Walker Percy clearly late in his career understood that one could actually observe relations, sign relations. E.G.: I walk into class, get everyone's attention, and place my pen on the table at front. I then ask each student to inspect the table, then write a descriptive sentence about what they SEE. Almost to a person, they write, "The pen is on the table." I then ask them how many items they saw in their inspections. Routinely they say two, the pen and the table. I say there are three items, pen, table, and the relation of "on." They resist, but I point them to their written sentences. They are doubtful. I put the pen back in my pocket, and ask now for a description about pen and table. I get, "The pen is not on the table." The third item has ceased, and we watched, observed the whole thing.

So why would Walker Percy accept the scientifically observable presence of relations, but deny the results these lead toward? (KK)

Unfortunately, Percy's inquiry was biological. What brain location puts symbol together? That's a silly question to ask about "location" if there is really no "matter." But there IS a reality - in other words, even if there's no matter, there's still a reality out there that is a certain way whether or not we want it to be that way, or Peirce's idea of "real but not existing."

Ketner speculates later as to another reason why Percy would not accept this side of Peirce, and expresses his desire to explore it with Percy personally:

Did Walker Percy equate "person" with "ego"? Going down CSP's path, we find that the self (ego) is quite real, but not primitive.⁶¹ ... Relations are more basic; i.e.: egos (while certainly real) are constructed from more elementary relations, often sign relations. Percy could not accept that conclusion, a Buddhist result which, perhaps, offended his Christian commitment to the basic status of the human soul (the ego?), which of course is the item that is to attain eternal life. No basic soul, then, would equal no eternal life. Hence, despite CSP's good logic, the result could not be accepted.... I did want to find a way to talk with Percy about this to the bottom, and face to face. However, it was not to be. (KK)

Ketner's musings are consistent with other evidence that Percy was a traditionalist at heart and somewhat skeptical of new theories, even new scientific theories in the new physics, especially when it conflicted with his Catholic faith.⁶²

Percy never abandoned his project; he merely continued his search along his traditional avenues, that of a diagnostic physician. By the time he was writing *Symbol and Existence* (his sequel to

⁶¹ See CSP's essay, "Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man," the part about how self develops in children. Ketner says that he mentioned this to Walker but doesn't think he read it. (KK)

⁶² See chapter 1.6 and pages 222-223. XX

Message), he was referring to the coupler as “namer” but still had no idea what it was. “They [symbol and thing] are brought into this relation by an operation which is performed by an agent.... Who does the pairing? Obviously the namer. Who is the namer? Is he identical with his organism?” (SE 81). Percy concludes the namer is not the organism because “the act of naming is generically different from [other acts in nature] the ‘act’ of flying, the ‘act’ of fertilization, the ‘act’ of mitosis, the ‘act’ of responding” (82). It is not a matter of state A being a function of state B ($B=f(A)$)” (SE 83). It is not a succession of states. He explains that the relation between symbol and thing is not material because...

...neither symbol nor object is changed by the act of symbolization. The word ball and thing ball remain the same whether one is understood to mean the other or not, whether they are identified or not; nor are they brought into a material relationship—as one billiard ball is brought into a material relation with another billiard ball when they collide. (SE 84)

So how does this affect Percy’s search for the coupler? It is definitely not a gene or a brain location or any other kind of physical entity, he concludes. Eventually he decides, like Peirce and quantum physics, the coupler is not material, but neither is it Descartes’ “ghost in a machine.”

What sort of agent is it that intends this material transformation? It is not the organism, not the complex biological system which interacts with the environment—for such a system can only change the environment or itself undergo a change. The agent who performs the act of symbolization—he who names—must be an immaterial agent, since the action it performs is an immaterial action. It is not my organism, my body, who names; it is I.... I imply no such thing, and am in fact convinced that the case is otherwise, that whatever its nature, the immaterial symbolizer is not a Somebody Else but is rather the living man himself considered in those acts which are most characteristically human. Perhaps the Aristotelian notion of the soul as the highest principle of operation, the ‘substantial form’, of the body could be fruitfully applied here (SE 85).

By this time Percy gives up, and considers the topic a digression. The nature of the coupler was the all important question that ended his first language treatise, yet Percy drops the whole subject now:

My aim is to pursue direct consequences of the act of symbolization, [one of which is] recognizing a namer who is not identical with his organism considered as a biological system responding to an environment. But since this brings us at once into the ancient and sterile battleground of mind vs. matter, soul vs. body, and since I am more anxious to develop fresh insights than wage traditional warfare, I will say no more about this mysterious Namer. (SE 85-86)

Yet though he seems to drop the matter officially, in his second language book, he really isn't done with it. This business of the coupler would not leave him alone. In his 1989 Jefferson Lecture, the year before his death, he reiterates his request that someone draw him a picture of the elusive coupler:⁶³

I have used the term "coupler" as a minimal designation of that which couples name and thing, subject and predicate, links them by the relation which we mean by the peculiar little word "is." It, the linking entity, was also called by Peirce "mind" and even "soul." Here is the embarrassment, and it cannot be gotten round, so it might as well be said right out: *By whatever name one chooses to call it--interpretant, interpreter, coupler, whatever--it, the third element, is not material.* [Percy's emphasis]

It is as real as a cabbage or a king or a neuron, but it is not material. No material structure of neurons, however complex, and however intimately it may be related to the triadic event, can itself assert anything. If you think that it can, please ***draw me a picture*** of an assertion. (SSL 287)

No one ever drew the picture he was looking for.

There was an answer, however, to be found in a wider embrace of his mentor, Charles Sanders Peirce, and other philosophers, such as Jung, whom he admired. Ketner's explanation of relations and Peirce's triadic science, Peirce's synechism and Jung's synchronicity provide logical solutions to the mystery of the coupler, the interpretant, or the Namer.

3.9 THE SEMEIOTIC FABRIC OF LIFE: REALITY AS CONTINUOUS

The great American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce, said that the most amazing thing about the universe is that apparently disconnected events are in fact, not, that one can connect them. Amazing! (TS 68)

* * *

Percy did however examine some traditional philosophers who happened to propose a more radical world view than commonly accepted – the idea of the universe not as discrete parts, but as continuous, interrelated, and connected. While he takes these philosophers, not just Peirce but also Jung, seriously, and while he considers their ideas, he never completes a paradigm shift. Percy even

⁶³ See page 194 for reference to his other requests that someone draw him a picture.

called himself only a “thief of Peirce,” focusing mostly on Thirdness, but CSP’s philosophy had riches and depths that Percy could have drawn from to flesh out his radical anthropology.

PEIRCE ON TIME AND EVOLUTION

For Peirce, Thirdness is the tendency of phenomena (things or people) to take habits; habits are what create regularities, predictable laws about the way things will act:

All things [Secondness] have an element of chance and spontaneity [Firstness]), and all have a habit taking tendency [Thirdness] – for Peirce, as time progressed, it moves from more chance to more generalizing (habit or regularity): “[The tendency to take habits] is a generalizing tendency; it causes actions in the future to follow some generalization of past actions; and this tendency is itself something capable of similar generalizations; and thus, it is self-generative. We have therefore only to suppose the smallest spoor of it in the past, and that germ would have been bound to develop into a mighty and over-ruling principle, until it supersedes itself by strengthening habits into absolute laws regulating the action of all things in every respect in the definite future (I.409).” (qtd. in Sheriff 14).

In other words, the future becomes more “hardened” and set and predictable as time progresses.

Entities tend to develop habits conforming to laws. With the passage of time, they follow and adhere to these habits more and more, and become more “set” as habits become stronger and stronger.

Sheriff elaborates on the implications of Thirdness and Peirce’s metaphysical view of the cosmos. Order is slowly being formed out of chaos, with the universe becoming more “fixed” with each passing moment, as the universal mind as well as the individual mind seeks regularities in the world:

But we cannot fully appreciate Thirdness, the triadic relation of these phenomena, until we understand the close connection of nature and mind, of law and thought. Since the tendency to take habits is the one fundamental law of evolution, “is the sole fundamental law of mind, it follows that the physical evolution works towards ends in the same way that mental action works towards ends...” (6.101). The regularities of mind as well as those of nature must be regarded as the products of growth. The original chaos was like a confused dream in which nothing really existed. As things “are getting more and more regular, more persistent, they are getting less dreamy and more real” (1.175). In fact, Peirce regards matter as mind whose habits have become so fixed that it loses the powers of forming and losing them. Thus matter is partially deadened mind (6.33). Feeling, growth, habit-taking (i.e., life) exists only where there is chance (freedom, spontaneity). “Wherever chance-spontaneity is found, there in the same proportion feeling exists. In fact, chance is but the outward aspect of that which within itself is feeling” (6.265). From the boundless potentiality of nothing, from God if you wish, springs variety, continuity, reality and the feeling of unity, the metaphysical sense of life.... However we express it, chance/God is the vital element in the universe that gave rise to the tendency to habit that accounts for all order and laws of nature and mind. Therefore the creation of the

universe and the development of reasons “is going on today and will never be done” (I.615). “To believe in God at all,” Peirce queried, “is not that to believe that man’s reason is allied to the originating principle of the universe?” (Sheriff 16-17)

Peirce wasn’t quite as deterministic as this sounds; Firstness always exists to some degree and can always alter directions. Peirce’s theory of the evolution of the world holds that Firstness (chance, spontaneity, “chaos”) dominated the world in the beginning, and as time passed, it became more solidified. Secondness became more prominent – this hardened matter.

But Firstness still exists, and chance and spontaneity and freedom interact with (what would be otherwise) a purely deterministic model of a world of only Secondness. Firstness and Secondness together created a world that is **not** structured according to the principles of total determinism. While Secondness means that the world is not a random collection of events dominated purely by chance because there are cause-effect reactions, Firstness means that chance and spontaneity intervene in this otherwise completely pre-determined world. We live in a world that is not chaotic, nor is it completely predictably pre-determined. Our world is one that is fairly predictable on the surface, though not set in stone, and one that can take creative and constructive directions as influenced by the involvement of human beings.

Underlying all of it, more basic and primary than either Firstness or Secondness, is Thirdness, or the relationship of “all,” as well as thought, mind, consciousness, which influences and puts it all together:

There was no order or regularity until there was Thirdness – until the habit-taking tendency developed (according to Peirce’s evolutionary cosmogony) or until God spoke. “In the beginning was the Word...” says the gospel writer John. The Word is Thirdness, which is primary, according to both John and Genesis. Genesis attributes the origin of the universe to the prior existence and creative power of the “word”: “God **said**, “Let there be light,” and therefore it was so. Or as Joseph Esposito puts it in *Evolutionary Metaphysics*, “The “first condition” (MS 1105) of creation must... be expression.” (Sheriff 19)

Here, Sheriff equates Thirdness with “the Word,” with God, creator of the universe, just as Percy does.

The result is an optimistic world view that is neither deterministic nor nihilistic, but one that is logical

and creatively evolving towards a unity and relationship directly influenced by human involvement and human thought. “In contrast to the deterministic, nihilistic, absurdist views of human existence that have been dominant for the past one hundred years, Peirce’s theory is that creation is working towards logical ends and that individuals are free to participate in that creation process by making the world more and more logical” (Sheriff 59). The ethical implications are clear: our actions matter.

THIRDNESS AS CONTINUITY AND CONSCIOUSNESS

In addition, Firstness or “chance” leads to Thirdness or “...the law of continuity, the continuous spread of feeling, born of chance, can produce general ideas, ‘mental’ associations if you will” (Sheriff 18-19). These general associations are Thirdness – mental habit-taking, or intelligence and reason. Firstness is immediate feeling; Secondness is sensations of reactions or polarities; Thirdness is “consciousness of a process of change” (Sheriff 28). It is not an instantaneous or immediate recognition but occurs over time. “ ‘This is the consciousness that binds life together. It is the consciousness of synthesis (l.381)’ ” (Peirce, qtd. in Sheriff 29). Without Thirdness, chance and spontaneity would exist with no connection to anything. Interactions of objects against each other would exist, but with no acknowledgement or understanding of pattern or regularity to their interactions or reactions, nor of meaning or purpose.

Thirdness enables thought and consciousness. “Thought is representation; it is signs of signs” (Sheriff 32). Peirce further elaborates:

The third category of elements of phenomena consists of what we call laws when we contemplate them from the outside only, but which when we see both sides of the shield we call thoughts. Thoughts are neither qualities [Firstness] or facts [Secondness]. They are not qualities because they can be produced and grow, while a quality is eternal, independent of time and of any realization.... No collection of facts may constitute a law; for the law goes beyond any accomplished facts and determines how facts that *may be*, but *all* of which never can have happened, shall be characterized.... Just as action requires a peculiar kind of subject, matter, which is foreign to mere quality, so law requires a peculiar kind of subject, the thought, or as the phrase in this connection is, the *mind*, as a peculiar kind of subject foreign to mere individual action. (Peirce 78)

Signs⁶⁴ are Thirdness; signs are necessary for thought and consciousness. Thirdness is the “fabric of life” that yields reflection upon meaning and purpose, that notes connections and similarities and synchronicity of things. Without Thirdness, which puts events and perceptions together in a relationship, the world would be random perception with no conclusions or reflection or self-consciousness possible. There would be no ability to perceive relationships between events. These ideas of Thirdness as thought, as the activity of mind, are the precursors to Walker Percy’s later belief that symbolic activity (triadic activity or Thirdness) is necessary for consciousness.

Peirce’s ideas of Thirdness creating a metaphysical continuity in the world later become important in Percy’s writing and are spread throughout his novels as the idea of “the fabric of life,” (for example, “the fabric is wearing thin” (MG 18) and “the fabric is dissolving” (MG 54) and that naming is “the warp and woof of the fabric of our consciousness” (MB 145).) This phrase is Susanne Langer’s specific term (Langer 78),⁶⁵ but Peirce was also a source of not only the idea but the term. Percy does have at least one direct reference to Peirce’s doctrine of continuity in his fiction, citing Peirce by name in *The Thanatos Syndrome* (69). Peirce himself explains this concept as it relates to Thirdness, using a similar metaphor, the “thread of life”:

By the third, I mean the medium or connecting bond between the absolute first and last. The beginning is first, the end second, the middle third. The end is second, the means third. The *thread of life* [my italics] is a third; the fact that snips it, its second.... Continuity represents Thirdness almost to perfection.... Law as an active force is second, but order and legislation are third. Sympathy, flesh and blood, that by which I feel my neighbour’s feelings is third. (Peirce 80)

PEIRCE’S THEORY OF MIND

Ketner claims that Peirce refutes Descartes and solves the mind-body problem of dualism:

“Descartes was wrong when he said mind is some kind of ‘thing,’ for mind is a reality, not an existence.

⁶⁴ Peirce uses the word “sign” to refer to the triadic sign relation in general: something (an object) is represented by something (a representation) to an interpreting agency (an Interpretant). For Peirce the sign is a triadic relation, a fact about three times: object, Representamen and Interpretant. It is also the entire sign relation itself. See Appendix C for further discussion of Peirce’s (and Percy’s) understanding of the term “sign” for a triadic sign relation.

⁶⁵ See chapter 5.1 for a detailed exposition of Langer’s understanding of the “fabric of life,” which was similar to Peirce’s synechism and Jung’s synchronicity.

Minds don't knock together like dyads, like billiard balls" (TP 78), just as "God is real, but doesn't exist: The cosmos is God's embodiment perhaps; God is the intelligibility of the universe..." (TP 79). God, the Word of God, is Thirdness; the physical universe, God's manifestation, is Secondness. Similarly, Mind is Thirdness, the actions that result because of Mind and consciousness, are Secondness.

Ketner's – originally Peirce's – assertion of nonmaterial reality also refutes the materialist's view of the world, which would deny the reality of anything non-physical or non-tangible. These realms (Thirds) of reality – very important realms – affect lives far more than "physical" ones. The reality of law, relations, and spirit have more impact on the psyche and soul (themselves "real but not existing") of a human being than say, good nutrients in one's diet. This coincides with Percy's view that behaviorism does not explain all human motivations or actions, and that Freud's theories do not account for the perversity of self that often acts counter to its biological self-interest (Tolson 208).⁶⁶

Peirce thought that various theories of mind – such as thought as analogous to electric current moving along a wire, or brain locations for consciousness – were erroneous (Sheriff 26). In Peirce's view, mind also has the same qualities of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness that he describes for the physical world. Thirdness of the mind is "reason" or intelligence. "In mental phenomena, as in physical phenomena, instantaneous feelings/qualities flow together to form ideas/regularities that influence and are influenced by each other" (Sheriff 24). For Peirce, although nature and mind are usually thought to be entirely different, actually they are not:

The original chaos was like a confused dream in which nothing really existed. As things 'are getting more and more regular, more persistent, they are getting less dreamy and more real' (I. 175). ... Peirce regards matter (Secondness) as mind whose habits have become so fixed that it loses the power for forming and losing them. Thus matter is partially deadened mind. (Sheriff 15)

⁶⁶ See previous comments on the "starving artist" or celibate monk. Victor Frankl in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, makes the observation that prisoners in Nazi concentration camps, in equally destitute conditions, lived or died not whether they had more food or physical sustenance, but whether they had meaning in their lives. If a prisoner discovered his wife in another camp had died, often he lost his meaning for living and died. Though everything was taken and they were starving, a prisoner might share bread with a fellow prisoner who needed it as it gave them meaning.

The habit-taking tendency underlies all other laws and “both mind and matter are results of one original law, the tendency to take habits” (Sheriff 24). Like Percy’s transformation of symbol, Peirce believes that the creativity of chance-spontaneity, of Firstness, becomes regularized and generalized into laws that fix the world into “an absolutely perfect, rational symmetrical system” (6.33), with no “deviations” in which mind becomes “crystallized, dead,” and growth could not exist – because chance-spontaneity is necessary for growth (change) (Sheriff 15). But for Peirce, things are not forever fixed in deadness: “Symbols (signs that are self-consciously conscious of other signs), like qualities, ideas, and the expanding universe, grow” (Sheriff 58). As do the limitless possible relations between symbols.

Mind and consciousness are thought by many philosophers to be very similar, if not the same, but for Peirce they were different. Mind and consciousness are not synonymous. They are “distinct and simultaneously interdependent” (Sheriff 26). Mind is external and physical and “Second;” consciousness is the phenomenological experience. ““Viewing a thing from the outside, considering its relations of action and reaction with other things, it appears as matter. Viewing it from the inside, looking at its immediate character as feeling, it appears as consciousness... (6.268)” (Peirce, qtd in Sheriff 18).

Language exemplifies how mind is external. We know language, and speak and use it, without knowing (consciousness of) all the rules of English. The semeiotic implication is that our ideas are “feelings of consciousness when viewed from within and signs when viewed from without... and [they] interact and control each other” (Sheriff 25). Further, “consciousness/feeling is not only something that is within us; we are within it. We do not have it; it has, or is, us” (Sheriff 25).

CONTINUITY – PEIRCE’S ABDUCTION

In approaching the ultimate “mystery” insofar as what happens within the organism, the third element, that enables the triadic act of symbolism to occur, Percy discusses Peirce’s idea of “abduction” (or “retroduction”) and offers that as a possible explanation.

Abduction, simply put, is “guessing.” “Abduction” – a compatriot of induction and deduction – is one component of the Abduction-Deduction-Induction cycle, or “ADI cycle.” Abduction is a third way the human mind works to come to knowledge or what happens inside a human mind in the process of hypothesis formation. Induction and deduction, with which most of us are more familiar, cannot give us the final truth of our search for knowledge, they cannot “contribute the smallest positive item to the final conclusion of an inquiry” (Peirce, CP, 6.475, 1908), without abduction. One must have a testable hypothesis or the correct theory will never result. Deduction is a logical process exploring the consequences of propositions, and induction is experimental design and control testing to arrive at a correct picture of the world. Abduction is process of the guessing to develop a hypothesis to be tested – the logical leap the mind takes to find a possible solution or explanation to the facts at hand. Percy writes that “No new truth can come from deduction or induction. Deduction explores the logical consequences of statements. Induction seeks to establish facts. Abduction starts from facts and seeks an explanatory theory” (MB 321). Abduction generates the hypothesis, which is promptly tested, which if successful, is the final conclusion. In the abductive process, the thinker looks at a set of puzzling facts (which heretofore do not have an explanation that accounts for them and makes sense of them) and then guesses to produce a testable hypothesis to explain them. Abduction does not require the abductee’s adherence to any one dogma, method, or philosophical belief to work; primarily abduction works best with, and is composed of, a mental freedom: spontaneity, creativity, “pure play,” and “musement” as Peirce called it. Abduction does not produce truth; it only provides input into the testing processes.

Percy says abduction is a “valid and possibly useful strategy in approaching language” (MB 320):

Now how does Peirce’s theory of abduction relate the problem close at hand, namely, approaching the black box, LAD, toward the end of discovering its workings? ... In view of the uniqueness of the human capacity for speech, how different are these workings from the workings of other [non-human] brains? Are they qualitatively different or quantitatively different? Does the black box hold Cartesian mind-stuff or S-s-r-R neuron circuitry? Or both? Certainly it would be a start in the right direction if we had some notion of what to look for,

what *kind* of thing. It is here that abduction or Peirce's explanatory hypothesis might be of some help. (MB 321)

The interesting issue about abduction is that it requires a logical or intellectual leap. Just as triadic phenomena are "non-linear," abduction is a non-linear thought process. Ketner explains Peirce's reasoning for why abduction "works": "Our minds are continuous with the cosmic mind (we are tokens to its type); otherwise he says, we could not do science" (TP 8). Even Percy quotes Chomsky, "Man's mind has a natural adaptation to imagining correct theories" (MB 322). He also quotes Peirce, that is, out of the "trillions of trillions of hypotheses" that could account for the facts under investigation, "only one is true" – yet the scientist usually hits on the correct hypothesis "after two or three or at the very most a dozen guesses" (Peirce, qtd. in MB 322). The odds are significantly against this, yet it happens time and time again. To the Cartesian dualist, the mind *seems* like a separate entity from the universe, yet the fact that the scientist is capable of understanding its principles and guessing correctly the explanations for it – against all odds – is evidence to Peirce and Percy that mind is not separate. Peirce's explanation for it is found in his conclusion as a physicist about the nature of the universe. A realist, Peirce believed that, although men's minds operate separately from the laws of the universe, the same laws and principles and even essential "stuff" that make up the universe also make up human beings: "the reasoning mind is a product of the universe" and the uniformities of the universe are 'incorporated in his own being'" (Peirce qtd. in MB 322). Percy later elaborates:

[Charles Peirce] (and later Chomsky) are astounded by the fact that people can arrive at a correct theory of things. Peirce is talking about scientists; Chomsky is talking about a child learning a language. I subscribe to Charles Peirce's realism, the fact that somehow or other a scientist who's faced with a mystery or phenomena which he's trying to explain, and for which there can be a million or so hypotheses, somehow can arrive at the correct hypothesis after three or four guesses. To Peirce this is a tremendous mystery, and so it is to Chomsky. Peirce explains it by saying that man is a product of the universe, that there's something in his mind that's a part of the universe, and therefore he can arrive at more or less correct interpretations. (Con I 133)

Chomsky's use of the concept of "abduction" was limited, and did not include the whole range of Peirce's vision of it:

Chomsky argued that the ability of children to acquire the grammar of their first language, and the ability of adults effortlessly to use this grammar, can only be explained if we assume that all grammars are variations of a single generic “Universal Grammar,” and that all human brains come with a built-in language organ that contains this language blueprint. ... Despite [the complexity of grammar and language]...children acquire language knowledge at a remarkable rate. This leads to the apparently inescapable conclusion that language information must already be “in the brain”... (Deacon 35-36)

This idea – the uniformities of the universe incorporated into the mind of man, or its converse, that something in human minds are a part of the universe – is a very important key to explaining many of the characteristics of “the coupler” – and even gives clues as to what the coupler is or how it works.

Percy isn’t so sure – because he only considers its implications in terms of Chomsky’s use of the idea. Regarding Peirce’s comment that: “the reasoning mind is a product of the universe” and the uniformities of the universe are “incorporated in his own being” (Peirce qtd. in MB 322), Percy dismisses it, “Maybe so. This is only speculation, however interesting, about why abduction works” (MB 322), and he went on to examine the theory of abduction itself, dropping the issue of how or why it works. Yet WHY abduction works gets at the metaphysical issue that might also explain why the coupler works: continuity.

Percy dismisses further examination of abduction, considering it only “because of its possible value to linguistic theory and to call attention to the odd use to which Chomsky has put it” (MB 323). Chomsky, unlike Percy, says it is our capacity for abduction that explains how we learn and acquire language. The child’s mind is “preset” for general grammar and from that, uses hypotheses, or abduction, and inductive evidence (the language around him) to learn language. Percy agrees that minds may be “preset” for grammar – in the general form that coupling must be done by a coupler, but disagrees with Chomsky in that a child is capable of forming a theory of language (however unconscious). He allows the possibility, but seems to severely doubt, that a child “somehow hits on the grammar of a language after fragmentary input” (MB 323). (Percy also equates Chomsky’s reasoning here (and perhaps his idea of the LAD, or black box inside one’s head) to homunculus biology.) He then

concludes that abduction is valuable not to tell us what is happening inside the child's head, but to help us hypothesize fruitfully in order for *the linguist* to find an adequate explanatory theory for language. Percy is then applying the principle of abduction within the process of the scientific method of theorizing about language – but not considering the metaphysical implications of abduction.

There are other implications for a metaphysics that result from Peirce's philosophy, that can relate to Percy's language theory, but these are threads of the theory that he does not pursue. Peirce has two concepts that can account for how abduction works, for the non-linear quality of it: tycheism (chance) and synechism (continuity). He considers abduction is a kind of Jungian synchronicity displayed within the universe. This accurate guessing at hypotheses and hitting on the right one within a few tries, without (or not relying totally on) logical or empirical examination, is due to the synchronicity, or "synechism," of man's minds with the universe. Esposito calls synechism the "keystone of Peirce's metaphysics." Peirce says that it is because the mind is contained in and a part of the universe; Jung says it is because the universe is aligned and "synchronized."

CONTINUITY - PEIRCE'S SYNECHISM

Peirce scholar Esposito defines "synechism" as the continuous wholeness of the entire universe:

Synechism, as a metaphysical theory, is the view that the universe exists as a continuous whole of all of its parts, with no part being fully separate, determined or determinate, and continues to increase in complexity and connectedness through semiosis and the operation of an irreducible and ubiquitous power of relational generality to mediate and unify substrates. As a research program, synechism is a scientific maxim to seek continuities where discontinuities are thought to be permanent and to seek semiotic relations where only dyadic relations are thought to exist. (Esposito 1).

The heart of synechism is the doctrine of continuity. Continuity is "the very idea the mathematicians and physicists had been chiefly engaged in following out for three centuries," (CP 1.41) and "the leading conception of science." (CP 1.62) Peirce variously described it as "unbrokenness" (CP 1.163), "fluidity, the merging of part into part," (CP 1.164), where "all is fluid and every point directly partakes the being

of every other." (CP 5.402n2) The mathematical conception of continuity included the notion of infinite divisibility (Esposito 2).

With regard to space, Peirce denied that three-dimensional Newtonian space was objectively real, adopting a Leibnizian conception over a Newtonian one. (CP 5.530) In his third letter to Samuel Clarke, Leibniz argued that space is not absolute but "an order of coexistences, as time is an order of successions." As Peirce described it, the order of space is not geometrical but dynamical and even dialectical: "Space is thus truly general; and yet it is, so to say, nothing but the way in which actual bodies conduct themselves." (CP 5.530) But Peirce also asserts that:

the continuity of space so acts as to cause an object to be affected by modes of existence not its own, not as participating in them but as being opposite to them. . . . So again, when a force acts upon a body the effect of it is that the mean of the states of the body are not actual, but indefinitely approximating to the actual, differs from its actual state. So in the action and reaction of bodies, each body is affected by the other body's motion, not as participating in it but as being opposite to it. But if you carefully note the nature of this generalized formula you will see that it is but an imperfect, somewhat particularized restatement of the principle that space presents the law of the reciprocal reactions of existents. (CP 6.84)

This 'conduct' of bodies is to engage in reciprocal interaction and even to influence by opposition alone.

Although Peirce speaks of space as a cause he means to say that being a continuum, it is a form of reciprocity, an expression of Thirdness, (CP 6.212) consisting of reacting individuals. Space is simply a common sense description of the interaction of individuals that are in large part what they are because of their interactions (Esposito 2):

As a result of his synechistic perspective Peirce at times sounds more like a twentieth-century physicist than a nineteenth-century one. Developments in elementary particle physics in this century have shown that the atom of John Dalton and Niels Bohr was a profound simplicity. The discovery of the conversion of matter into energy and vice versa, string theory, the search for a pervasive Higgs field to account for the mass of a particle, quantum theory, the new science of developmental genomics —these are some recent theories that illuminate and modernize Peirce. Quantum theory, for example, refers to a radical discontinuity on the subatomic level, but only if the space and time of that level is supposed to be Newtonian-like. (Esposito 5)

Clearly Peirce's synechism echoes some quantum physicists. While not all believed that a logical explanation exists for entangled pairs and other nonlocal quantum behavior, others, such as David

Bohm, feel there is an implicate order, in which all is connected, beneath the explicit order. "Peirce claimed that '[a]ll communication from mind to mind is through continuity of being'" (CP 7.572). With this insight "the barbaric conception of personal identity must be broadened" to include a dimension of social mind and social consciousness (Esposito 6), not unlike Lewis Thomas's view of the biological world.

Of course, the implications of this are immense. The universe, instead of being random, or instead of being composed by millions of discontinuous particles of matter knocking against each other on a daily, momentary, basis, is actually flowing through time and space like a wave, which is not separate from but merely a discontinuous part of the ocean and of other waves. Separation is an illusion, a temporary state.

Although Percy seems to hold to the idea of the world as a continuity in his *Thanatos* quote, in other places, he is more skeptical. When Ketner explains this concept to Percy, he does not embrace it automatically. Ketner writes:

For P, the basic stuff of the cosmos is relation.... WP [Percy] is briskly selling a book that appears to argue... the cosmos is a bunch of relations and worlds and like. As CSP said, matter is just effete mind, too weak, too hide-bound with habit to be vigorous interpreting mind. Matter in other words, is just a certain kind of relational pattern or system.... The impact of all this on science is terrific, but its impact on religion might be even more terrific for spirit (being just another kind of relational pattern) can readily be seen to be real,... as real as matter. (Ketner, qtd in TP 32)

Percy was hesitant – if not about synechism per se, about most of Peirce's metaphysics. Percy's reaction to Ketner's long and involved letter on Peirce's thoughts – his semeiotic, metaphysics, cosmology, was that he needed some time to digest it, but that he doubted he would "ever get hold of the technical-philosophical-Peircean argument advanced in some places" (TP 39). He also felt Peirce/Ketner's approach was a bit of "conjuring" – switching logical and "real" categories (TP 40). Finally, he questions whether Peirce even ventures far beyond Saussure's sign – merely "a passive

accretion” of meanings and symbols (TP 42). Percy clearly wasn’t comfortable with the more complex aspects of Peirce – one reason, perhaps, he called himself a “thief of Peirce.”

Charles Bigger and Ketner both felt Percy’s use and understanding of Peirce and Peirce’s symbol was incomplete (TP XX). Percy’s admission he was merely “a thief of Peirce” was important enough to Samway to make it the title of his book. Percy borrowed ideas in part from Peirce and others, but he was on a track that kept him from exploring their theories more fully and perhaps finding alternative solutions than those that were just the biology and language.

Towards the end of his life and career, Percy continued his semiotic search by corresponding lengthily with other top thinkers in the semiotic world besides Ketner, such as Thomas Sebeok and John Deely. Vincent Colapietro writes to Percy in the year of his death, (February 18, 1990), urging a paradigm shift:

I have just read your piece on “the Divided Creature.” While I’m in deep sympathy concerning what I take to be the main thrust of this essay, I wonder if the source of the incoherence of our worldview lies even more deeply within science than you suggest here or, for that matter, elsewhere. The problem might surface most evidently in the so-called human sciences, but the roots of the problem are to be traced in the implicit metaphysics of the natural sciences themselves, a reductionist metaphysics in which purely dyadic reactions are presumed to exist in re rather than only in our highly abstract perspective (i.e., the highly abstract perspective of natural science). Should we not be careful to replace the dualisms of modern thought (e.g., the Cartesian dualism of mind as unextended thing and matter as extended thing, the Humean dualism of reason and custom and of reason and passion, the Kantian dualism of phenomena and noumena), the dualism of purely dyadic reactions with genuine triadic ones? Perhaps there are only triadic reactions, though with regard to some of these (the ones Charles Sanders Peirce called “degenerate”) it may be profitable, within certain contexts and for certain purposes, to treat them as though they were essentially dyadic.

As Peirce himself suggests or, at least, implies, we have to become as little children again (CP 1.349). This means, in part, recognizing – re-cognizing the cosmos as a perfusion of signs (CP5.448, note I). This is the guess of a physicist at the riddle of the universe (CP 1.7). My purpose in writing is not to elicit a response from you, but to pose a question that might be of some interest and perhaps even importance to you as an intellectual wayfarer (TP 191-92).

Percy agrees with Colapietro, acknowledging that a modern paradigm shift is necessary and that the present paradigm is limiting in any kind of research on these matters. Percy’s response to Colapietro, February 23, 1990:

You are quite right of course. The temptation is to find inadequacies in the “dyadic” theory of natural phenomenon, suggesting a “triadic” theory in its place. But, of course, the difficulty is the mind-set of the entire Western world, beginning with Descartes, which is supposed to be based on a scientific revolution but is not. Descartes is the villain in my book.

A curious fact: You can point out to scientists and modern philosophers the contradictions and errors in Cartesian dualism. They will nod, shrug, agree – and continue in their *scientism*. The mind-set of an era is all-powerful and all-consuming. (TP 192).

And yet, ironically, the mind-set of the era seemed to prevent Percy himself from accepting those aspects of Pierce’s philosophy that might have made his search easier. Percy identified the error of the present paradigm, but was not yet free enough of his own particular background of traditional science and traditional religion (Catholicism) to make the paradigm shift that would have gleaned him the answer he sought.

Maybe Percy’s coupler is at this limit of the edge of human understanding. It is not dyadic, not in the realm of cause and effect. It resides in a different world than the Newtonian/Cartesian one Percy was nurtured in – the as yet indescribable world of the new physics.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ See Appendix B for more discussion of the new physics.

4 THE NOVELS: ARITHMECRIT

4.1 TO BE OR NOT TO BE (A NOVELIST)

So here is the real question, or rather the main specter which haunts every inquiry into language as behavior. Granted the two major methodological approaches to the talking patient – the analytic-psychical [Freud] and the organismic-behavioristic [Skinner] – is not the sole remaining alternative the novelistic? Instead of novelistic we could say phenomenological, for the novelist must first and last be a good phenomenologist, and to most behavioral scientists, phenomenologists are closer to novelists than to scientists. (MB 186)

* * *

Percy meant to be a scientist, by way of medicine – and after his illness, he then meant to be a scientific/philosophical essayist on humans, by way of semiotics. Fiction was his secondary emphasis, one he often felt he sort of “fell into,” he says: “The issue of science and art is of perennial interest to me, since I started off in science in college, in medicine and was headed for psychiatry, and ended up writing novels” (SSL 141). But as one critic concludes, his main occupation was not novel-writing:

“Writing novels was how he entertained himself when he was not doing his serious work” (Eckert).

Percy says of his “serious work”:

I think if I were doing it all over again, I would study linguistics, because it is going to be the new science. Incidentally, I am presently writing a book called *Novum Organum*, which is based on the belief I have that we are increasingly unable to understand ourselves based on our magnificent triumphant science....I think there may be such a thing as what I call a “radical science.” We now call it semiotics, which has to do with the interaction between people, and people and things, and people and symbols. (Con I 221)

For him, semeiotic theory was primary. He worked on his theory of language throughout his life and until his death. He outlined his foundational ideas on language theory in *The Message in the Bottle*, a compilation of essays written between 1954 to 1975. *Message* is a diverse anthology in which Percy immerses himself in examining the language act, particularly the first act of “naming,” the ontological status of symbol, and the human capacity for symbol-mongering. Throughout the essays, he consciously elucidates the idea of the triadic nature of the uniquely human act of symbolism.

Still, his work on language and a new anthropology was unfinished, never fully fleshed out in his mind or in his own assessment. *Message* was somewhat disorganized and confused in some critics' eyes – incomplete in Percy's eyes. In fact, the book ends on a question – the search for the coupler and what occurred in the naming event was still very much a mystery to Percy. He spent the rest of his life deliberating on his "Theory of Man," or "radical anthropology," as he variously called it, using an analysis of symbol in general, and naming in particular, to formulate his thoughts.

But, ironically, it was his last three fiction works, all written after *Message*: *Lancelot*, *The Second Coming*, and *The Thanatos Syndrome*, that carried the "burden of his non-fiction" – with semeiotic symbols and themes proliferating throughout novels – while his non-fiction semeiotic sequel remained unfinished and to this day unpublished. During this time, Percy was writing this sequel that would complete and codify what he began with *Message in a Bottle* and part of *Lost in the Cosmos*. Throughout the late 1980's to 1990, until just a few months before his death in 1990, he was deep in correspondence with such prominent linguists as Thomas Sebeok, John Deely, and Ketner, with whom he continued to develop his theories on symbol and language and discuss the work of Charles Sanders Peirce. He spoke often of his plans to finish his language theory, envisioning it by many names over the years: *Son of Message in the Bottle* (Con I 186), *Message in the Bottle Returns* (Con I 186), *Novum Organum* (Con I 216), *Thirdness* (TP 18), *Contra Gentiles* (TP 131), and *The Delta Factor* (Samway 395). The ten-chapter unpublished manuscript, finally called *Symbol and Existence* (seven chapters of which have been published in other sources), resides at the UNC-Chapel Hill archives.

He continually refers to his work on language in interviews and letters, only to put the book off in real life. Despite his intentions, Percy again and again found himself diverted back into the world of fiction. After the completion of *Lancelot*, he indicated his desire to pursue language theory, and not to embark on another work of fiction (Con I 186). Instead, his fifth novel, *The Second Coming*, was out next. Later he said that he felt that he had "failed" in his first five novels and in *The Message in the*

Bottle, but said “I’ve got a good idea for the next one” (Con I 225). When asked after the completion of *The Second Coming* (his second to last novel, he was 70 at the time) if he were working on another novel he says:

Oh, no, Lord no. When I finish something like *The Second Coming*, the last thing I want to do is write another novel! It took me four years to write it. At the end, the only thing I’m certain of is that I don’t want to write any more fiction right now. So what I want to do is almost routinely to go back and pick up where I left off with my non-fiction. It’s about the use of language, the use of symbols, the use of signs. The way I started out, the Langer book, was reviewing, but that book was important. (Con I 43)

But once again, the best laid plans went astray, and he wrote *The Thanatos Syndrome* instead.

Yet at the same time he was writing each of these three latter novels, he never gave up his work on this language theory sequel. He was completely preoccupied with semiotics at this time, even more so than before. These novels he wrote after *Message* mirror his primary focus. Embedded throughout the novels are the ideas and themes of this unarticulated language theory – even, or rather especially, the dyad, triad and tetrad, which form the basis of all his language theory as well as his “radical anthropology.” As a result of his simultaneous non-fiction and fiction projects, the dyad, triad, and tetrad become abundantly present in the latter half of his fiction. Though he never completely abandoned Kierkegaard’s existential stages in his philosophy and in his novels, he makes a definite shift at this time, from primarily using and emphasizing Kierkegaard’s stages, to a new paradigm – that of his symbolic semiotic diagrams.

His frustrations with semiotic “dead ends” (MB 10) that led him to publish novels instead of non-fiction was perhaps serendipitous: his audience was wider and his message more accessible through fiction. These novels, while indirect means, were more approachable, more comprehensible, and ultimately more effective at conveying his theories to a general audience than were his obscure semiotic treatises. Novels also were more suited to and more successful at conveying the existential nature of humans – the “something other” that a scientific or even psychological explanation cannot encompass, one that is captured particularly well by the existential novelists. Percy says:

It is an elementary axiom that the truth which science tells about things and events is a general truth. The scientist is only interested in a molecule of sodium chloride or a supernova or an amoeba or even a patient insofar as it resembles other molecules, other supernova, other amoebae, and even other patients sharing the same disorder. ... The great gap in human knowledge to which science cannot address itself is, to paraphrase Kierkegaard, nothing less than this: What it is like to be an individual, to be born, live, and die in the twentieth century. ... it is, of course, the artist who finds himself in league with the individual, with his need to have himself confirmed in his predicament. It is the artist who at his best reverses the alienating process by the very act of seeing it clearly for what it is and naming it, and who in this same act establishes a kind of community. (SSL 151)

Existential novels were also appropriate to deliver Percy's message because they captured the central element of Percy's radical anthropology, this search for meaning, which arises from the capacity for symbol.

We see precursors of this search in his 1957 essay, "The Coming Crisis in Psychiatry," in which he asserts that man is an existential creature, not merely a biological one, nor even a psychological one as defined by the "soft sciences," the social sciences. Life is about more than even freedom, love, creativity, or emotional maturity, sociological adjustment, or living life productively. Human beings, unlike any other creature on this earth, have an epistemological need, for an existential knowing – the ontological encounter with an "other" through naming, through symbol – as much or more as they are compelled to satisfy other basic human needs such as air, water, food, shelter.⁶⁸ And the meaning must be satisfied, not transiently, but transcendentally. At his National Book Award acceptance speech in 1960 for his first novel, *The Moviegoer*, he humbly concludes:

In short, the book attempts a modest restatement of the Judeo-Christian notion that man is more than an organism in an environment, more than an integrated personality, more even than a mature and creative individual, as the phrase goes. He is a wayfarer and a pilgrim. (SSL 246)

Percy sees human beings as not just physical creatures, but as "pilgrims" and "wayfarers," seeking something beyond material existence and mere physical survival, for something that cannot be grasped solely by empirical verification or behaviorism. A dyadic scientific viewpoint cannot fathom this –

⁶⁸ See Chapter 2.7 for a more thorough explanation of Percy's view of human epistemological need.

cannot take into account any existential, ontological need – but such a need *can* be explored through other means, through the novel. Although, ironically, Percy’s psychological explorations were a direct result of his science background (as a medical doctor he said that he might have been a psychiatrist if not a pathologist), and many of his main characters are psychiatrists – he still believed psychology and psychiatry based in dyadic science could not suffice either.

Art, the novel, is far more accurate in this regard – and so Percy continues to write stories to us, more truthful pictures of the essence of humans than science had. Percy explains:

In these brief remarks I wish to offer two propositions for your consideration. One is that our view of the world, which we get consciously or unconsciously from modern science, is radically incoherent. A corollary of this proposition is that modern science itself is radically incoherent, not when it seeks to understand things and subhuman organisms, and the cosmos itself, but when it seeks to understand man, not man’s physiology or neurology or his bloodstream, but man *qua* man, man when he is particularly human. In short, the sciences of man are incoherent. (SSL 271)

Humans transcend purely physiological explanations. Dyadic science is a subset of a greater explanatory theory, contained within another, different superset, one that art CAN describe.

Yet Percy never abandoned hope that he could describe scientifically (language seemed the best tool) what the existentialists, and Percy himself, had already described novelistically. Language unites empiricism and existentialism (MB 280). The existential novel always seemed, to Percy who was still a scientist at heart, an inadequate tool for examining the nature of the human being in a manner that could be convincing to “non-believers” – even the non-believer within himself. Percy wanted to *prove* his point scientifically. However insightful were his novels to explore the nature of human beings, Percy continued to return to linguistics to assuage his frustrated goal: “The importance of a study of language, as opposed to a scientific study of a space-time event like a solar eclipse or rat behavior, is that as soon as one scratches the surface of the familiar and comes face to face with the nature of language, one also finds himself face to face with the nature of man” (MB 150). Language and linguistics became Percy’s empirical tools to an understanding of humans and human nature. This “semiotic approach to

consciousness” (Con I 214), or “semiotics of the self” was his attempt to understand the self scientifically, but not by “a conventional science of secondary causes” (214), but rather to look at a new way of thinking about “people and things and symbols” (222). His non-fiction meant to demonstrate all of these concepts, to get at the philosophical problem more directly than the novel could, using a philosophical, biological, anthropological, and linguistic theory of humans that literally finds the ***coupler*** – a uniter – of mind and matter through language theory, that sees symbol as different from sign, and illustrates these ideas through dyads, triads, and tetrads.

And, although Percy’s premise was that understanding language was indissolubly linked to understanding the nature of humankind (and vice versa), he expressed discouragement that anyone might be interested in hearing about that or working that through:

What is involved in a theory of language is a theory of man, and people are not interested. Despite the catastrophes of this century and man's total failure to understand himself and deal with himself, people still labor under the illusion that a theory of man exists. It doesn't. As bad and confused as things are, they have to get even worse before people realize they don't have the faintest idea what sort of creature man is. Then they might want to know. Until then, one is wasting one's time. (SSL 420)

However, Percy still felt language was the key to reconcile the existential view of man with the prevailing scientific view so he never abandoned his language study nor his intention to “put it all together” finally. This language sequel was on his mind always, but never became a completed reality. His last three novels became the default messengers of his semiotics and his “radical anthropology.”

The discovery that he had prostate cancer in November of 1989, and his subsequent death six months later, put an abrupt end to his dialogue with semiotic scholars and concluded his search for a grand language theory. Since then, few have pursued the approach to language from his perspective, one that focuses on the naming event and the triadic nature of symbol, and one which contrasts significantly from most linguists and semioticians of his time and even now. What Percy leaves behind is worth examining, cultivating, and continuing. It is a unique approach to anthropology and symbol with the combined perspectives Percy offers: that of a scientist, novelist, and an existential philosopher.

4.2 ARITHMECRIT

Mathematics is the alphabet with which God has written the universe.

-- Galileo

Number symbolism has flourished throughout literature, but more specifically religious literature. Authors with religious, spiritual, even mystical, themes find number symbolism was more adept at conveying these themes than other symbols. Medieval writers, in an era mostly dominated by a religious belief and an overarching religious paradigm, use numbers prolifically. Dante's *Divine Comedy* contains the Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso (three of them) and all are full of "threes" and multiples of threes. In other times, mystics rely on number symbolism too. William Blake uses "fours;" Robert Frost, often called a nature mystic, uses "twos." Walker Percy had twos, threes, AND fours.

Mystical and religious writing has numbers more than writers who convey human, earthly insights, messages, and events. Numbers – words that describe only mental concepts with no material match – are less of "this-world" than any other earthly symbol, and thus the best way to convey a transcendent message. Ernst Cassirer wrote that numbers, being non-sensuous, were the best symbols for non-sensuous, or spiritual, ideas. Philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, 19th century American pragmatist and Percy's single most important semeiotic influence, used mathematics to illustrate a metaphysical picture of the entire world as a set of connected relations, in which Matter is just another relational pattern, preceded by Form, best understood through "number."

While used throughout his last three novels, number symbolism is not overtly differentiated or acknowledged by Percy. The numbers in the novels generate a new kind of literary analysis, "ArithmeCrit," or examining the role of numbers in literary texts. Numbers as symbols are in the "transcendent" symbol category, approaching "sacred symbol" in their connection to the transcendent. While they are not designated as sacred or sacramental by the community, as sacrament is, they have characteristics that make them more effective vehicles for the transcendent than regular words.

Because they are non-sensuous and more abstract, they lend themselves to symbolism of the non-sensuous and more abstract. Just as the arbitrary sound (for the word) makes an excellent vehicle for symbol because it has no connection to physical survival, the number is even more arbitrary and less associated with anything in this world that lends itself to physical survival or biological sustenance.

Why is number symbolism associated more with the abstract and the spiritual world? Ernst Cassirer discusses symbolism of numbers as more capable of conveying abstract spirituality – “other worldly” ideas – than mere words:

For language cannot take the decisive step which mathematical thought demands of numerical concepts, namely their characteristic detachment and emancipation from the foundations of intuition and the intuitive representation of things. It [language] clings to the designation of concrete and concrete processes and cannot free itself from them even when it seeks mediately to express pure relations. (*Philosophy*, 228)

However, numbers can free themselves in a way other symbols cannot, Cassirer says. Lawlor echoes Cassirer’s words: “Modern thought has difficult access to the concept of the archetypal because European languages require that verbs or action words be associated with nouns. We therefore have no linguistic forms with which to image a process or activity that has no material carrier” (8). The primitives had their gods (“powers or lines of actions through which Spirit is concretized into energy and matter”) to access the archetypal real – and Lawlor sees these “god energies” as “controlled, specified and modified through the effects of angulation” and an angle is “fundamentally a relationship of two numbers” (8). So Lawlor sees geometry, as well as number, as a vehicle of conveyance – for understanding of that which is otherwise inaccessible through verbal symbol: “Geometric diagrams can be contemplated as still moments revealing a continuous, timeless, universal action generally hidden from our sensory perception. Thus a seeming common mathematical activity can become a discipline for intellectual and spiritual insight” (6).

Simply put, names of physical objects as symbols are too sensual, too of “this-world” to represent that which is not of this world, only one step above a picture of a “peach” to represent the

object “peach.” While names of objects are “emptier” than pictures of objects, numbers are even emptier yet.⁶⁹ A number cannot be grasped by sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch – it is abstract – and so becomes the better vehicle for the transcendent, which also cannot be grasped by sight, sound, smell taste and touch. Geometric designs are similar, and perhaps even more apt as a conveyor of the transcendent, for they often have order and pattern, and the divine is associated with order and pattern, and bringing order out of disorder – or at least out of creation. So too is a number in that it is in a sequence of numbers and relates in an orderly manner to other numbers, no matter what the equation or type of calculation (addition, subtraction, multiplication, etc.), it has pattern and order that can be predicted. However, it does not relate to any specific object in the outer world, but rather, to ANY thing. If the name carries the essence of the object *in alio esse*, the name of a number is pure potential – infinite. “Three” is not referring to anything in particular, so it can be three of anything, and therefore, far more abstract, and suitable for abstract subjects.

The Bible and other religious texts often use numbers – sometimes these numbers may represent an exact physical number of what the text says it represents, and sometimes there is a corresponding metaphorical meaning that goes along with the accuracy of the number. However, many if not most numbers in literary and religious texts often have a metaphorical meaning and do not have a physical real-world correspondence. The number is actually conveying something entirely different than its literal interpretation. It is well known that a loyal Muslim devotee believes he will receive 72 virgins in heaven if he sacrifices his life for Allah – and the individual fundamentalist Muslim often actually takes this literally. Less fundamentalist and more moderate scholars of any religion, however, interpret their religious texts metaphorically: “72 virgins” does not actually mean exactly 72 virgins – the number 72 is symbolic of “plenitude” (Schimmel 263). The twelve disciples of Christ may really mean twelve disciples, and twelve tribes of Israel may have been really twelve tribes, but the number 12 has a

⁶⁹ See Chapter 2.4 for discussion of the necessity of the emptiness of the signifier in the naming act in order to be efficacious.

metaphorical meaning as well: Twelve is one of the perfect numbers, or that of governmental perfection. Israel is divided into twelve tribes; even though there are in actuality thirteen tribes, only twelve are listed (Bullinger).

There are other “perfect numbers” in the Bible: Three is divine perfection, seven is spiritual perfection, and ten is ordinal perfection (Bullinger). Ancient Jewish belief has it that God created seven planets, seven days of the week, seven heavens. The seventh day was the day of rest – and set aside for worship. The first six, were the work of creating the world. Six represents the number of the created world (Schimmel 122), and often the ultimate creation of the created world (the human being). Six is repeated three times (666) in popular fundamentalist Christian theology, and is considered the “mark of the beast” (the anti-Christ) because the number of man repeated three times, as though man were trying to be (replace) God. In Percy’s last novel, this number is used repeatedly in keeping with the theme. Without God, humans become like animals.

Aristotle said, “Of two things or men, we say ‘both’ but not ‘all.’ Three is the first number to which the term ‘all’ has been appropriated” (qtd. in Hopper 5). Hopper further illuminates, with a Peircean attitude towards the number three: “A single occurrence is of no significance. A repetition is noticeable, but might easily be the result of coincidence. A third occurrence of the same nature gives the event the impress of law” (Hopper 5). Three can represent “all;” it can also be a simple round number, a number of perfect completion (Schimmel 69). Three is often considered a divine or mystical or sacred number, “the most universal number of deity” (Hopper 6), and the Christian God is viewed in terms of a “trinity” of persons.

The Jewish mystical tradition used their letters as numbers – while McLeish and others argue that this impeded their mathematical progression (with only 22 letters – and therefore numbers – and five additional letter variants) (McLeish 94), it gave rise to a deep mystical tradition of the Jewish Kabbalah, that is, meditation on the symbolism of the letters/numbers to become closer to God – called

number magic or *gematria*. The numbers had hidden meanings and the Hebrews, like Pythagoras, believed “the letter-numbers had been used by the Creator as building blocks of the universe, and were therefore sacred” (McLeish 94). Numbers were doorways to the revelation –even experiences – of God. Numbers clearly had mystical significance for the Jews.

Lawlor affirms the mystical characteristics of numbers and geometry:

Geometry deals with pure form, and philosophical geometry re-enacts the unfolding of each form out of the preceding one. It is a way by which the essential creative mystery is rendered visible. The passage from creation to procreation, pure, formal idea to the “here-below,” the world that spins out from that original divine stroke, can be mapped out by geometry... Inseparable from this process [form, or geometry] is the concept of Number, and as we shall see, for the Pythagorean, Number and Form at the ideal level were one. But number in this context must be understood in a special way. When Pythagoras said, “All is arranged according to Number,” he was not thinking of numbers in the ordinary, enumerative sense. In addition to simple quantity, numbers on the ideal level are possessed of quality, so that “twoness,” “threeness” or “fourness,” for example, are not merely composed of 2, 3, or 4 units, but are wholes or unities in themselves, each having related powers. (10)

As societies advance, so does their ability to count, and the number of their numbers advances. Very primitive societies don’t count at all, according to some scholars, while others are at the stage of “one, two... many,” not being able to distinguish past a single item or a pair. The next development is to combine the concept of one and two: a “one-two” is three; “two-two” is four. After that, all numbers are “many” because three pairs (six) would require comprehension of three. (Hopper 3; Ifrahs 3-5; Cassirer, *Philosophy*, 232-249). Nor can animals count either:

Animals can only respond to a number situation when – as with eggs in the nest or food – it is connected to their species and survival needs. There is no transfer to other situations or from concrete reality to the abstract notion of number. Animals can only ‘count’ when the objects are present and visible, and when the number is small (not more than five or six).... The reason for animals’ inability to separate numbers from the concrete situation is they are unable to think in the abstract at all... (McLeish 7)

Ifrah also believes that animals’ capacity to count is limited – but in a quantitative rather than qualitative manner. He offers several examples of animal number perception (never extending beyond 4 or 5). Human children learn, however, by the age of three or four, how to count past the stage of animals and primitives, the stage of one, two... many (Ifrah 5). Ifrah says, “... animals have a [non-

realized] potential which is [has become] more fully developed in humans” (3). Therefore, as Percy would say, they lack consciousness, that is, the abstract thought necessary for consciousness that humans have.

TRIANGULATION

Percy uses number symbolism and corresponding geometric shapes, triangles, squares, diamonds, throughout his last three novels. Another geometric event Percy uses is triangulation. Triangulation is related to number symbolism, but of a slightly different character. Numbers and geometric shapes are static symbols, whereas triangulation is an action. Normally triangulation involves three entities, but it can involve more. The action of triangulation is using two (sometimes more) elements which can be seen or experienced to determine the existence – often the location and/or presence - of a third which cannot be seen.

Naming is ultimately an *action* of triangulation – the object and symbol (the word or sound that represents the object) can be seen, but the coupler cannot be seen. Yet, because we are aware of these two items we can physically perceive (the word and object) are coupled, we know a coupler must exist. In a sense all symbols are triangulation in that they are physically present entities that give us clues or awareness of another presence - an unseen transcendent one. Percy’s characters triangulate throughout his novels – from signs or unusual events or objects – as clues to the divine presence. Triangulation is **key** to Percy’s (and Peirce’s) triadic theory of language - the idea of the word as part of a triad and not a dyad. Triadic theory would not be possible without triangulation. The coupler cannot be seen (and as such remains an unsolved mystery) but is clearly there as evidenced by the nature of the interaction between word and object to create a name. Just as the Christian God is a trinity, the third element of the language event, the coupler, is “other worldly” and transcendent as well – enabling humans to encounter the visible world ontologically, fully and wholly, repairing the rift between man and nature.

Part of an ArithmeCrit approach to Percy's texts is not only to analyze the role of numbers and shapes, but the action of triangulation. One of Percy's protagonists' tasks is to recognize the clues and symbols they encounter (even if they must perceive this through triangulation) as clues to the divine. In other words, God's presence surrounds us constantly but is only accessible if we acknowledge and can "see" it. ("He who has ears, let him hear," Matthew 11:15.) It is only through triangulation that God is known and experienced and lived. "Experienced" and "lived" is as important as "known," for in Percy's triangulation, it is not just information, awareness, and insight being conveyed in triangulation; ultimately God is not a neutral abstraction, but a real presence in the physical world. Triangulation of the "clues" we encounter while living our lives grounds us in experience and presence of the divine and directs us in our path in life. Without it, we would merely be aimless wanderers rather than wayfarers of meaning and purpose.

Percy's heroes know there is something more to existence than the everydayness that confronts them; they don't feel at "home" in the world. The characters are often lost and wandering, at least spiritually, if not literally wandering without direction, as in *The Last Gentleman*. When the distractions of this life are no longer fulfilling, the world is then empty to them, a blank slate, so they can now see "signs" – to something more than the world. The signs are the most important thing in the novels and in the real world in which the characters live. It is only when Percy's protagonists become aware that they can "see" clues that transcend both their despair and their existential wandering. They may not have a final awareness of what they are on the earth for, but they have a present purpose that is connected to the final one (and not just an isolated activity in the space-time continuum or communal reality). Their job is now to pay attention to the clues – signs and symbols – along the way.

The triad is Percy's primary symbolic shape, and all important not only to his language theory, but also in his novels. It is fully present even in his earlier novels, even before *Message*. The presence of threes, multiples of threes, triads, triangles, and triangulation permeates all of Percy's fiction,

signifying the mysterious divine element that makes humans different from animals. In the first three novels, however, the triad is less prevalent and more general, and the divine symbol actually represents more the Catholic idea of the sacrament, and less so the symbolic triad of his language theory.

After *Message* (1975), he became immersed in this study of semeiotic and worked on the manuscript's sequel continuously for the rest of his life – simultaneously as he was writing each of his last three novels. The numbers of his semiotics ended up in his novels. This divine symbolism of the semeiotic three starts to fully flourish and become dominate. This triad now refers less to the theological one, the holy trinity, than it does to the semeiotic triad, which contains the mysterious coupler, the third element of the symbol diagram. The first two elements, word and object, are triangulated to reveal a third, the coupler. It is this third element which sets humans apart from the animals. At this time, Percy also began to use the other numbers (twos and fours) that he had never previously used, relating symbolically to their meaning in his language theory and his thoughts on the symbolism of the dyad, triad, and tetrad, not in a general way, but in a very conscious manner (sometimes even painfully forced: he actually draws pictures of triangles in *Lancelot*.) Percy's latter fiction was immensely affected by his simultaneous obsession with his semiotic search.

An "arithmecritical" examination of Percy's fiction shows his conscious use of the numbers and geometry that corresponded to his semiotics, though he rarely mentions this intertwining of fiction and non-fiction. Percy's numbers had not only anthropological implications, but also metaphysical ones. Humans are triadic creatures, and the fabric of life is a triadic one for Percy and his philosophical mentor Peirce. Everything is related; everything is connected, Percy realized, as his number theory, his Cenopythagoreanism, developed over the years through his immersion in a study of man's symbolic capacity and his language theory. Percy's Thomas More exclaims in Percy's last novel, "The great American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce, said that the most amazing thing about the universe is that apparently disconnected events are in fact not, that one can connect them. Amazing!" (TS 68). This

synechism, this fabric of life, is a metaphysical view of a universal connection of all things through triadic relationship. Percy's debt to Peirce was not just a triadic understanding of symbol and humans, but a triadic understanding of the whole universe as a fabric of life.

CRITICS

While Percy may have taken Peirce seriously, few critics took Percy seriously when it came to dyads, triads, and semeiotic in general. Previous analyses of Percy had been limited to the literary, and so did not cover the totality of his thinking, simply because he garnered the attention of the literary world, not the philosophical world. Philosophers considered him an autodidactic amateur, which in fact he was. Tolson writes of Percy's place in semiotic theory:

Percy, in fact, was in a very peculiar position in American intellectual culture. He was an amateur writing in a field that had become not only professionalized but balkanized into a number of mutually hostile (or at least indifferent) camps. He was close to the continental existentialists and phenomenologists, but he was also respectful of Anglo-American thinkers and even saw himself as trying to build a bridge between the two. That he was also interested in linguistics, semantics, anthropology, and theology placed him well beyond most established philosophical pales. An intellectual renegade, he was vain enough to think that he might reach not only some academic readers but also the (perhaps mythical) common reader. Consequently, the silence of friends, or their frank admission of perplexity, was troubling. (Tolson 256)

And if philosophers and theologians tended to give Percy's view of symbol a cursory treatment, linguists did so even more. Percy's non-fiction works have received *some* attention, and the overarching general ideas of his language theory, the end purpose of it (man as a creature with a soul, a pilgrim and a wayfarer), have been used as a tool to uncover literary themes – but even then the specifics have been lost on most.

This continuous oversight is unique to his semeiotic efforts; Percy critics are quite thorough in analyzing the rest of his work. Much complex thought is devoted to analyzing Percy's religious and social views, but few scholars have devoted whole works to Percy's "semiotics" – whether in his non-fiction or fiction – other than how that might affect his religious convictions. Perhaps that is because he didn't have a "semiotics," but "for reasons duly advanced" had a semeiotic, though the practitioners of

semiotics were mistaken that he was one of them (KK). At the same time, he was formally educated in medical science, and was, at heart, a philosopher of science and a scientist of human beings – this is what drove him to write. Percy's semeiotic observations offer great insight into his literature and his novelistic intentions – and to ignore them is to miss the significance of much of what he meant to say, and to only partially understand his themes. For example, the ubiquitous presence of the triad itself (or dyad or tetrad) in his literature receives little more than passing notice.

If occasionally critics do speak of Percy's triads, they concentrate on his non-fiction triads (rather than his fiction triads) found in his writing on language theory, not in his novels. The symbolism of "three" and "triads" are applied only to other themes than Percy's burgeoning radical anthropology. Few mention or even notice triads – or any other numbers or geometric shapes – in his novels. Triadic analysis has been used by scholars to evaluate his theology, including his Catholic theology; his philosophy (Kierkegaard, Marcel); his psychology (a secondary choice of specialization); his Southern background; his medical education; and his satire on the downfall of American morals and culture. But triads in his novels as applied to his anthropology or cosmology are completely overlooked.

Desmond's article "Walker Percy's Triad" refers only to his interest in a triad of disciplines (science, literature, and religion); Simone Vauthier's "Narrative Triangulation in *The Last Gentleman*" in Broughton's *The Art of Walker Percy: Strategems for Being* discusses the narrative triangle, or "the trinity of narrator, narration, and narratee" (69), but not triangles, triads, threes, or triangulation within the novel itself. Even Desmond's thoughtful 2000 work on Percy and community begins with an examination of Percy's mysterious coupler, the third element of the communication triad that had so stumped Percy (and any other triadic linguist), and decides Percy meant it to be the third element of the divine trinity, the "holy spirit," and so proceeds with a theological analysis of intersubjective human relationships in Percy's fictional works. Yet, though Percy did dabble with the idea of the coupler as a

“holy spirit,” he never thought he wholly solved the mystery of the triad’s coupler, as he continued his search for its nature and origin, even up to a year before his death.

Lewis Lawson’s insightful article, “The Cross and the Delta,” does an exegesis of a sentence in Percy’s *Message* prologue, “In the beginning was Alpha and the end is Omega, but somewhere between occurred Delta...” (Lawson 3), with references to both Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1, equating the “word” (Delta) to God. Lawson also refers to Peirce’s quote comparing the triad to the divine trinity – though in Peirce’s version, the interpretant is not the holy spirit, but the Son of God (Lawson 9). In Peirce’s theology, God the creator is Firstness; God completely revealed, Secondness; the universe in all states and time, Thirdness (Lawson 8). However, Lawson’s insights into Percy’s triads, like others who examine his semeiotic, end with his non-fiction.

Percy’s doubts about his success in understanding the interpretant and conveying his language theory that were expressed in his first major speech (for the National Book Award in 1962) would never be relieved; indeed, they would be mirrored in his last public speaking event, the Jefferson Lecture in 1989. The search was unfinished. Percy’s concept of the triad and the coupler remains unsolved, never deeply examined by Percy critics, who are mostly literary scholars. Philosophers, semioticians, and language theorists have largely ignored his work. He seemed, to them, more of a hobbyist in this area, and indeed, Percy was by his own admission largely self educated. (Though semiotics is a field populated by self-educated thinkers – encompassing a diversity of disciplines and not usually gathered as one subject of study in the mainstream.)

And it is true Percy’s semeiotic was never systematic or organized. Even his primary book on language theory was a somewhat disconnected jumble of often contradictory and asynchronous thoughts, albeit valuable and profound in a linguistic community that held a largely scientific, materialist, or “dyadic” view, a community which never fully explored or answered the mystery of the very first language act: naming, as well as the “coupler” or the process within humans that put “word”

together with “object.” William H. Poteat concludes: “Academic philosophers, in a generous mood, will certainly find *The Message in the Bottle* pleasant reading, provocative at points, but not really ‘professional’” (qtd. in Broughton 193). In fact, he says, at points it is “profoundly confused” (193).

Confused or not, Percy’s insights were valuable in their uniqueness; he essentially stood alone in contemporary times, breaking ground on a new way of approaching language and humans through his understanding of Peirce’s dyads, triads, and his own tetrads. He was certain he was “onto something” and never gave up his study of it.

Many literary critics have examined the philosophical, theological, and psychological influences in Percy’s fiction; few, however, bother to take note of the influence of semeiotic thinkers and theory on his fiction. While Percy’s first three novels were dominated by Percy’s existential explorations, as has oft been noted by these critics and Percy alike, his last three novels were each profoundly influenced by his language theory, which has never been noted. Kierkegaard’s stages gave way to the prevalence of American pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce’s symbolic categories of dyads and triads, and, a Percyan addition, tetrads – replacing the stages to become Percy’s new “anthropological” description of the human spiritual condition. Percy’s homage to Kierkegaard’s primacy in his fiction applies mainly to his first three novels.

The Moviegoer reflected all the themes of Percy’s first three novels; the failure of psychology, scientism or anthropology to describe humans, the better descriptor of existentialism. Yet, after the publication of his first book on language theory, written after his third novel, his writing and themes would change direction. Language theory becomes the answer to the lost paradigm; it supplants existentialism to describe human difference from the rest of the world, including even the higher primates. Percy uses a dyad, a triad and a tetrad in each of his last three novels to illustrate his main themes. *Lancelot* gets the triad; *The Second Coming* uses the tetrad; and *The Thanatos Syndrome* employs the dyad.

4.3 LANCELOT AND THE INVERTED THREE: THE MOVIEMAKERS

Can good come from evil? Have you ever considered the possibility that one might undertake a search not for God but for evil? You people [the Catholic church] may have been on the wrong track all these years with all that talk about God and signs of his existence, the order and beauty of the universe – that's all washed up and you know it. The more we know about the beauty and order of the universe, the less God has to do with it.... But what if you could show me a sin? ... Now there's the mystery.... You could almost make a believer out of me. (L 51-52).

Lancelot, 1977, Percy's first book written during and after his language theory book, *Message in the Bottle*, 1975, is a novel that no longer skirts around the issue of symbol and number. In fact, much of it was written at the same time as *Message in the Bottle* and Percy's notes for both books were mixed together in the same folders. Forefront in Percy's mind is the most important magic number three – and using number as a way to convey his themes is now Percy's *modus operandi*. Instead of beating around the bush, he beats the reader over the head with a sledgehammer, even drawing triads within the pages of his novel. For Percy's first book after this literary shift of his, he uses "three," the primary number in his language theory. However, his protagonist Lancelot's existential search is a distorted one, and so the number three is distorted as well. Lancelot's attempt to search for a morality and to establish a new order is an upside-down search – he thinks he is on a righteous path, but he is not, his goal is opposite of the love and community of God – so Percy uses upside-down threes. Throughout the novel, Percy has many references, large and small, to the inverted number of three, or the evil triangle, and its many distorted manifestations, representing Lancelot's inverted, misdirected, and sometimes even evil goals.

Lancelot is a dramatic monologue by the lawyer protagonist, Lancelot Andrewes Lamar, who has been incarcerated in a mental hospital for killing his wife, her lover, and their cohorts, Hollywood stars, by burning down his house with everyone in it. The whole book is Lancelot's therapeutic confession to the priest-psychiatrist, Percival, whose questions and replies we never hear – until the last page of the book, in which he replies in monosyllabic "yes" and "no" answers. We literally see Lancelot's (and Percy's) Southern traditional stoicism confront Hollywood liberal self-indulgence and self-absorption.

Until his murderous act, Lancelot was a fairly average American, living a traditional life, looking forward mostly to his nightcap and the evening news, his distractions. His Southern historic mansion of a home is being used by a group of Hollywood stars and starlets to film a movie on location, and his wife Margot and daughter, Siobhan, are taken by the superficial glamour of the stars, whose progressive Californian morés and values are set in stark contrast to Lancelot's Southern traditional ones. He sees their graphic sins – the infidelities, the animal side of sex and life devoid of spiritual connection or true community, and he sets out on a mission to destroy it. He does this, at least in his little corner of the world, through homicidal retribution. While his recognition of sin in a misguided world is correct, his method – and his solution, war (a Third Revolution) – is in error.

Embedded with Lancelot's southern values are the tenets of the southern Agrarians, seen in the "Agrarian Manifesto," "I'll Take My Stand" (1930), of which Walker's Uncle Will was a contributor. Percy illuminates through Lancelot that the Agrarians' longing to return to the pastoral, idyllic life of the old plantation south, with its outdated traditions such as duels and honor in battle, as an answer to values and lifestyle of fast-paced and impersonal industrialization, urbanization, and modernity, was just as much in error as those they were fighting against.

Lancelot's Southern values of tradition and honor are no better than Hollywood's modern misdirection – both are wrong, according to Percy. Lancelot searches for a grail in a world without spiritual hope or God, but it is an unholy grail – not one of love, but of judgment. The Hollywood troupe is on the wrong path, Percy clearly draws, but Lancelot, mentally ill and a murderer, is no better and perhaps far worse. He has values, yes, but values and morality for their own sake without God, even values of Percy's roots, the Southern tradition, are still lacking the author and foundation of morality, God himself.

The right path, as Lancelot, and even his priest-therapist-confessor, Percival, discover at the end, is living a sacramental life in committed, intersubjective community.

INVERTED COMMUNITY, INVERTED SOLUTIONS, INVERTED THREES

Unlike the rest of Percy's protagonists, on a quest for meaning and purpose and something greater than self and the life they are presently living, Lancelot's quest is directed toward finding (and eradicating) evil, and he seeks to provide his own misguided answer, rather than a transcendent one. The symbols Lancelot sees are therefore symbols of evil, not signs from God. While Lancelot rightly realizes this dyadic age had "got it wrong," and needs triadic meaning, he's only recognized the problem correctly, but not the solution. His search and his solution is perverse and evil. Lance's sought-after answer is not one of forgiveness and affirmation of the world, as we see in Percy's other novels, but in destruction of it and rejection, and in creation of a *third* society – one that echoes the Southern stoic tradition – an ironic answer, for Percy in reality finds this inadequate although, or perhaps because, it was the credo of the brilliant uncle who raised him, William Alexander Percy. Lancelot fails to see that humankind and even nature is fallen and can never create perfection without the intervention and involvement of the divine – the definition of symbol and sacrament.

While Lancelot attempts to instill triadic meaning, triadic living, and triadic thinking in a dyadic world, his methods are wrong – and so the triads and threes Percy draws in this novel are "unholy," perverse, and distorted. Their distortions represent his vision - not only the sin he sees, but the solution he finds, since that, too, is mistaken. Three, the sacred triad, instead of being a sign of the mystery of the presence of God, good, or the divinity within humanity that makes humans human and not animals, now represents sexual perversion and moral misguidance because Lancelot searches not for the divine, but for immorality – mistaking morality with holiness, with the spirit of God. But holiness is not morality and the goal of the Church is not to bring the supplicant to moral perfection, but to divine love. While morality can be a sign of God, it is not God himself, and therefore morality is not the end goal. Morality is the physical action that results from the presence of God and God's love inside the human – and to mistake the action for the spirit is to make the mistake of materialism.

“Lancelot” is of course an allusion to the Arthurian Lancelot, in search of the holy grail. Percy’s Lancelot, unlike the Arthurian Lancelot, searches for an unholy grail. Merlin is no longer the wise wizard, but a misguided Hollywood director offering inadequate and false postmodern “answers” to moviegoers. The Lady of the Lake even appears to a deranged and dazed Lancelot. Swords abound, from Bowie knives (L 18) to the broadsword of Christ (L 177-78) to Excalibur (really the Bowie knife) the illusionary Lady of the Lake offers Lancelot.

The Bowie knife, reminiscent of Southern frontier tradition (since Lance’s solution is a Southern stoic one), is the metaphorical sword in the stone: “I tried the Bowie knife test, do you remember? With my right hand I stuck the knife into the soft pecky cypress wall with all my strength. With my left hand I tried to withdraw it without working it to and fro. I could not” (L 65). (Lancelot cannot remove it – is not ready to be “king” – as the mythical Arthur was.) Another sword is a pun on Lance’s name, his answer to why he had to actually see his wife’s infidelity (when he already knew of it, by triangulation): “Or was it a desire to feel the lance strike home to the heart of the abscess and let the pus out?” (L 236). The sword is a concrete solution – so much more real and accessible and immediate and viscerally satisfying than the abstraction of love. And much easier.

Since all is inverted, in this novel the sword in the stone is not one of honor, but of evil. Lancelot kills Jacoby with the sword (the Bowie knife), and the knife is all important to him. He sacrifices his freedom and almost his life to retrieve it. At the end of the novel he blows up his house and everyone in it. While he is blown clear of the explosion, he still returns to the flaming house and is burned. Why? “I had to go back to find the knife” (L 246). Lancelot’s revolution is going to be established not by love, but by the sword. “If it takes the sword, we’ll use the sword” (L 256). The Bowie knife, the sword, also refer one of the roots of the word “science” – to cut, to cleave, to rend, to separate. Like Lance’s name (lance a lot), the tool of Lance’s revolution, the knife, cuts and slices and divides – it must, in Lance’s mind, cut out the evil, kill the sin, wage war against the enemy. Like a dyadic science applied to human beings, it

fails. It is the mirror opposite of the tool of the Christian revolution: the forgiveness and unity of love, which creates community, not separation.

Lancelot's attempt to establish a utopian community is misguided to say the least, insidious and evil at worst. It is upside down, just as the rest of the novel inverts truths and the search, and represented by Percy using inverted "three" symbolism:

A new life. I began a new life over a year ago when I walked out of that dark parlor after leaving the supper table. Or rather walked into that dark parlor. Now I believe there will be a third new life, just as there are three worlds, the old dead past world, the hopeless screwed up world, and the unknown world of the future. (L 63)

He leaves the communal supper table (communion – albeit with sinners – is still communion). His "thirdness" (third life, three worlds) is a dark parlor of exclusion of those deemed (by Lancelot) "lesser," a Hitlerian world of "death to the unworthy," a place where Lancelot will incite a "Third Revolution." He says to Percival, his priest-confessor-therapist, with Percy again using inverted three symbolism to name his Revolution:

You have your Sacred Heart. We have Lee. We are the Third Revolution. The first Revolution in 1776 against the stupid British succeeded. The Second Revolution in 1861 against the money-grubbing North failed – as it should have because we got stuck with the Negro thing and it was our fault. The Third Revolution will succeed. What is the Third Revolution? ... The new order will not be based on Catholicism or Communism or fascism or liberalism or capitalism or any ism at all, but simply on that stern rectitude valued by the new breed and marked by the violence which will attend to its breach. We will not tolerate this age. Don't speak to me of Christian love. Whatever came of it? (L 157-58).

Percival, Lancelot's confessor, is rightly aghast at Lance's rantings – they are the rantings of a modern-day terrorist or a latter-day Nazi. In Lancelot, Percy creates the perfect picture of the horrors of the mindset of the combination of the abstracted scientist and the romantic idealist with a cause, one who creates real evil. The scientist's abstraction enables him to depersonalize others, and thus do with them what he feels serves his sentimental, idealist, and abstracted goals for bettering society (such as

genocide in the Nazi's case; murder of his wife and the actors in Lancelot's case).⁷⁰ The sentimental scientist is a recipe for evil.

In Lancelot, Percy draws the dangers of this personality largely. Percy critic Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr., refers to the "myth of the autonomous self," in which, with

the collapse in the Western world of the Judeo-Christian framework of belief and order, the postmodern self turns inward to itself as the seat of all knowledge and value.... The solipsism of the autonomous self becomes particularly dangerous when the self embraces, with unyielding commitment and without regard for the rights and even the lives of people (since all value is located within the isolated autonomous self) extreme ideologies calling for remaking of society. (Brinkmeyer 161)

Lancelot operates in isolation as the American value of "rugged individualism" takes over him. Percy writes, "The self sees itself as a sovereign and individual consciousness, liberated by education from the traditional bonds of religion, by democracy from the structures of class, by technology from the drudgery of poverty, and by self knowledge from the tyranny of the unconscious – and therefore free to pursue its own destiny without God" (LC 13). Having abandoned the social structures of the day (or been abandoned by them, as they fall apart), the American character is to see oneself alone and independent, free to create its own path. In Lancelot's case, this is misdirected, in part because it is to proceed alone. For Percy, the communal experience of symbol, in sacrament, and the sacramental community, is the answer; this American solipsism is in direct contrast to the intersubjective community.

Lance's mistake is not only to believe in the autonomous self, but to put the moral cause, the utopian vision, before the persons involved. Therefore, people can easily be disposed of for some abstract ideal and vision that will, ironically in the romantic's mind, make the world a better place. Standing apart in his individualist stance combined with his "causa sui," Lancelot "reduces the humanity of the people about whom he speaks, turning sovereign and free people into dyadic creatures to be

⁷⁰ See pages 9-10, 26-28, 40ff. for more discussion of and background on Percy's sentimental scientist. xx

observed with scientific detachment and experiment with scientific certainty” (Brinkmeyer 164). AND to be easily done away with if they prove problematic to attaining Lancelot’s utopian “moral” society.

Yet Percy’s Catholic theology states the purpose of the church is not to bring us to morality but to love. Instead, Lance has embraced Ernest Becker’s “*causa sui*” with all its failings.⁷¹ “You are pale as a ghost. What did you whisper? Love? That I am full of hatred, anger? Don’t talk to me of love until we shovel out the shit” (L 179). Love is missing in modern life – and especially in sex, its physical expression, as Percy draws throughout the novel. But Lancelot’s solution to that absence is not to love, but to hate, to war, and to kill in the name of a cause, an abstract belief. “The point is, I will not tolerate this age...We shall not wait for it to fester and rot any longer. We will kill it” (L 159-160).

TRIANGULATION

The novel opens with triangulation and “signs.” Lancelot is in a mental institution, and out of his window he can see a sign, with three partial words: “Free &,” “Ma,” and “B.” (L 4). These three elements of the sign become the cause for much speculation, as he tries to solve their mystery. What do they say? Somehow he feels it has something to say to him. Thirdness is about communication. Another triangle is the location of the institution. Lancelot sees little outside his cell, but he can see a cemetery (death) and an adult movie theater (sex) next to it. and the blackboard of La Branche’s Bar with its daily specials (L 22). Lance is triangulated between death, sex, and whiskey. The theater is the former old Majestic theater – implying, “We used see movies like *The 49ers*... Now they’re showing something called *The 69ers*...” (L 22). The movie is obviously named for a sex act, but 6 and 9, and 69 are all multiples of three (the first, 3 + 3, the second 3 x 3). The name is for a pornographic movie in which sex has become one of physical gratification – a dyadic experience purely - rather than its proper triadic: the union of two souls through the body, the third element of which is the presence of God, and

⁷¹ See page 40ff. xx

which gives life and love to a physical act just as naming does. Lancelot, who seeks sin and death, not love and union, uses inverted threes – ironic threes.

The theme of sex is integral in *Lancelot*, as central as death is. If sex surrounds him, death surrounds him even more, not just in the proximity of his cell to the cemetery, but death is also his solution to the sexual inversions and perversions around him: he kills his unfaithful wife. Both of these events (sex and death) are two of the most soulful events in a human life – and key concerns of Freudian analysis which Percy regarded as a failed modern example of possible salvation. The dyadic science of Freud, focusing on these physical events of sex and death, misses the most important concerns, the concerns of the soul. Percy makes sure that Lancelot's counselor is not a Freudian, but a priest, a giver of sacraments and creator of sacramental community.

The novel opens on All Souls Day, November 1, the day the Catholic church celebrates the dead. "A pleasant feast for the dead" (L 10), Lancelot calls it. Yet here, there is no soul. And if a city has a soul, Lancelot says, the soul of New Orleans has a "vital decay" (L 22); the vice of Marseilles is that "Death and sex are treated unseriously and money seriously" (L 23). For Percy, this is the soul of the world today.

Another triangulation begins the plot of the novel, if not the story itself (as it is told in flashback). Lancelot triangulates to discover his wife's past infidelity. Percy's idea of the unity and relationship of all – the fabric of life – is reflected in this discovery. Life is not random, but rather a tightly interwoven dance, and one dot out of place affects the whole process of existence. Lancelot precedes his revelation to Percival with an observation:

Yes, sure enough, one dot, not even a bright dot, one of the lesser dots, is a bit out of place. You've seen the photos in the newspapers, random star dots and four arrows pointing to a single dot. ... What of it, thinks the layman, one insignificant dot out of a billion dots slightly out of place? The astronomer knows better: the dot is one millisecond out of place, click click goes the computer, and from the most insignificant observation the astronomer calculates with absolute certainty and finality that a comet is on a collision course with the earth and will arrive in two and half months. (L 19).

Life is not random, but a fabric tightly woven, and every dot has significance, has meaning, is a clue to the overall pattern. The dot is of course his daughter's blood test. She is type "O" which, given his blood type and his wife's – three blood types – does not "triangulate" or lead to the conclusion that she is his. His triangulation of three leads not to the divine, but to immorality, to the discovery of deception and sin, that his wife had "carnal relations" with another man, that he is a "cuckold." More evidence, more triangulation, more inverted threes, further proves his point. He has the blood types, Siobhan's birthday to calculate conception date, and the "third and indispensable item came from a shot in the dark.... Bastardy will be proved with Master Charge" (L 31-33). The credit card bill reveals where his wife was at conception (not at home). Threes lead to sin, and not salvation, with *Lancelot's* inverted themes.

Triangulation, the geometric version of three, is a theme that Percy uses in all his novels, but later develops far more overtly in his last novel, *The Thanatos Syndrome*. Lancelot "triangulates" constantly, just as Father Smith does in *Thanatos*. But Father Smith, the priest, triangulates to find fire (i.e.: the Holy Spirit) – Lancelot triangulates for sexual sin:

But this time I did something different. I left the worn path of my life.... A few minutes earlier I had noticed that the door was open some six inches. It was possible, standing with my back against the door, to hear the diners and by moving from side to side to see their reflection in the dim pier mirror on the opposite wall. The images traveled some fifty feet, thirty feet from diner to mirror, twenty feet back to me. (L 49).

Lancelot is triangulating, and through it, discovers the sin he seeks – the object of his search – in this case, his wife's present infidelity: "How strange it is that a discovery like this, of evil, of a kinsman's dishonesty, a wife's infidelity, can shake you up, knock you out of your rut, be the occasion of a new way of looking at things" (L 51).

But Percy gives clues from the beginning that there is hope for Lancelot's (and everyone's) redemption. For though Lancelot's view triangulates death, sex, and whiskey, it also offers another triangle: "a patch of sky, a corner of Lafayette Cemetery, a slice of levee, and a short stretch of Annunciation Street" (L 3-4). Here we have the sky (God), the levee (water, baptism, or spiritual

cleansing), and the Annunciation – a more hopeful vision for our lost Lancelot. His world is not completely replete with sin, but God’s presence is always there to see.

In his biography of Percy, Jesuit scholar Patrick Samway writes that, whatever the signs mean, the important point is that “Lance is trying to interpret the signs of his life...” (TP xvi). He is engaged in human symbolic activity; he is interpreting the signs of his life, finding MEANING, through triangulation – the only way meaning can be found, the only place meaning exists. Percy’s essay entitled “Toward a Triadic Theory of Meaning” says it all – only through the magic number of three can there be meaning and understanding, purely human functions. Only through triadic understanding and triangulation can humans be humans and not creatures. Lance, at least, is seeking when the Hollywooders are not, though the fact that he can’t see or interpret the signs shows he is confused and lost in his search.

It is through triangulation that Lancelot can not only identify the problems and sickness of the world he lives in, but it is also how he will find his answers – and perhaps find healing. “There is something I don’t understand. You are both my leverage point and my companion,” he tells Percival, his priest-confessor (L 108). From the single still point, a stable place, he can then find who he is, and make some sense of his life, past and present. Percival, Lancelot’s priest confessor, can offer that to Lancelot, just as the church offers that to the world – the church being the third point in the triangle between individual and God.

To answer the existential question, “Who am I and why am I here?”, one has to have stable points for triangulation. With no leverage points to triangulate we wander randomly through life – the fabric of life is thin, does not exist even, and we do not even know ourselves. Director Janos Jacoby in *Lancelot* does not. “Janos Jacoby was full of himself.either volatile fiery French-Polish, or he knew how to act volatile fiery French-Polish, or maybe both. His accent varied – he had been an actor too so he didn’t know what he was” (L 110). Like the Roman god Janus he is named after, Jacoby has two heads (in some myths, four heads) looking in opposite directions, with no grounding or commitment,

ready to fly off in any direction at a moment's notice. A two legged chair cannot stand; a three legged one is stable. The number two is devoid of the third, of the divine, element that allows humans to transcend the mere animal realm and allows us to access our humanity. Janos is "two" – a dyad, representing mere physicality, while Lancelot is "three" and searches for something more.

HOLLYWOOD: POSTMODERN VALUES

Hollywood represents all of the values of this age, values that Lancelot has taken up arms against. It is more wealthy, materialist, sexually free, image-oriented, artificial, and "godless" than the rest of America. It leads our society in those areas, and encourages the rest of us to become so. Salmon Rushdie compared Hollywood stars to the Greek gods. They were not moral guides nor exemplaries to the Greeks, like the Hebrew God was; in fact, the Greek gods were even less moral than humans. But they ruled over and represented various areas of life, and all they asked was that humans worshipped them, just as the American public worships its Hollywood stars. Hollywood stars replace God in our society, complete with their void of moral guidance, yet we make the mistake of not just worshipping them, but following their morality and values as though they were a Hebrew god.

Percy carries it further when he has the protagonist of the movie represent the New Christ.

Merlin (the inverted Merlin, a false wizard) says:

It is the sexual liberation of Sarah. Everyone is hung up.... Not only is the stranger free, he is able to free others. There is a sense about him of having come from far away, perhaps the East, perhaps farther, Perhaps he is a god. At least he is a kind of Christ type. He fulfills people.... The stranger is the life-giving principle, the books are dead, everyone is dead... so what we are trying to get across is that it is not just screwing, though there is nothing wrong with that either, but a kind of sacrament and celebration of life (L 147-148).

Merlin speaks in abstractions. He offers many "could be's" for whom the stranger might be, yet the stranger remains abstract, identity-less, and nameless. Percy, like Flannery O'Connor, believes such abstraction leads "to the gas chamber."⁷² The sentimental answer here to the existential search is "free love." Sex is the new religion, the new Christ, and the new mysticism – and Hollywood proselytizes that

⁷² See page 27 for O'Connor's quote and discussion of this oft-used concept of Percy's.

message to us, to “help” us in our search. This kind of answer and this kind of sex is a human-to-human encounter. However, it is without greater connection than self-freedom from oppressive physical circumstances, it is without the presence of God, and certainly it is not a means of coming any closer to, or “knowing” oneself and another, or knowing God. It has no real meaning and serves as merely a distraction to human existential questions.

Hollywood’s answer does not satisfy Lancelot (or Percy). Unlike the *moviegoers*, who are at least on a search, hoping to find the answer, find themselves, in the story of the movie – these *moviemakers*, who think they have found the answer, are more lost than anyone else. They “make” illusion, they barter in illusion, their life is an illusion, and their sense of self is an illusion. “What was nutty was that the movie folk were trafficking in illusions in a real world but the real world thought that its reality could only be found in the illusions. *Two sets of maniacs*” (L 152). Although Lancelot’s threes are inverted due to the misdirected nature of his search, at least he searches. The moviemakers are in the dyadic realm of twos, of the animal world, of pure physical pleasure without any acknowledgement or even awareness of the concerns of the soul.

In the existential world, the realization of the transience and ultimate meaninglessness of temporal values deteriorates into hedonism. Hedonism is the step before the search begins. The moviemakers have abandoned the values of this-world, but have nothing to replace them. All that is left for them is eating, drinking, sex. They have no grounded, stable, unmoving points of triangulation, they do not have a sense of self or identity, yet they presume to offer the illusion of that to the rest of the world, as role models. They pretend to have an answer. Lucy is:

...maybe even happier to be next to Raine, whom she worshipped as a casual possessor of those qualities most prized by Lucy, and therefore, it seemed to her, most unattainable: beauty, fame, and that special ‘niceness’ which Lucy could scarcely believe, Raine’s way of remembering ...names... Raine’s ability to act like anyone else, a real person, seemed to Lucy to surpass the most miraculous deeds of the saints. “She is the most wonderful person I have ever known,” Lucy told me. (L 111)

But Lancelot recognizes the shallowness of the actors – underneath acting nice, they can't answer Percy's ultimate question ("who am I?"). They do NOT know who they are. Percy asks not merely "who" as an individual, but "who" as a human race. The actors, however, can't even answer the first question. They were "vacant" and had no real roots or stability. They "took a light passing interest in everything, current events, scientology, politics. They were hardly here at all, but were blown about this way and that, like puffballs, in and out of their roles" (L 112). Percy alludes here to the "uncommitted" in Dante's limbo, the vestibule of hell, but Lancelot would, and does, punish the actors for their uncommittedness as well as their sexual sin, far greater than Dante would. "Dante was downright indulgent with sexual sinners. They occupied a very pleasant anteroom of hell" (L 17).

FALSE ANSWERS: SEX

Right sex, holy sex, is "triadic," just as the Word is triadic. The love-making act is rightfully three: two plus the divine. The spirit is the "coupler" between the two beings, just as the mysterious coupler in the symbolic act allows the physical sound of the word to BECOME a symbol, to become something more, to give joy and meaning. The symbolic act is a pairing that becomes a simultaneous identification of the word and object – the two become one, just as two humans become one in the triadic sexual union.

The third element makes possible this pairing and identification, and awakens the spirit and soul, bringing joy and meaning, just like Helen Keller's joy at "naming" water in the garden. Take the spirit away and add another human in place of God as the third element, and you've got nothing spiritual, nothing triadic, just a cause-effect reaction between objects, a bunch of cells bumping against each other and offering resistance, or giving way, as Percy so graphically describes in his novels. Ironically, three humans (without God) do not create a triad because the coupler (the spirit) is absent.

In the current age, Percy is saying in *Lancelot*, sex has deteriorated to the dyadic, and even life itself has – best exemplified and described by Lancelot's understanding of life's end, death – nothing

more than cells encountering other cells, just as sex is reduced to a mere physical action. “Why is it such an unspeakable thing for one creature to obtrude a small portion of its body into the body of another creature? Is it not in fact such a trivial matter when one puts it that way?” (L 16). Percy not only conveys it as a dyadic interaction of body parts, he uses the word “creature” (not “human”) as sex without soul is not a human act, not akin to language, but an animal act.

When Dana and Margo film a sex scene, the physical act devoid of emotion, Dana, the actor, “looked straight into her eyes, lazily and with no difficulty. Margot looked back with difficulty. Three lights were reflected in her eyes” (L 152). Because Margot is not really one of the Hollywood moviemakers, she doesn’t exist in the realm of spiritless sex as easily as Dana does. She is not as dyadic as her Hollywood counterparts. Although Lancelot’s relationship with Margot begins more dyadically - it is sexual and financial compatibility that brings the two together, not love, as with his first wife, Lucy – Margot still feels sex is more than a mere physical engagement. Still having remnants of her humanity, “three lights” in her eyes, or the triadic spirit, make this kind of sex difficult for her.

The several orgies of “three” that the Hollywood stars have in Lancelot’s house are also inverted, perverted triads. Percy even diagrams the participants as triangles (L 189), and one group of three is even portrayed as a “swastikaed triangle” (L 192) – clearly an evil act in Lance’s mind. He films them for evidence, yet the tapes come out murky and “reddish” with “lights and darks” reversed (L 185, 190), just as the orgy participants’ actions are reversed – instead of humans becoming divine, they are humans becoming animals, and just as Lance’s search is reversed. The reddish film is reminiscent of the fires of hell, but also of the Brave New World birthing room, where anonymous bodies come to life. Instead of people, they are all arms and legs and body parts (L 191), detaching, flying off, extending as pseudopods, as Percy dehumanizes their actions and makes them merely physical. Sometimes they deteriorate even further, not body parts or even cells, but merely “electrons” and “ectoplasm” (L 186,

192). Their humanity has vanished, and they have become all physical processes. Triangles abound, but they have nothing to do with the divine or the spiritual but with the inverted bodies.

For Lance, this is an abomination. Lancelot differentiates any kind of sex from the dyadic realm, from other, physical needs such as food and water. It includes something more and should be treated as more, in Lancelot's (and Percy's) mind: "...sex is not a category at all. It is not merely an item on a list of human needs: life, food, shelter, air, but it is a unique ecstasy, an ek-stasis..." (L 21). While Lance recognizes something different in sex, he still doesn't quite "get it." In his confused state, sex runs the gamut of import, and he views it on all ends of the scale, all mistaken. It becomes for him, at various times, a salvation, a replacement for God; at other times, a meaningless physico-chemical interaction. Yet when it is "god," it becomes misleading, even dangerous:

God as absolute? God as infinite? I don't even understand the words. I'll tell you what's absolute and infinite. Loving a woman.... What else is infinity but a woman become meat and drink to you, life and your heart's own music, the air you breathe? Just to be near her is to live and have your soul's own self.... What else is a man made for but this? (L 129)

And later, he continues on the reason to live, "Most of all, 99 percent of all, no: all of all, a woman to love. What else is there really in life, dear Percival, than love..." (L 169). Not just the love for a woman, but ultimately, sex itself is Lancelot's meaning of life: "The great secret of the ages is that man has evolved, is born, lives, and dies for one end and one end only: to commit a sexual assault on another human and to submit to such an assault. Everything else man does is so much bushwa and you know it and I know it and everybody knows it" (L 222). Eventually Lance's distorted mind carries his "answer" to the meaning of life even farther: "God's secret design for man is that man's happiness lies for men in men practicing violence upon women and that women's happiness lies in submitting to it" (L 224).

Percy's portrait of the deranged killer Lancelot is a realistic one and shows an exaggerated logical end result of the abandonment of God for abstracted romantic love and for elevating sexual union higher than the transcendent divine. Lance's healing at the end of the novel is marked by his realization that his "secret of life" is mistaken: "There was no 'secret' after all, no discovery, no flicker of

interest, nothing at all, not even any evil.... So I have nothing to ask you after all because there is no answer. There is no question. There is no unholy grail as there was no Holy Grail" (L 253). In the existential framework, his abandonment of his made up values propelling his distorted search for an earthly utopia has now freed him, created a blank slate from which to launch the divine search.

Through Lancelot, Percy critiques the values of the southern Agrarians – who also wished to create an earthly utopia, a return to southern traditions and lifestyle as an answer to the modern moral and social transformation of America. The Agrarians' anti-communism also promoted an admiration of Hitler, another establisher of an earthly utopia, because he thwarted communism in Germany in the thirties. The romanticized idealism of both Hitler and the agrarians was the danger of the sentimental scientist that Percy warns against here and again in *The Thanatos Syndrome*.

At this point, as at other times throughout the novel and the crazed Lancelot's mind, sex (as well as life and death) takes an about face, and is "nothing" – a mere physico-chemical interaction. Even the phallic "sword," the instrument to bring about the Revolution and the answer, fails. "Not even the knife at his [Jacoby's] throat seemed to make any difference. All it came down to was steel molecules entering skin molecules, artery molecules, blood cells" (L 254). All is molecules, there is not spirit or soul, and the same is true for sex: "her fornication, anybody's fornication, amounts to no more than molecules encountering molecules and little bursts of electrons along tiny nerves – no different in kind from that housefly scrubbing his wings under my hair" (L 89). Yet it IS more to Lance than that, and he is still obsessed with Margot's infidelity, though he can't figure out why. "Is the sexual offense a special category and therefore unlike other offenses, theft, assault, even murder? Or is it that sexual belongs to no category at all, is unspeakable? Isn't the sexual pleasure unspeakable? Then why shouldn't the sexual offense be unspeakable?" (L 15-16).

If indeed it is, Percy, through Lance, has succeeded in showing there is something more to the world than the tenets of materialism, physicalism, scientism, and logical positivism. The mystical and

the transcendent are alive and well, though not speakable (as they always are unspeakable, or “impossible to say” (MG 235)), and not empirically verifiable as the positivists would have it. Still, they exist, although Lance is uncertain, arguing each side throughout his confession to Percival as he tries somehow to understand the nature of a mysterious union between a man and a woman, what it might be about, and what it involves: “Is it not a trivial matter when one puts it that way? ... As a physician wouldn’t you say that nothing more is involved than the touch of one membrane against another? Cells touching cells” (L 16). But in fact, it clearly is not trivial to Lance – he kills over it – and Percy’s point is made: something more IS involved. If this “something more” exists in even this one area of life, the fact that it exists at all means that physicalism and scientism fails.

Anna is his compatriot in mental illness; she occupies the room next to his in the mental institution. Anna doesn’t speak due to a traumatic rape – though she is slowly coming out of her shell, as Lancelot exclaims happily: “The girl in the next room and I communicated yesterday! She has not spoken a word for months, not since her terrible experience, but we communicated!” (L 34). The joy at communication is a clue to Lancelot as to where Lancelot should be looking for his answers, not in a Third Revolution that is obsessed with, and kills, sexual immorality and theorizing. (Lance immediately after relates his “sexual theory of history”) (L35). Anna, however, is more on the right track; she is far less obsessed with sexual immorality than Lancelot is, despite the trauma she experienced – that he never personally did.

Anna’s rape represents the ultimate dyadic manifestation of sex, yet it is also another perversion of the sacred “three”: it is three men who gang raped her. Anna was an unwilling participant, but there are willing participants in other sexual perversions of the sacred three. Lancelot’s detective work of filming his houseguests to uncover infidelity goes a bit awry. The film is a reddened blur as in a hellish *Brave New World* hatchery, but still clear enough to detect orgies of three: Merlin, Margot, and Jacoby in one room, with a parallel orgy of Raine, Dana, and Lucy in another room. Sex

takes place in groups of threes in *Lancelot*. Percy actually DRAWS triangles – three of them – connecting the three orgy participants. Two are triangles of his wife’s infidelity – Margot, Merlin and “I” (*Lancelot*) (L189); then Margot, Merlin, and Jacoby in the orgy itself. The third is the swastikaed triangle of Raine, Dana, and Lucy.

Interestingly, there is also infidelity in *The Thanatos Syndrome*, but the dominate number for that book is “two” (the dyadic incident – a physical interaction, devoid of the spirit of God), so Percy portrays the infidelity in the *Thanatos Syndrome* in “twos,” rather than threes, as here in *Lancelot*. Ellen’s affair with Van Dorn and Tom’s affair with Lucy are independent from their relationship with each other; at the time, the two are separated so it is not a triangle, but a pairing. Sex of course has deteriorated in the New Age to a mere physical act engaging only the animal side of the participants – a picture Percy continues and draws even more largely in *The Thanatos Syndrome*, comparing humans to primates there and here: “First there was the Romantic Period where one ‘fell in love.’ Next follows a sexual period where men and women cohabit as indiscriminately as in a baboon colony – or a soap opera” (L 35). In this statement, Percy foreshadows events and themes in his final novel, *The Thanatos Syndrome*.

TIME

Hollywood’s answer of sex does not solve the existential issue – the question of time and what to do with oneself – and *Lancelot* recognizes this. “For the last few years I had done nothing but fiddle at law, fiddle at history, keep up with the news (why?), watch Mary Tyler Moore, and drink myself into unconsciousness every night” (L 60). When *Lancelot* and Margot finish their restoration of the historic home, “we found ourselves at a loss. What to do? We did what other thirty five year old couples did: went skiing in Aspen, house-partying, fishing and drinking on the Gulf Coast, house-partying, and drinking in the Highlands.... What to do with time? Make love. Have a child. We did that.... What did God do when he finished creation?” (L 121, 123). And *Lancelot* observes how time changes with

jealousy, "Time loses its structure. Time stretches out. There is so much time. The minutes and hours creep by" (L 122-123). He explains to Percival later on, "Then I realized why I drank and smoked. It was a way of dealing with time. What to do with time? A fearful thing: a human body of ten billion cells ready to do any one of ten billion things. But what to do?" (L 123). Human physical capacity may be excellent, but at the same time, existentially, a human may be lost. For Percy, the physical reality is different from the existential reality. Lance's is empty – he does not know why he is alive or what to do.

He says:

The mystery is: What to do with oneself? As you get older you begin to realize the trick time is playing, and that unless you do something about it, the passage of time is nothing but the encroachment of the horrible banality of the past on the pure future. The past devours the future like a tape recorder, converting pure possibility into banality. The present is the tape head, the mouth of time. (L 106)

But though the past (life) is banal, even "meaningless" and "does not signify" (L 105), it is worth investigating because it holds clues. The present is golden (L105) but a devourer of time and Lance wonders, "does it ... turn the pure empty future into the shabby past?" (L 107).

Lance is not the only one who fills up time with meaningless activities, not knowing what else to do. Percy ridicules Raine's new age philosophy, implying that even Raine knows deep down its inadequacy. "Could it be her I.P.D. was a trick too, not a trick she played on me but on herself, a way of filling up time?" (L 113). (Percy looks askance at any of the new age philosophies emerging in his time, replacing traditional Christianity as answers.) Without meaning, anything anyone does to fill up time is mere distraction – perhaps gratifying on a basic level, but ultimately useless and amounting to nothing. Of course, time and how to fill up time, how to fill up the empty hours in one's day, particular 4:00 on a Wednesday afternoon, is a constant theme with Percy, and one he develops more fully in his next novel.

FALSE ANSWERS: CAUSA SUI

Perhaps the most obvious inverted three is the distorted triangle of the orgy that Lance draws for his confessor. The Delta symbol should be a sign for something divine or a doorway to the

transcendent beyond the physical world; in this case, it is the bodies of three “lovers” reducing sex to physical pleasure only – when of all bodily acts not consecrated by man, it is the one that most contains a connection to the divine. Lance even identifies the symbol as evil by calling it a “swastikaed triangle” (L 192).

The evil of a Nazi symbol is even greater considering that Percy reiterates continually that the Jews are a living symbol of God’s presence which the Nazis attempted to utterly eradicate. The hiddenness of this evil is implicit for Percy as well, due to his personal experience visiting Germany in the 30s, and encountering the “Hitler youth,” whom he greatly admired at the time for their enthusiasm, loyalty, sense of purpose, and dedication to a cause (Tolson 117-118). On the surface it seems so “good” – yet the cause was not for something transcendent. As Becker says, a human being is victim of an underlying anxiety due to his subconscious awareness of his death and seeks immortality by living for a *causa sui* – a cause outside himself, larger than and greater than himself, a cause to live for and die for. While it SEEMS good, if it is not transcendent, it can be evil, since it usually involves the demonization of another group outside one’s own. The *causa sui* is not just a cause FOR something, but usually, a cause AGAINST something. The *causa sui* is often lived out by the attempt to eradicate the other, just as Lance’s anxiety is effectively treated by his *causa sui* – he seeks not to love – “Don’t speak to me of Christian love. Whatever came of it?” (L 158) – but to kill: “We shall not wait for it to fester and rot any longer. We shall kill it” (L 160). His *causa sui* is the Third Revolution (the Revolutionary War and Civil War being the first two). Again, the “third” of this revolution represents a triad of revolutions in Lancelot’s mind, but a distorted one, since this triad is of war and killing, not sacramental love and community.

The war, however, is against something abstract – immorality. Wars of course make the best *causa sui*. They are a literal confrontation with the anxiety of death, and by killing rather than being killed, one triumphs over it. If one is killed in the process, one still triumphs, as one lives on through the

continuation of the war itself, through one's comrades continuing the fight. If the war succeeds, one lives on through the concrete manifestation of the war's goal.

Likewise, Lance heartily embraces (and sadly laments) the loss of the Southern tradition of the duel. One confronts the abstract anxiety of death by making a concrete confrontation with death – so the psychological anxiety is made visible, and disappears from the unconscious.

Here we see Lancelot personifies the *causa sui*. He has identified a “demon” and is working to eradicate it – and succeeds. The abstract demon is the immoral values of the new age, the Hollywoodization of America. He literally eradicates it (in his life) by burning the house down with Margot and the Hollywood gang. But this is not enough. He speaks to Percival of the Third Revolution, and seeks to eradicate the immorality of the age (specifically sexual immorality) everywhere. This is the Nazi effort; their *causa sui* was an attempt to create the perfect society through “euthanasia” of, first of all, the handicapped, mentally retarded, mentally ill; and later, the “imperfect races” (including, especially, the Jews) and others deemed socially unfit, in an eradication of the less than perfect. Yet the cause inspired passion and purpose in the Hitler youth, and all of its followers. The existential anxiety that Percy saw in us all, that he writes about constantly as a uniquely human trait, was being effectively treated by the *causa sui*.

Lancelot has a moderately happy life (L 24). Yet all of our wisdom about how to live life becomes nothing in the face of our imminent death – we will all, ultimately, fail – and so awareness of eventual death penetrates the wall of happiness, bringing anxiety. However, Lance's solution, his *causa sui*, was just as misguided as the Nazis, and no better a replacement for a life-guiding purpose than the Hollywood actors' hedonism.

Percy's *Lancelot* is sometimes critically unappreciated, but it is, like most of Percy's works, prescient. It speaks of the wars of our times. In present day America, we are not engaged in a war against some concrete enemy geographically enclosed (as in the First Revolution, against the English, or

the Second Revolution, against the North) but rather, against an abstract enemy – the war against terrorism. It is a war of morality and immorality, just as Lance's war, the Third Revolution, was. The planes hit the twin towers on 9/11 not to gain land or money, but because of the terrorists' perception of Western immorality, just the war that Lance has taken up. Terrorists of any faith have the conviction and self-righteousness of a *causa sui*, easily willing to die for the cause, because this ensures their immortality. They have found their holy three, their Delta triangle of meaning, but it is a distorted triangle.

Many view Percy's works as a social comment upon his times, and a good deal of his work has been largely ignored since his death. Yes, he wrote of what he saw happening to society in his day, but his works are still applicable and if anything, more applicable today. Like Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Percy's novels portray themes that give us insight into current events and the ills of the times.

TRUE ANSWERS: COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY

Communication dominates *Lancelot* and other Percy novels just as it dominates Percy's thinking. If each novel uses a different sacrament of the Catholic's seven sacred sacraments, it is the sacrament of confession that marks this novel – not so much penance, but the whole novel is a confessional. At the end, a penance is implied when Percival speaks his "yes." The priest will now speak, will give the confessor direction. Thus rather than sacrament being an incident within the novel, the whole novel itself is a sacrament – the penultimate symbol. Of all the sacraments, confession is most marked by communication. It is focused on sin as well – just as Lancelot himself focused on sin. Confession revolves around sin and exists because of sin and seeks to address the problem of sin, unlike the other sacraments – baptism, confirmation, marriage, holy orders, the Eucharist, last rites – all are steps along the way to unite us

But while Lancelot seeks communication, the tool to community and communion with the other, Percy believes communication has failed. His idea of broken communication, of language that

has become overworn and overused so it no longer works and cannot communicate, is present here as well as in his non-fiction. In this novel, it is those who do NOT talk that seem to communicate more clearly. Silence is sometimes a more effective means of communicating. Not only that, it seems the ones who do not talk have a better hold on the truth, though they don't communicate it and are better human beings, more holy in some way, like a monk who has taken a vow of silence or an ancient Greek priestess Cassandra who knows the truth but refuses to speak to those who will not believe. Lancelot refuses to speak to all the other therapists in the hospital, except Percival, his confessor: "After all, what is there to talk about? I've nothing to say and am certainly not interested in what they say" (L 5). Whether it's because they wouldn't understand, couldn't identify, or Lancelot had no wish to enter their trivial misguided world (in his assessment), he will not speak to them. But to Percival, "No, what first struck me about you was that you're the only person around here who doesn't want to talk. That and an abstracted look in which I recognize a certain kinship of spirit. That plus the fact that I knew you and saw that you knew me even better" (L 5).

Communication is the path to true community and real communion with others, but for Percy, it doesn't happen in our modern society, and we not only can't know each other, we don't even know ourselves enough to be able to communicate with others, other than trivial or sensual distractions that fill the day of the Hollywood culture that comes to visit his house. The busy, meaningless activities (and even sex) echo the busy, meaningless words that distract us from what's really going on, from that which might be worthwhile – real connection with others, and real understanding and communion with others. But first, the distractions (both activities and words) must go. In a flashback, Lancelot realizes, looking at himself in the mirror, "I had been afraid of silence" (L 66).

Not only does Percival rarely speak in the novel, but Anna, his fellow "inmate," does not either. Communication is all important to Lance, and it is the way he feels he can connect to Anna: "I must communicate with her. According to my theory, it is no longer possible to fall in love. But in the future

and with the New Woman, it may be" (L 35). Percy continues to illustrate his thesis that regular words have become more of an impediment to communication than anything else. Anna has refused to use them. She does not speak and Lancelot must communicate with her differently than worn out words.⁷³ Not even body language or eye contact will suffice (usually more effective than words at conveying the truth) since she is behind a wall, in a separate "cell."

So a new language emerges. Lancelot devises a system of knocks on the wall that separates them. When Anna knocks back, it is of immense importance: "She tapped back twice. It might have been an accident. On the other hand, it could have been true communication. My heart beat as if it were falling in love for the first time" (L 12). Two is a coincidence, three a pattern – and true communication. Anna never quite gets the tapping code, so Lancelot actually abandons the wall between them (both literally and figuratively) and goes to see her in her cell; the need for relationship, the love, inspires growth in both of them. It is the first time Lancelot has walked outside his room ("closeted in a single small cell and glad to be here") (L 108), and it's the first time Anna has eaten (he feeds her a chocolate, a Hershey's kiss). Why? "Very simple. I just got tired of all that tapping" (L 109). The kiss is a kind of holy communion of romantic love. Eventually the soul yearns for something more and compels us out of our safe and pristine nests to the messiness of life...

Lance's misguided Third Revolution finds its refutation and correction in Anna's utopian vision, one of threes as well, but not inverted, as she is not inverted. At the end of the novel, she offers Lancelot an alternative to his dystopia: her place. "'When you get up there in Virginia,' she told me, 'you'll find a fallen-down house but a small solid two-hundred-year-old barn. One side is a corn crib and tack room with a loft. It would make a lovely cozy place in the winter and big enough for three'" (L 252). Lance wonders if this is just a repeat of Margot, who wished to shuttle him off, house him safely out of

⁷³ Anna is not the only female love interest in Percy's novels that speaks "abnormally" or rather, will not speak "normally. Allie in his next novel has even more interesting language idiosyncrasies. The message is that regular language is often "worn out" and fails to communicate and create community. These female protagonists communicate and connect much more authentically with Percy's heroes through their new and unusual languages.

the way in the pigeonier. But, he realizes to himself, “...she said *big enough for three*” (Percy’s italics) (L 252). He has seen her redemptive vision. This three is not Lancelot’s misguided three of division or separation or condemnation or killing, but is the three of intimate love and union. Lancelot is now directed on the right path, a life of a sacramental community. Like all Percy’s novels, at the end, the redemptive path is found in a loving relationship of commitment to a woman and a community.

REDEMPTIVE TRIANGULATION

Percy gives clues from the very beginning that there is hope for Lancelot’s (and everyone’s) redemption. For though Lancelot’s view from his cell triangulates death, sex, and whiskey, it also offers another triangle: “a patch of sky, a corner of Lafayette Cemetery, a slice of levee, and a short stretch of Annunciation Street” (L 3-4). Sky (God), water (baptism), and “annunciation” (literally, “announcement,” that is, communication, speaking, in this case speaking of God as Mary learns from the angel Gabriel, “The Lord is with thee”) are a divine trinity – but only a little bit of it seeps into his dark cell, the life he has created for himself. Patrick Samway writes that, whatever the signs mean, the important point is that “Lance is trying to interpret the signs of his life...” (TP xvi). He is engaged in human symbolic activity; he is interpreting the signs of his life, finding MEANING, through triangulation – the only way meaning can be found, the only place meaning exists – in triadic activity, or symbol.

And, it is through triangulation that Lancelot can not only identify the problems and sickness of the world he lives in, but it is also how he will find his answers – and perhaps find healing. “There is something I don’t understand. You are both my leverage point and my companion” he tells Percival, his priest-confessor (L 108). From the single still point, a stable place, he can then discover himself, and make some sense of his life, past and present. Percival, Lancelot’s priest confessor, can offer that to Lancelot, just as the church offers that to the world – the church being third point in the triangle between individual and God.

After this novel, Percy embarks on his next one, his second to last. From the darkness and (quite literal) fire of the sin and inverted sexuality of *Lancelot* rises the phoenix of *The Second Coming's* true love.

4.4 THE SECOND COMING: A TREASURE HUNT FOR DIAMONDS, FOURS, AND COMMUNITY

“Do you remember her joking about her island which was nothing but a sandspit and three pine trees and worthless unless the treasure Captain Kidd was supposed to have buried there was ever dug up and which nobody took seriously enough even to try, yet which you thought of often, not so much to get the treasure but to find it, to find a sign or a gold bug or a map?”

“Treasure. Yes.”

“Well, there’s no Captain Kidd’s treasure, but the Arabs certainly want to buy it.”
– Allie’s letter to herself, SC 39

Percy’s fifth novel, published in 1980, has *some* threes and triangles, but the theme of *The Second Coming*, more than any other of Percy’s novels, is the intersubjective community, the number and geometric shape that repeats in this novel is not primarily three, or even an inverted three, as in *Lancelot*, which meditated on the individual’s loss of spirituality – but rather, four and the square or diamond. This novel is not so much about the *individual’s* search for meaning, or loss of spirituality, represented by the Delta triangle (and its inversion in *Lancelot*), as it is about community and communication, represented by the intersubjective communication of the protagonists and illustrated by the four-sided diamond.

The Second Coming is Percy’s novel most consciously devoted to signs. Sign and symbol had become the predominate concern of Percy – who was working on his theory and book on language even more as the years went by. The novel’s theme of signs extends to every kind of sign and symbol Percy is concerned with – language as symbol, symbol as worn out, symbol as a sign of God’s presence and direction, God’s symbols in a variety of forms, including Jews as a divine sign and landscapes as sign. Science as a dyadic activity devoid of spirit and soul, inadequate to either describe humans or to recognized or meet their greater existential needs, is almost as prevalent here as in *Love in the Ruins*.

This book is a love story, about the community of love created between two lonely people (represented by the Intersubjective diamond). The primary community is the protagonist Williston Bibb Barrett, who meets his soul mate, Allie, and they connect, love, and create authentic community that

eventually extends beyond themselves. The novel opens decades after Percy's second novel, *The Last Gentleman*. Will's earlier love interest, Kitty Vaught, has married well and is a typical well-to-do Southern suburban housewife, a bit dazzled by new age philosophies, but now determined to have Will back. Will in turn has married Marion, a wealthy but good Episcopalian woman who has died. Kitty's daughter, Allie Vaught, has been institutionalized for maladjustment to society, for refusing to speak or speaking in odd sentences, yet Percy portrays her as by far the most sane, the most spiritual, and the most insightful of all the women. She escapes from her mental institution, and takes up residence in a greenhouse in the woods on land she owns. Will first meets her when he stumbles off the golf course looking for his misdirected ball; but later he falls through a cave wall into her greenhouse and she cares for him in his unconscious state. Their love takes off, and after a series of obstacles (Will is now institutionalized, Allie fights to stay in her garden home), they reunite and start a community with each other, and with others.

Signs of the divine, of the presence of God, surround Will (and the other characters, who remain oblivious to them) guiding them in a "treasure hunt" for authentic relationship with God and others. The novel itself is a treasure hunt, and the signs are clues as to where and what the treasure is. The treasure hunt is a metaphor for life; the treasure is the Intersubjective diamond of community. Percy's existential seeker translates perfectly into the treasure hunt metaphor – but with the treasure hunt, the emphasis is teleological – less on the process of seeking, more on the end goal, the treasure.

We are all on a treasure hunt. The question is: what is our treasure? Different Percy characters consider the treasure they seek as different things, even varying for the same character at different times. The authentic treasure, however, the treasure that Percy's protagonist Will Barrett seeks is not the same as other characters' treasures. He is on a hunt for authentic relationship with God and others, for love, for meaning, for spirituality in a physical world.

In the beginning of the novel, before Will and Allie meet, each is searching for their own particular path and salvation, and Percy relies more heavily on threes, triangles, and triangulation (not inverted this time) to represent their individual search. Later, the threes lead them to the treasure of community found in each other and in the communal world they then create for others, symbolized by fours and diamonds. Three symbolism expands to four symbolism with the inclusion of the other human being in the communication process – and hence, the creation of community.

THE TREASURE OF COMMUNITY: INTERSUBJECTIVE DIAMONDS

Communication between one human being and another is signified by the intersubjective diamond, hence the novel's "fours" and four sided geometric shapes. The repeated treasure symbols are "diamonds" and "gold." The four-sided diamond – the intersubjective diamond – is the real, authentic treasure. Squares also, but diamonds are valuable gemstones that work well with Percy's symbol. Both squares and diamonds have the four points of the intersubjective diagram. In fact, Percy draws the intersubjective diagram as a diamond. Percy represents the treasure in other ways as well – but gold and diamonds predominate. The four-sided diamond – the intersubjective diamond of community – is the real treasure.

Intersubjective communication is an all important theme in this novel. Allie's disjointed speech is a focal point in the novel, illustrating Percy's oft-emphasized point about the loss of meaning in language. Here the freshly created words transcend staleness and enable that connection to the transcendent through the world and to the other. Poet-priest Gerard Manly Hopkins' presence is strong in this novel, in both landscapes as well as language. Allie's made up words, like Hopkins' words, enable the listener to perceive the message more clearly. Allie receives her inheritance from an aunt, her treasure, for one reason – "I listened to her. Nobody else did," she says (SC 39). Through communication, she participated in community with her aunt. Through insistence upon *authentic*

communication – by refusing to use stale words and worn-out language – she is also insisting upon have authentic relationships and living an authentic life.

THREES: WILL ALONE

A treasure hunt has clues, signs, that will lead us to the treasure. Here, the first sentence begins the novel with “sign”: “The first sign that something had gone wrong manifested itself when he was playing golf” (SC 3). From the very beginning, signs point to something beyond the golf links (representing a more shallow society - social acceptance and community by superficial values or “fool’s goals”). Literally, the woods, cave, and Allie just beyond the golf links are his true treasure, but metaphorically, the treasure is authentic relationship with God and others.

When Will falls down on the very first page, he is able to see from a new perspective. He is able to see some signs – clues – as to where to find the authentic treasure, just as his more intentional journey, falling into the cave and later into Allie’s nest, enables him to see the signs or clues towards the treasure – or even, find the treasure itself, as in the case of finding Allie. From the ground, a different vantage point, he can see signs of a world outside of the physical social world, of the Holy Spirit and God: “A strange bird flew past. A cumulus cloud went towering thousands of feet into the air... it seemed to turn purple and gold...” (3). Will normally would not give the bird (the holy spirit) and the cloud (God) a second glance, but now he does. Purple and gold are regal colors, symbolic of the heavenly king, but the introduction of gold on this first page begins the treasure theme. Gold is what one finds at the end of the treasure hunt, but Will must be careful along the way not to mistake real gold for fool’s gold.

Will’s threes that he encounters as the novel opens are little clues – ones that he sometimes notices, sometimes misses (even on the golf course) – that there is something “more.” His ball carries a “good three hundred yards” and he uses a “three-wood” on the shot (5). Vance waits for his “third shot” (6) at the same time. The numbered wood serves double duty; the “three” refers to Percy’s

language theory, but also Percy notes the postmodern impersonal nature brought to the game ("Now you can choose a numbered club from the back of an electric cart") when it used to be called a "spoon" (6) – an intimate sleeping position between lovers, not so impersonal. When Will slices the "third ball" he sees it as a "failure at living, a minor deceit, perhaps even a sin," judging himself by the values of the world (SC 45). The religious concept of sin enters with threes; the dyadic world of animals does not have this concept. Yet that slice leads him into the woods, off the golf course towards the fulfillment he had been searching for, when no amount of conformity to contemporary values (the straight line to the hole) had ever done that. Later, Will wonders "whether he would hit the ball three feet or three hundred feet? Did it matter?" (SC 65). On the golf course, which represents the shallow community, but a community nonetheless, one plays in a "foursome," (a community, dedicated to a game). Signs surround him, leading him away from that world to a more authentic one, one that has lasting meaning and real relationships and true love.

"There is a kind of happiness in golf, he thought... Look at Bertie. He lives for nothing but to break a hundred..." (SC 65). The key words are, "he lives for nothing," in the world of the golf course. Even golf is really nothing. There is no transcendent lasting meaning in the game of golf, only a distraction from that search for meaning. Yet there are signs and clues beckoning Will out of that world, off the golf course, and towards the "real thing." Birds (the Holy Spirit, the presence of God in the world) swirl and twitter and rest everywhere throughout the novel. Another symbol of the authentic treasure, gold, glints everywhere. And everywhere there are the divine clues of threes leading him to the treasure of fours.

In the woods, he encounters a "three-fingered" leaf, like a "mitt with a thumb;" humans aren't animals in this world (as they are later in *The Thanatos Syndrome*), but they are human, drawn with threes and with opposable thumbs separate and different than an animal's paw. The air (spirit) is "not cooler or warmer," but different. The spirituality of humans is not on a scale, a quantitative difference

from animals, but it is what makes us qualitatively different. It is complex. “The cloud smelled of complex leaf rots...” (SC 209). Just as sign is simple, and symbol (language) complex, the air here resonates of that human realm of complexity, infused with divinity, not mere biological function, far simpler.

It seems that threes, or signs of God calling to him, manifest themselves even, or especially, in the midst of the most worldly of situations and peoples: the golf course, the garage where Ewell tries to get him in on a porn movie deal – with Sarah Goodman, an actress. More significant to Will is that she happens to be of Jewish descent. Will is alert to the signs of God’s presence, and that is what he pays attention to. Sarah is such a sign, not a sexual object to Will. For Percy, Jews, God’s chosen people, are divine signs throughout his novels, especially *The Second Coming*, just as threes are. Instead of wondering about Sarah Goodman’s physical “gifts,” he wonders about her spiritual significance, “What did that signify?” he ponders, and wonders whether he would have her physically or if she would lead him to “Israel” (God’s land) (SC 179). And in the garage, as Ewell tries to entice him with the distractions of Kierkegaard’s first stage, Will sees a “white cloud which filled the doorway as dense and solid as a pearl. No doubt the sun shone directly upon it, for it was shot through with delicate colors” (SC 179). Yet the white cloud, God’s presence, must shine through the “ripple of darkness” in a garage with the “three cars, one English, one German, one Japanese, [which] seemed as beautiful as birds poised for flight any moment from the immaculate concrete” (SC 179). The “immaculate” concrete emphasizes inadequacy of the world of flesh and money that Ewell offers as a substitute for the divine. The nationality of the three cars are the same as the participants of World War II, but these participants that got the world into a war are now “birds” – the holy spirit – as an all-powerful God can transform even the worst of things to his own will and a message to those who can listen and hear. And it is important to note that Will's father's hunting accident deafened Will, so his ear "roars" - with the message of God.

Because he alone chooses to, he alone hears the message and sees the signs that are so prevalent in a world "rippling with darkness."

Another three-clue that he examines are the shells from the shotgun that his father used when he shot his son. He wonders his whole life what happened, trying to piece the event together, examining over and over again, the "three empty Super-X shells" (SC 60) – shells that deafened him and almost killed him. In one moment, "holding the three-iron in both hands," as Percy repeats over and over, the truth comes to Will as he replays the event in his mind, just as he had done for "thirty years" (SC 60). Repeating the event, holding the three-iron as if it were a magic ball or "a divining rod" (SC 61), or rather, a divine rod, a three that can lead him to the answer, Will realizes what happened: "There were *four* shells" (SC 61). Will's three iron is a divining rod that leads him to find "four" – leading him to community. "He was watching the three iron as, held in front of him like a divining rod, it sank toward the earth. Ah, I've found it after all. The buried treasure, he thought smiling" (SC 61). The treasure is "fours" –true love in community.

THREES: ALLY ALONE

Allison, Kitty Vaught's daughter, sees and feels too clearly the communication disconnects and the lies and dishonesties in relationships today. Allie, too, is on a treasure hunt, for authentic communication and community, and her rejection of false treasures has literally driven her into a mental institution. As she works her way out of her institutional captivity, Percy works the treasure metaphor quite literally. Newly escaped from the home, she must determine where to go. Divine three-clues and false three-clues surround Allie as well. Escaped from a mental institution and amnesiac from shock treatments, she tries to find both her identity and her purpose. Wherever Allie goes, authentic communication occurs, if people will only listen closely. "He who has ears, let him hear," says Christ. As she sits on the park bench to locate herself and her direction, she receives three temptations, as Christ

did on the mountaintop – three temptations that represent possible solutions to the existential dilemma.

The first is a woman with “an oval face like a madonna’s” (SC 32). She gives Allie a religious tract that begins with *three* sentences asking about loneliness and offering “a personal encounter with our Lord and Saviour” as the solution (SC 33). Yet the proselytizer isn’t listening to Allie; no communication takes place, though Allie actually takes her seriously and answers the question about loneliness authentically. Her proselytizer merely invites her to church, and doesn’t even “see” Allie, looking past her, not at her.

The second salvation is offered by the runner. He has been “into running for *three* months” which has changed his life, he says (SC 34). (In “three weeks” he expects to be up to twenty-six miles) (SC 35). It is a salvation to him, and he means to proselytize her as much as the born-again Christian means to, inviting her to Hattie’s, where all the runners go. Yet when she shakes his hand, it is “all gristle and bone” (SC 35), and she thinks, “His hand was as fibrous as a monkey’s” (SC 36). His solution to the existential dilemma is no human salvation for a human dilemma. It is a physical solution that does not connect with the divine, does not make him more human. Rather, he has found a solution in the animal side – a precursor to *Thanatos Syndrome’s* water solution in Percy’s next novel.

All the while a column of ants, following “the same path, climbing over the same granules of concrete, then descending into a crack at the same place, then climbing out of the crack at the same place” march in front of them – clearly a statement as to the sameness of these false salvations (SC 37). Each is something the masses follow without thinking, none is unique to the individual, nor do each of the proselytizers even try to connect to Allie as an individual. They look right through her, can’t remember if they’ve shook hands already, and no communication takes place. The strangers she encounters are not only Christ’s tempters on the mountaintop, but Job’s three false comforters in the Old Testament.

Following the first two temptations, false salvation options, she has a third solution, unique to her. First she meditates on the fool's gold and how easily it is to be deceived as to the real treasure. "Imagine being born with gold-tinted corneas everything looks like gold but it's fool's gold" (SC 40). Her encounters with these strangers, representing different paths the world offers (the runner, exercise and health; the hippie, counter-culture values; the ants, regimentation by mere instinct) are fruitless. She finds a more fruitful one – Percy's answer to how to live life, how to address the existential angst, in a postmodern world, which is counter to the normal paths offered today. She charts her own path: "After marking the trail with her Scripto pencil and making an X in the blank space, she folded the map carefully with the marked trail on the outside and stuck it in the breast pocket of her shirt" (43).). The X is of course, the greenhouse, in the forest where she will reside. She keeps her treasure map – X marking the treasure – close to her heart. Her real treasure – her life in a "stained glass" (SC 83) house with a cathedral of a stone in an Edenic setting, is devoid of the material trappings of America's consumer society. "She meant to live with few things" (SC 43). Her stained glass cathedral is the holy life she has chosen. Allie's nature setting in the woods, surrounded by life and greenery and sunlight, is God's presence in the world, just as Gerard Manly Hopkins illustrates in his poetry.

There, Allie's work and use of tools is divine work. She has the "strength of three men" with her block and tackle (SC 234). She puts "three bricks" under the door that serves as a bed for Will when she nurses him back to health (SC 235). She continues "the search" just as Will does, looking for clues, marked by threes: "For one thing, she could read these books for more clues,..." (SC 83).

TRIANGULATION

Triangulation occurs here, too, though less obvious than in Percy's next novel. Both Will and Allie, however briefly, discover themselves through triangulation. It is their identity that is the third point in the triangle. Percy writes of Will's triangulation: "With two mirrors it is possible to see oneself briefly as a man among men rather than a self sucking everything into itself – just as you can see the

back of your head in a clothiers triple mirror” (SC 14). When Allie escapes from the mental institution, sans memory, she looks at her driver’s license, which expired *three* years ago, to triangulate in order to find both the date and her identity. First, “She looked at the calendar and the date of the expiration of her driver’s license. She made a calculation” (SC 24). From this, she finds the date. She triangulates again. “She gazed at the photograph on the license. She read the name. Earlier in the Gulf rest room she had looked from the photograph to the mirror then back to the photograph. The hair was shorter and darker in the photograph, the face in the mirror was thinner, but it was the same person” (SC 24). Triangulation reveals truths and gives answers here, just as it does in Lancelot.

There are more threes for Allie; she gets her hair cut like the actress in *Three Days of the Condor*; she checks into the Triple-A motel. She is recreating her life based on threes. Her old life in the mental institution, she reads in her diary, does not have threes. She writes after her sixth course of electroconvulsive therapy. Later, in Percy’s next novel, sixes are used to represent “the beast” or man without God. Interestingly, the movie *Three Days of the Condor* was based on a novel, *Six Days of the Condor*. Its name transformed the six into three, just as Allie has left her life of sixes for threes.

NAMING

The transformation of language from meaningless sound to meaningful symbol is also experienced here, in the naming act. “She uttered her name aloud. At first it sounded strange. Then she recognized it as her name. Then it sounded strange again, but strange in a different way, the way an ordinary word repeated aloud sounds strange” (SC 24).⁷⁴ Her name sounds strange as she recognizes it; first just a sound, then a real word, an actual symbol, in which the sound carries meaning. There are two different events happening here, as Percy explains in his language essays, the mere sound devoid of meaning, and the sound with meaning, in which the sound disappears into the object itself. The object

⁷⁴ See Appendix A and Chapter 2.4 for more discussion of the stages of symbol and how a mere sound takes on the identity of the meaning of the signified.

is carried within the sound, *in alio esse*, and the sound then becomes transparent so the object can be present.

Later she thinks of Will's name and the strangeness of names: "Will Barrett. She repeated it to herself. How did the name go with him? How to take the name. She tried to locate him in the name" (SC 201). For her, as with Percy, names are all important, the doorway to knowing the other. They are not to be ignored or randomly dismissed. She tries to decide which of his many names to call him. "What to call him? Mr. Barrett? Mr. Will? Will Barrett? Bill Barrett? Williston Bibb Barrett? None of the names fit. A name would give him form once and for all. He would flow into its syllables and junctures and there take shape forever. She didn't want him named" (SC 249). Here Percy captures the idea that symbol, or naming (any name, not just a proper name) captures the essence of the object WITHIN it – it is a pairing that occurs in a single moment in time, not a cause-effect reaction of two separate things interacting. No interaction takes place, the name IS the object.

THE TREASURE OF UNITY: REAL GOLD VS. FOOL'S GOLD

The second treasure metaphor Percy uses is gold. Just as different characters consider their gold (their treasure) to be different things, many things are gold in Percy's novels. The repeating metaphor of "gold" that his characters seek is sometimes material, sometimes spiritual; sometimes right, sometimes wrong. Sex, woman, success, money, status are all "gold" in *The Second Coming*, but these are all fool's gold. Allie realizes: "Imagine being born with gold-tinted corneas and undertaking a lifelong search for gold. You'd never find it.... With gold-tinted corneas everything looks like gold but it was fool's gold" 40).

For Percy, only one treasure is worth seeking, only one is authentic: that which extends beyond the biological-physical world and gives transcendent meaning and enables intersubjectivity. The "fool's gold" may be what we think we want, but the only thing that will ultimately satisfy us is the authentic "gold." Kierkegaard's first and second stages, the aesthetic and the ethical, contain goals and rewards

and treasures that are only temporarily satisfying. Only the third stage, the religious stage, has the permanently satisfying goal – relationship with God. (However Percy combined Kierkegaard's third stage with Marcel's theology of God found in community, not in isolation.)

The Arabs' buying Allie's inheritance, as well as Kitty and her husband's attempt to get it, is that second stage – business and social success. The first stage is represented by the simple purveyors of pornography and even Kitty's attempted seductions of Will. No one can understand Will's rejection, as the religious stage is confounding to any who have not reached it. He seeks treasure, yes, but not that of the others.

Another treasure metaphor that Percy uses frequently is the "gold bug." Allie equates the gold bug with a clue to the treasure as she thinks to herself: "...unless the treasure Captain Kidd was supposed to have buried there was ever dug up... which you thought of often, not so much to get the treasure but to find it, to find a sign or a gold bug or a map?" (SC 39). Another sign at the entrance to the forest is the bug, which also escapes: "The shell of a cicada hard as a gold bug had been clamped to the tree for three years. His fingers felt the slit of the shell where the creature had escaped" (208). Later as Will sits in a daze in the deserted shopping mall parking lot, overgrown with vines, he thinks of the "green-stick Rosebud gold-bug matador, the great distinguished thing" (277), with the ocean nearby. The forest and ocean represent God, and the treasure is where God is.

The "gold bug" metaphor works on many different levels, one of which is Carl G. Jung's concept of synchronicity, or the idea that seemingly random events are meaningfully connected. In his famous article, "Synchronicity, An Acausal Connecting Principle," Jung relates a true story that has now become a classic example. While counseling a patient who related her dream of a costly piece of jewelry in the shape of a golden scarab beetle, a real gold-green scarabaeid beetle flew through the window. Jung caught it, handed it to her, saying "Here is your scarab" (Jung, "On Synchronicity," 511). Jung says:

While she was telling me this dream I heard something behind me gently tapping on the window. I turned round and saw that it was a fairly large flying insect that was knocking against

the window-pane from outside in the obvious effort to get into the dark room. This seemed to me very strange. I opened the window immediately and caught the insect in the air as it flew in. It was a scarabaeid beetle, or common rose-chafer (*Cetonia aurata*), whose gold-green colour most nearly resembles that of the golden scarab. I handed the beetle to my patient with the words, "Here is your scarab."

The event was too coincidental for Jung to dismiss and was one of many meaningful coincidences that confirmed his view of the world as synchronistic and the "law of causality does not hold"⁷⁵ ("On Synchronicity" 509). Jung's synchronicity claims that random coincidences, that seem too highly improbable and almost impossible to have any cause-effect connection are in fact connected by an "acausal connecting principle" and they have meaning. Jung's several experiments indicated to him that space-time factors are different from our normal understanding of them; the psyche can eliminate space, and time can become "psychically relative" ("On Synchronicity" 509). Since space and time are "the indispensable premises of the cause-effect relationship," causal explanations break down due to this psychic relativization ("On Synchronicity" 511). Just as with Percy's triadic naming event, there is no cause-effect relationship between word and object, Jung says the same is true of other world events.

Jung applied his concept to a "coinciding" of similar occurrences in the psychic state of the individual and an external event, which do not relate to each other causally. Jung theorized in the "doctrine of synchronicity" that "one and the same (transcendental) meaning might manifest itself simultaneously in the human psyche and in the arrangement of an external and independent event" ("On Synchronicity" 511), meaning that both space and time are relative to the psyche, or that the psyche cannot be determined or localized by space and time ("On Synchronicity" 518). One event (or state of mind) does not **cause** the other event, but the pattern of the universe becomes visible in their congruency. Synchronicity coincides with "Leibniz' idea of pre-established harmony, and was then replaced by causality. Synchronicity is a modern differentiation of the obsolete concept of

⁷⁵ Jung's synchronicity is the exact opposite of Freud's theory of the "uncanny" – or that the mind makes up illusory connections between events. See Chapter 1.4 for more discussion of Freud and Jung.

correspondence, sympathy and harmony... [based on] empirical evidence and experimentation" ("On Synchronicity" 518).

Mind and the world are related and connected, Percy increasingly believes, as is everything in the whole world, just as Charles Sanders Peirce theorized with his principles of abduction and synechism. Jung points to new developments in modern physics and quantum theory: quantum particles do not always follow the law of causality, a law which seems to modern physicists to be only statistically valid and relatively true. Jung's friendship with quantum physicist Wolfgang Pauli gave him close familiarity with these principles of acausality that supported his theory. In fact, his second essay *Synchronicity* was published with Pauli's work in *The Interpretation and Nature of the Psyche*.

As a member of a Jungian discussion group in Covington, Louisiana, at the time he was writing *Lancelot* and beyond, Percy was quite familiar with Jung's ideas which were actually similar to some of Peirce's concepts. Both Peirce and Jung theorized some nature of the universe which transcended the law of causality, though Peirce called it synechism and Jung, synchronicity. In his last novel, Percy quotes Peirce saying, "apparently disconnected events are in fact not, that one can connect them" (TS 68), or synechism. Another Peircean concept is "abduction," or hypothesizing. Scientists usually hit upon the correct hypothesis after the second or third try, which is very unlikely. Peirce thought this happened because the mind and the world are connected.

The import of Jung's doctrine of synchronicity is, of course, the same as Peirce's synechism, abduction, and Thirdness: Unity and Relation. The world is not composed of discrete isolated events and objects bumping against each other in cause-effect manner, but is actually continuous and flowing together, and mind and matter are not different substances, but connected and related and interwoven. There is a "fabric of life," to quote Susanne Langer, a metaphor Percy uses repeatedly in his novels. Jung's synchronicity is Percy's "fabric of life" that he speaks of many times, much earlier than *The Second Coming*. Life is not random – events are woven together to create a pattern that makes sense.

Sometimes, “the fabric of life wears thin,” though, and other times, the signs seem to point to some kind of unity to everything.

Another gold bug reference is Edgar Allen Poe’s story, “The Gold Bug,” a tale about a treasure hunt, as Will and Allie are on, with a cryptogram, in which letters and symbols substitute for numbers and when decoded, reveal the location of the treasure, just as Will and Allie must decode the divine signs and numbers to find his treasure. The treasure hunter in Poe’s story (with *three* characters) seems insane, just as Will and Allie both seem to the outside world, but both Poe’s treasure seeker and Percy’s seekers eventually find their treasures.

Percy’s gold bugs, like Jung’s synchronicity, indicate meaning and synchronicity beyond the dyadic event, beyond seemingly disconnected random events, in the underlying fabric of life. As Will Barrett goes in search of something “beyond,” some connection and purpose beyond physical survival or physical affluence or social approbation or physical satiation (whether through sex or food) that suffice for others, he sees gold bugs. Gold is a treasure in and of itself, but the gold bugs are clues in this treasure hunt, clues to real gold, not fool’s gold.

Percy speaks of Jung’s synchronicity, Peirce’s synechism, or Langer’s fabric of life in many places. Will contemplates this idea when he considers times when he was “open to chance happenings;” he was “shaken up,”

therefore vulnerable to the stares of passers-by and also open to chance happenings. At times, he had noticed, coincidences occur. They not only occur, they are called for... Lives are lines of force which ordinarily run parallel and do not connect. But that day Robert Kennedy had been shot and he had had a wreck. Lifelines were bent.... Kennedy was killed. Lines of force were bent.... Perhaps, he thought, even God will manifest himself when you are bent far enough out of your everyday lifeline. (SC 67)

The “everyday lifeline” is the wall of the temporal life, the routine, everyday cares. Once you get out of it, you can see past the wall to the eternal, where all things are connected. In other words, synchronistic occurrences are a signs of God’s presence, God’s clues to the treasure. If X marks the spot, you are not there yet. You are at point A, and clues are scattered along the path to the treasure at X.

The further Will gets from the treasure, the more confusing the treasure map is and the harder it is to find the clues. The fabric wears thin; the pattern and clues to the treasure no longer present themselves. When Jimmy Rogers gets too close, telling jokes and making deals with Arabs, things start to not “make sense” again. Will feels separated, farther from any kind of unity of life or people, and wonders, “Did this mean that lifelines were back to normal, that is, non-converging and parallel to infinity? Or had something happened and their lifelines were bent together?” (SC 68). If community is there, he has lost the sensation of it and of the pattern that comes from connection to others.

Sometimes, Will thinks things have significance and meaning, form a pattern, and are connected. Sometimes, not. As he tries to decipher his father’s suicide in his bedroom, he thinks, “The bar of sunlight seemed significant. He sat up and shook his head. No, things do not have significances. The laser beam was nothing more than light reflected from the motes he had stirred up. It was not ‘stark.’ One place is like any other place” (SC 288). Do the objects and events of this physical world have any significance beyond their physical existence? Was the bar of sunlight nothing more than light reflected from motes he had stirred up? Or – do they interact with an order beyond themselves? Is there an interwoven fabric of life?

Will thinks later, as he and the group of old men are sitting around watching television, distracting themselves, not connecting, “Was there a whole world of meaning, of talking and listening which took place everywhere and all the time and which no one paid attention to, at least not he?” (SC 325). The “world of meaning” is the world of authentic communication in authentic community, and the divine presence found in such community. Meaning and order and sense of purpose and pattern in the world is, on one level, just the functioning of the universe and the objects within it – things are connected – but this synchronicity also represents not just the universe, but people within it, who are connected to each other. Lifelines are connected, and through this, God is seen and experienced, as Marcel would have it. When, in the hospital, Will forgets his “acid” (medicine), he falls away from a

mistaken dyadic solution of salve for only the symptoms, and comes closer to an eternal solution of purpose. “Things took on significance” (SC 326). He can now see the signs of God’s presence, see the signs of synchronicity, that distractions hid from him.

Ethel Rosenblum (Rose-in-bloom) is also marked by “unity.” As a Jew, a sign of the divine for Percy, her presence is a clue that God is present in the world. Percy surrounds her with triangles and gold and her Jewish heritage – all representing the divine “treasure.” Valedictorian, salutatorian, and a Jew, and therefore by default a Percyan sign of God, Ethel does find a pattern in the chaos. Will believes, “For some time I had believed that the Jews were a sign, a clue to the mystery, a telltale bent twig, a blazed sapling in the riotous senseless jungle” (SC 190). Percy associates Ethel with gold; she wears “gold panties.” The “wedge [triangle] shaped salient of weeds” shaped “like a bent triangle” (7) is where he sees, and desires, Ethel Rosenblum with the “gold panties” (7). It is a treasure unnoticed and unclaimed by anyone: “Or perhaps it belonged to no one, not even the Negroes, a parcel of leftover land which the surveyors had not noticed on their maps” (SC 7). It is a “pied weed” (6, 8) – as in Hopkins’ “Pied Beauty,” contrasting with the “immaculate emerald fairway” (6) of the golf course.

While rarely alluding to his use of numbers and geometry in his novels, Percy does say in one interview that when Will falls down here, he “remember[s] the weedy spot, a triangular public place – a place for loving and a place for dying – where he first felt the pangs of love for a long forgotten classmate. These places are symbolic...” (Con II 51). Percy reveals here that his triangles are symbolic, though does not follow up on it (nor does anyone else). Percy’s idea of the plain symbol being the best conveyor of the divine is echoed here again, in conjunction with Hopkins. While this is a young boy yearning lustfully for a woman (he has a crush on her), it is more than that – behind the lust is really a yearning for the divine. Her triangle is a symbol, a lower manifestation, of the Delta triangle, representing God, and the union and presence of God.

God's signs, including the Jews, are the clues to the treasure – a treasure of meaning, order, sense, and divine presence. Ethel, as a sign of God's presence and action in the world, reveals synchronicity, or unity – not the randomness of a world without pattern, meaning, or purpose:

She could factor out equations after the whole class was stumped...cancel out great $a^2 - b^2$ complexes *zip zip slash*, coming out at the end $a/a=1$. $1=1$. Unity!

No matter how ungainly the equation, ugly and unbalanced, clotted with complexes, radicals, fractions, *zip zip* under Ethel Rosenblum's quick sure hand and they factored out and canceled and came down to unity, symmetry, beauty. (SC 7)

Cenopythagorean Percy says that mathematics reveals the unity of the universe. Life is not a random collection of objects and events. It has a unity, it is synchronous, with the presence of a divine order, that the sign of God leads us towards, and it can be understood through number. When Will thinks the Jews may have all left North Carolina, he thinks, "There goes the last sign" (SC 191).

By contrast, Pascal's famous wager (you might as well believe in God because you have nothing to lose if you're wrong) is frivolous to Will – "a crapshoot at Vegas" (SC 191) – for it is devoid of any recognition of sign, of meaning, or of the unity of life.

Later come the diamonds and the fours, when he meets Allie. Ethel Rosenblum is associated with threes, as she (a Jew) is a sign of the divine to him, but she is not the woman he will create community with. The threes guide him to God and along his path in life. They guide him to the fours, the community in which life with God and others is manifested. With Allie, there are fours – as he creates a community with her and others.

APPROACHING EDEN: HOPKINS' WORLD

The surface conviviality of the golf links represents a shallower society, not an authentic community. It is a superficial society governed by social approbation given for superficial values based on worthless "fool's goals" – just as fool's gold is worthless. As Will approaches the edge of the golf links and moves towards the woods, which contain both the cave for his authentic search and the real treasure (Allie and community), the signs become stronger, and his symptoms of disconnect with society

more pronounced. In this divine, Edenic world, poet and priest Gerard Manly Hopkins' presence is felt. He walks into the forest to retrieve his ball. A hawk ("a dagger winged falcon") flies over (70), and as Will goes "Deeper in the pine forest, beyond the chestnut fall," (51, 71) he thinks he sees someone "in the dappled leaves" (71). The diction alludes again to Hopkins' "Pied Beauty," a poem on a world of nature that emanates with the spirit of God ("Glory be to God for dappled things"). Hopkins' falcon (Christ), the chestnut fall and dappled leaves are the God's presence in the world – and in the midst of it all is Allie. In this world, the meaning of life is clearer, no longer obscured by the distractions and business and superficial values of everyday society. As he goes deeper into the forest, the Edenic scene is even stronger, mixed with the greens and browns of nature, the leaves and sun, the glass through which we can see, however "darkly," through to the truth of God. Allie's greenhouse is both Noah's ark and a cathedral of worship:

He walked through the chestnut fall to the poplar. The figure changed in shape,
disappeared, returned as a solid of darkness bounded by gold leaves, then vanished altogether.
Glass winked in the sunlight. The leaf shook violently as he went under it.

.... the sun behind him suddenly went down and came up in front, blazing into his eyes...
It was a house of glass... It was a greenhouse... as big as an ark. A steep copper hood verdigrised
green-brown shaded the front door like a cathedral porch. (SC 74)

The glass of the house is transparent – transparent through to the presence of God and true community, real gold, not fool's gold. She is in the *gold* leaves – she, Allie, is the treasure, the true gold, as it is through her he finds community and escapes his isolation, and he truly finds an "ally" in his quest.

Will's first meeting with Allie is a "four" meeting, and her need for "four" (community, relationship) awakens when she meets him. As he goes to retrieve his golf balls from the forest, she has them, a Spalding Pro-Flite and a Hogan Four:

"This one woke me up."

"What?"

"Hogan woke me up."

"Hogan woke you up?"

“It broke my window,” she said, nodding towards the greenhouse.... “I was lying in my house in the sun reading that book. Then *plink, tinkle*, the glass breaks and this little ball rolls up and touches me. I felt concealed and revealed” (SC 75-76).

The “four” breaks the wall of glass surrounding her and touches her – she is no longer isolated, no longer behind a barrier, and the naming/symbolic event (represented by the Hogan Four) between one person and another creates community between the two of them. The ball acts as a naming event – in community – as it reveals her the way symbol does. It “woke her up” as the intersubjective naming event is a waking event to a whole new world. Naming is a “breakthrough” event of the human species and the breakthrough event for each individual to human divinity and community, just as the Hogan Four broke through Allie’s greenhouse window, just like Helen Keller’s moment of joy and awakening upon realization that “water” was water in the garden.

The woods and the cave are a return to nature, away from the superficial world of modern society, and a return to Eden. They are holy, and it is the treasure at the end of the treasure hunt. “After marking the trail with her Scripto pencil and making an X in the blank space, she folded the map...” (SC 43). The X is the greenhouse, in the forest where she will reside. In the forest, the shrub is “speckled” as Hopkins “Pied Beauty” describes the creatures of God’s holy world. Allie’s gardening in the woods is this simple work that Hopkins celebrates as full of the presence of God. Her world is a Hopkinsian world. As Will enters it, “A flash of light came from the chestnut fall” (SC 51), Hopkins’ term. The light of God flashes out from the simple natural setting. Later, Percy uses even more Hopkins terminology: “Deeper in the pine forest, beyond the chestnut fall... was there someone standing there, or more likely, was it a trick of light, a pattern in the dappled leaves?” (SC 71). Allie’s dog is “brindled” (SC 82). Her green house is a divine sanctuary, a house of (stained) glass as big as an “ark” with a “cathedral porch” (SC 74). Nature is replete and lush and flourishing with life and the divine, as we see in the following passage referring to light (God), and stained glass (divine sanctuary), and rich fertile life:

The afternoon sun shone directly on the upper slope of stained glass. The glass broke into colors which filled the little room. Perhaps she had stirred up a suspension from the potsherds

and the moss. The gold was like dust in the air and the violet made a vapor. She gazed up at the transom. A cornucopia dumped out its fruit and flowers, purple grapes, yellow corn, scarlet strawberries, golden pumpkins, boxy pink rhododendron, the harvest tumbling down a blue sky to a green earth where fascicles of pine needles spelled out Autumn, Rhododendron! Then the stained glass had been designed for this place, my place. (SC 85)

These are the authentic “treasures” of life we seek, that Hopkins writes of (SC 85). In another Hopkins reference, she thinks, “There is plenty of stove wood, dead chestnut, I think” (SC 85). “Later the dog walked toward the chestnut fall...” Percy writes later, of Allie’s world. This is the lost Eden, the paradise, the treasure to which we seek to return, from which worldly panaceas distract us. We forget what we are searching for, and substitute other, false “be-alls” and “end-alls” as Allie says later.

The “Grand Crown” stove is Hopkins’ plain and simple tool which can suffice as a symbol far better than fancy frilly things or words. Percy writes in *Symbol and Existence* that mundane and unpretentious words are better vehicles for the light of symbol to shine through, noting how Gerard Manly Hopkins uses these hardy, everyday, work objects to convey the divine working in the world. Hopkins disparages the glamour of business in his poem, “God’s Grandeur” which sullies and “smudges” God’s beauty and his presence in the world, becoming “seared...bleared, smeared with toil;” while “Pied Beauty” honors a different kind of work – the simple craftsman with his far more primitive tools of the trade and which inspire the poet to say “Glory be to God for dappled things/...and all trades, their gear and tackle and trim” and “Praise him.” Percy begins the chapter on the stove with a Hopkins allusion: “Pine cones and dead chestnut from the forest and all manner of charred timber from the ruin” (199), recalling the “Fresh fire-coal chestnut-falls” of “Pied Beauty.”

Allie’s Grand Crown stove is Hopkins’ simple, humble work-a-day symbol through which the divine metaphor can shine far better than expensive shiny objects. It was a “cathedral of a stove, with spires and turrets and battlements” (203). It represents the treasure. “She had found a treasure,” Percy writes (SC 92). Fours abound around Allie’s stove. She needs four creepers with four wheels each to move the stove (202); she moves the stove on the fourth try, after “three false starts” (SC 202); the

stove has four warming closets and the coal grate, four sides (204). It requires four attempts to knot the string properly and gauge the angle to lift the stove (202). It is a “treasure... A great eighty-five year old brand new stove! Tut can keep his gold mummy case.” After some progress, she quits her work of hoisting the stove at “four o’clock” (205), says Percy.

THE SEARCH: THE CAVE

Though Will and Allie have not arrived at the final treasure, they still partake of the treasure through their search. Allie terms this the “be-all” later, as opposed to the “end-all” – but the “be-all” is fine for now. The sunlight “bejeweling” Allie’s lashes as she works on the stove echoes the “glittering jewels” in Will’s cave. The jewels are diamonds, representing the intersubjective diamond, tetradic community. Both characters are seeking and finding the treasure from different directions. The “cathedral of a stove” which is her work is paralleled in Will’s world: “...at the proper entrance to Lost Cove cave an underground river flowed into the sunlight through a cathedral arch of stone” (209). The entrance to the cave is “banal” (SC 209) which pleases Will, just as banal words for Percy are the best conveyors of metaphor and magic (SE 302). The stove and the cave entrance are both simple objects, but both are cathedrals, places where God resides and can be encountered. The cave is actually a place inside himself, a going inside himself. Rather than seeking his treasure in the external world of “fool’s gold,” he must find the real treasure inside himself (as must we all).

The cave is full of glittering jewels and gold, symbolic of the spiritual treasure that Will is searching for, and the treasure he experiences with the search itself. In the cave, when Will “shone the light up, it showed a glittering lopsided vault” (210), a vault for treasure (in this case, metaphorical). Will wonders if the size of the tiger’s skull was due to the fact that it may have been “dripped on by jeweled drops” (211). The tiger is like William Blake’s “Tyger,” as Will himself refers to it in his letter to Vaught: “ ‘I have a sudden hankering to visit the haunt of the saber-tooth tyger you discovered’ ” (183), is symmetrical (“Tyger! Tyger! Burning bright / In the forests of the night /What immortal hand or

eye/could (dare) frame they fearful symmetry?" (ll. 1-4 & 21-24). Its symmetry could be a sign of God's hand in the world, and Will intends to discover if it is so, or if such design is just an accident. However, his search is a challenge to God, just as the narrator of Blake's poem challenges God: how dare you create the ferocious tyger? Later, Will is delirious and hallucinatory from lack of food and illness, yet he sees the tyger much more clearly, less romantically: "He woke. The tiger was there, standing in the opening. There was nothing bright or fearful or symmetrical about him.... Were you ever really a splendid tiger burning in the forests of the night?" (SC 222). The challenge to God ends with a toothache, a return from abstraction into the body, and a redirection for Will.

Percy's re-birth imagery is obvious here, but deserves mentioning. He is reborn to his spiritual self, through a death of sorts, inside the cave. As Will journeys through the cave, "There were places where the ceiling came so close to the floor that he had to turn his head sideways like a baby getting through a pelvis" (SC 209).

Though he knows not what he is seeking (for sure) or if he will find it, and though he will be greatly surprised by the answer, his treasure hunt, like Allie's, is a "pleasure" (SC 210). There is pleasure for both in the simple execution of each task. This kind of pleasure is the pleasure of Kierkegaard's third religious stage: this is no stage one satiation of appetite or beauty (in fact, a "giving up" of those is entailed for both Allie and Will), nor is it the stage two victory of success of a grand and intricate business deal or commitment to social obligations. They relinquish all of those, in search of something more meaningful and "real." For both, it is simple tasks in search of authentic connection with a real God (triadic relationship) and later, with an "other" (each other) that brings real joy and lasting happiness (tetradic relationship).

Will's search for God, however, is misguided: he undertakes it as a scientific experiment in a search for concrete proof:

My project is the first scientific experiment in history to settle once and for all the question of God's existence. As things presently stand, there may be signs of his existence but they point

both ways and are therefore ambiguous and so prove nothing. For example, the wonders of the universe do not convince those most conversant with the wonders, the scientists themselves. Whether or not this testifies to the stupidity of scientists or to God's success at concealing himself doesn't matter. (SC 192)

Will also asks Sutter to monitor the demographic movement of the Jews from North Carolina as well as the rest of the country; in Will's mind, this kind of scientific analysis is a sign of God's existence or non-existence as well. It offers a side benefit as well: "What is more, it will advance knowledge" (SC 212).

However, dyadic science is not the answer to the question of God's existence; community is. As Percy also says of language, God cannot be subsumed under science – the latter is the subset of the former; mystery and relation is the bigger set. A scientific experiment will not uncover the presence of God, but love will. Gabriel Marcel found God to be created within community: heavenly faith and love is not only found, but lived and experienced, through human fidelity and love-commitment. Will journeys into the cave, searching for "the answer" (or, what Allie calls, the secret), and the answer is – as God's answers often are – quite unexpected.

Instead of a scientific sign, God gives Will a toothache, a clear rejection of the scientific path to God. Science is abstract and deals in generalities and abstract concepts. Living the abstracted life of the mind is no way to find God, and is a Cartesian answer, a mind-body split, and the angelism-bestialism split of *Love in the Ruins*; God's answer, the toothache, drives Will right back into his body. God is in real life, in the world, in our actions of love in the world. "What kind of answer is this to an elegant scientific question?" Will wonders (SC 224). He becomes too sick to look for the answer to the question; too sick to even ask the question. "There is one sure cure for cosmic explorations, grandiose ideas about God, man, death, suicide, and such – and that is nausea.... What does a nauseated person care about the Last Days?" (SC 213). Nausea deletes existential angst – the sick and the poor don't have the luxury of worrying about the meaning of life; they're too busy trying to better their physical circumstances. Will immediately gives up his "scientific quest," which is frivolous in the face of real-life emergencies, and seeks a way out of the literal cave, but also, the metaphorical cave he has created for himself.

Will's blind journey leads him through a sealed hole in the cave rock that the greenhouse juxtaposes. Unknowingly, Will pushes against the vines and he falls through – a free-fall headfirst through “air and color [spirit and life] brilliant greens and violet and vermilion and a blue unlike any sky.” He falls into Allie's greenhouse, into love, into a life with her, into community (SC 226). Percy says: **“The hole was a square”** (SC 226). This is the start of their romance, and it begins by Will's falling through the intersubjective diamond. It was “deliverance from the cave” (SC 226), from his isolated self, from his aloneness. God is not found abstractedly, through a rejection of the world, as Will tried by climbing into the cave. Will does not find God until he falls out of the cave. God is lived through world and community. Will is spiritually reborn and now about to start his real journey to God and with others.

FOURS: AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY

Allie bathes him in threes – in divine signs – to help him recuperate from his fall. When he is sick or unconscious, she gives him three aspirins (SC 227); to lift him, she has the strength of (better than) three men with her block and tackle (SC 234); she puts three bricks under the door to bathe him (SC 235). But when they are together and in love, it is no longer threes, but fours and diamonds, that represent their love. As she lay next to him, she and he together are shaped like a diamond with their bodies: “When she started to climb over him, she discovered that he had moved to make room. As she turned to nest again, he held her shoulder and she came down facing him. But he was bent a little away from her. She bent too” (SC 257). Together, they create Percy's intersubjective diamond of his language theory. Percy is clearer with this reference a little later: “He turned back. Their foreheads touched. Their bodies made a diamond” (SC 262). These diamonds are what one finds in a treasure chest, but as Percy's intersubjective diamond, it is the loving community which is the treasure. When the electrical storm arrives and they are in the greenhouse, “Facets of glass flashed blue and white. It was like living inside a diamond... Lighting struck again. The glass house glittered like a diamond

trapping light” (SC 264, 265). Blue, white, light – the colors that surround them are those of the divine. Their little community of love is divine, but instead of the treasure being outside of them, possessed by them, they are living inside the diamond; they ARE the diamond. They have not “found” the treasure, but they have *become* the treasure and are living it through their love and through community. The treasure is not outside of us, but within us, and in how we live our lives everyday.

Many scholars have commented on Percy’s existential wondering about what to do at four o’clock on a Wednesday afternoon (the *fourth day* of the week). Somehow the malaise just “gets” to you then. Percy’s oft-noted observation of depression in the middle of the afternoon in the middle of the week seems to have been chosen for its middling nature – as in the middle of life, we wonder why we are here, what it’s all about, and don’t know. Here, four o’clock has a greater significance. “Imagine having you around at four o’clock in the afternoon,” Allie says to Will, in amazement and joy at his presence (SC 257). The time of four o’clock is not arbitrary (why not 3:30?). It is four, the time for community; the antidote to the existential depression of life is community. Even later she says it again, “Late afternoon needs another person.... What if four o’clock comes and I need another person?” (SC 239). Four o’clock is the hour of community and of love. Will wonders about Allie when it is 4:30, if she is OK, or spiraling into herself (310). Later, when they finally reunite, Allie says, “Now I know what was wrong with four-o’clock the afternoon” (SC 341). So Allie knows when Will arrives that the existential malaise of four-o’clock is solved by the presence of love and a community: “As a life of smiling ease with someone else and the sweetness for you deep in me and play and frolic and dear sweet love the livelong day, even at four o’clock in the afternoon turning the old yellow green-glade lonesomeness into a being with you at ease not a being with you at unease?” Allie thinks later:

Then along comes late afternoon – four o’clock? Five o’clock? – a time which she thought of as yellow spent time because if time is to be filled or spent by working, sleeping, eating, what do you do when you finish and there is time left over? ... clock time became a waiting and a length which she thought of as a longens. Only in late afternoon did she miss people...In this longitude longens ensues in a longing if not an unbelonging. (237-238)

At the end of the novel, when Allie and Will are together, he comes to see her:

“I was talking to a man at St. Mark’s and all of a sudden I realized it was almost four o’clock and I wanted to see you.”

“You wanted to see me because you know how I feel at four o’clock in the afternoon?”

“That and more” (SC 354).

And then, he promises more: “I will always come see you at four o’clock in the afternoon...” (SC 355), and they lay down next to the Grand Crown stove.

Allie thinks to herself: “...is loving you the secret, the *be-all* not *end-all* [my italics] but starting point of my very life, or is it just one of the things creatures do like eating and drinking and therefore nothing special and therefore nothing to dream about? Is loving a filling of the four o’clock gap or is it more?” (SC 258). The answer is not an external goal (end-all), but an internal way of living a life of love (be-all).

Is the community, this relationship, just a distraction from the emptiness, or is it an actual authentic solution? Is it merely physical instinct, that all animals, all creatures, are compelled to, or is it something entirely different – a human activity solely, not a distraction, but a new human orientation, an ontological one of “being” (and hence, a be-all not an end-all).

Allie says, “Either way would be okay but I need to know and think I know. It might be the secret because a minute ago when you held me and I came against you there were signs of coming close to it, for the first time, like the signs you recognize when you are getting near the ocean for the first time” (SC 258). Even if it is the “secret” and a “sign” to nearing to the ocean (the transcendent), rather than merely a satisfaction of a biological need or a distraction from the malaise, Allie distinguishes between the “be-all” which it might be, and the “end-all,” which it is not. The “end-all” of course is the ocean – the transcendent, or God – which human relationships can’t suffice for, can’t take the place of. The “be-all” however is how we must be and what we must do while we are on our journey to the ocean. Besides referring to the ontological stance instead of biological one, it refers to Marcel’s “being” instead of “doing.” Relationships are how we live out our lives while we are here in “this world” and

while we are on our way to the ocean – they are also signs of the way to the ocean (the transcendent). It is the ground through which the eternal (God) manifests in the temporal world.

A WIDER COMMUNITY

When Will settles down with Allie, escaping the hospital (institution), they build a community with his fellow patients. Together their skills create community. Mr. Arnold can build a “four-room house with a creek-rock chimney” (SC 320), a home which is at once a part of nature (creek, rock) but also is made of “four” rooms, the number for community.

In the institution, however, there are no fours. There are the three men. Will, Mr. Arnold, and Mr. Ryan – the fourth is the TV. “He discovered it was possible to talk to them and even for them to talk to each other, if all three watched TV. The TV was like a fourth at bridge, the dummy partner they could all watch” (SC 319). The TV, the “fourth,” makes possible community. But this solution is not the real answer; it is a living death, an aimless community of distraction without purpose: “So here is the giant-screen Sony projector TV and CBS day and night and some of the programs not half bad either, some the programs in fact well done and amusing, yes, especially the sports and documentaries, yes? M*A*S*H ain’t bad. No? No. There was something he had to do” (SC 325).

The TV isn’t the only distraction from the “something” that Will has to do. Religion, which should provide the path to God, can be merely a distraction from the emptiness rather than a solution; community itself, which should manifest God, can be part of the distraction as well. (The distraction is “fool’s gold” – the solution is real gold.) Will meditates on his new-found (though not-quite-right) “solution” – really a distraction – to his former existential malaise, “I’ve found a better way than swallowing gun barrels: in short, I can shuffle off among friends and in comfort and Episcopal decorum and with good Christian folk to look after my every need” (SC 325). But this is not Percy’s answer, not the real solution. He says this while he is “drugged up” on medicine the institution gives him to prevent

him from falling because he is off-center (quite literally – that is, physically as well as spiritually) and needs a balancer, even to walk or stand up.

The institution tries to give a physical solution to an existential problem. But the existential problem is answered not by the right mixture of medicine to ratchet up certain brain chemicals, a delivery of Prozac, the distraction of TV, or even “Episcopal decorum.” The existential problem needs an existential solution: an authentic community of true love, divinely sanctioned. Allie knows that the existential misfit in society is not due to brain chemicals being off. It is due to that missing of God and of “the other” – a Thou to commune with. She says to Will, “Our lapses are not due to synapses” (329). “Our lapses” are the individual lapses on an every day basis which is manifest through existential longing and attempts to solve with distractions; on a larger scale, the race of humans lapse with “the Fall,” a lapse which drugs cannot actually cure, only hide.

Of course, God is always present, always there to access, despite the TV blaring in the background and the other distractions in the way: “He stood for a moment gazing at a tarantula in Deborah Kerr’s tent. Was there a whole world of meaning, of talking and listening, which took place everywhere and all the time and which no one paid attention to, at least not he?” (SC 325). This overlooked and ignored intersubjective meaning is the real answer, not the TV or other distractions. Meaning is found in those uniquely human perceptions and activities – language, community, God.

Allie and Will are soul mates in their complementarity. He falls; she hoists, so she can pick him up (SC 227, 236). He remembers everything; she forgets most things (SC 329). He is a “slicer” while she is a “hooker” (286). Together they balance each other and the ball hits the mark. If “sin” is to “miss the mark” (as the word is translated from the Hebrew), then together Allie and Will are on the right path. If this novel is a treasure hunt, it is also a game of golf – and Will tries to get his ball into the hole to win the game. Without her, he “misses the mark.” She is his balancer, and gets him on the right track to the real existential solution, or God manifested through love, just as Will does for her.

Will and Allie's help for each other comes in many ways, but mostly through balancing each other and through their respective strengths compensating for weaknesses or missing characteristics. Besides their slicing/hooking, falling/hoisting, remembering/forgetting complementarity, he understands and can interpret her language so she can communicate, and in turn, her unique speech refreshes him from his overexposure to most people's dead language. He is transcendent, with his search for God and signs so compelling that he gives up everything to enter a cave and face death, with his "cosmic explorations, grandiose ideas about God, man, death, suicide, and such..." (SC 213). She is immanent, fully grounded in a greenhouse and working in the earth for survival in this life. With her immersion in the garden, living among the earth and the elements and not even separated from them by walls and a roof, she creates a home in the world, and she provides a place in which he can ground himself. With the transition from chapter five to chapter six, their two worlds are juxtaposed. She is squatting in the sunlight, clearly grounded, and wondering how to heat the green house, while Will has voluntarily given up these and any concerns for survival. He falls into her world. It is the fall "up" – the next fall, after the fall down.

The answer is not God alone, but a loving community in which God can manifest, much to Will's surprise. Just as community is necessary for language to manifest – as well as art, culture, and religion – it is necessary for God's divine presence to take concrete shape. Will falls into Allie's greenhouse onto the "concrete" (SC 226). He is no longer in his cave of abstractions, but in concrete reality of others' lives, and the concrete manifestation of God through helping others (as they will soon proceed to help each other, and then later, those in the institution, and create a literal community). On a larger scale, the individuals in community have complementary skills just as Will and Allie complement each other. The characters help each other that way, creating a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Mr. Arnold and the other men in the institution will help Will create a community for all of them – and even more.

Here, Percy moves from the threes (God alone, and the protagonist alone) of *Lancelot* to fours (God-in-community) in *The Second Coming*.

**4.5 THE THANATOS SYNDROME:
DYADIC SOLUTIONS AND THE MARK OF THE BEAST – A BRAVE NEW WORLD**

Percy's last novel, *The Thanatos Syndrome*, published in 1987, is a takeoff on *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* – something is in the water. This novel stars his third novel's (*Love in the Ruins*) protagonist. Set sixteen years later, Dr. Thomas More's life hasn't gone so well. He has just been released on parole from state prison where he had been serving two years for prescribing amphetamines to truckers. Upon returning to his home and family in Feliciana, Louisiana, to resume his psychiatry practice, he notices something strange in the town folk – even his wife and two children. While the crime rates and teen pregnancy are reduced, and the population becomes otherwise far more efficient and successful, people have childlike, even animal-like, thinking and speaking patterns; women's cycles change from menstrual (homo sapien) to estrous (primate); and they exhibit unusual sexual behavior and loss of inhibition; as well as idiot-savant, even computer-like math skills; and lack of awareness of "self," introspection and reflection.

More and his cousin, Dr. Lucy Lipscomb, discover that everyone has been drugged: a group of scientists, including his friend and unofficial parole officer, Dr. Bob Comeaux, and the head of the computer division and his wife's bridge partner, John Van Dorn, have intentionally and secretly been contaminating the main water supply by dumping heavy doses of sodium. Their intent is to create these effects in a search for a better society: improving people's behavior, ridding them of guilt and anxiety, making everyone "happier" – or less aware of their unhappiness. For Percy, this is part and parcel with a ridding of the human soul. The scientists make the whole population "better" by society's standards, though they lose their soul and humanity as a result.

In a reference to Hitler's Nazi goals, Percy has Comeaux as director of the local "qualitarian center" which practices eugenics through euthanasia of the very young and old, another method in his aim of creating a "better" society, sacrificing the individual and the soul for markers of external success. For his part, Van Dorn runs a boarding school for children, whom he secretly abuses sexually. More and

Lucy expose the plot and the school, and Comeaux and Van Dorn receive their comeuppance; in the meantime, the eccentric Father Renaldo Smith, the prophetic voice crying out in the wilderness (literally, he spends much of his time in a tree perch, a forestry watch tower) guides More and helps him to see the evil implications of these social eugenics projects.

Many Percy critics have noted the symbolism of Father Smith's triangulation – that Percy was using the symbol of the Delta triangle to represent the divine within humans that the drugged world of *The Thanatos Syndrome* can't comprehend (or, once they drink the water, even experience). But by now, Percy's threes were as much or more semeiotic than they were religious symbolism, although the meanings (humans with something "more" separating them from the animals) overlap to a certain extent.

And triangulation, as well as the number three, is isolated and rare in this novel, occurring only in Father Smith's world, as Father Smith is an isolated island of humanity and divinity in a world gone wrong. Instead, it is twos, representative of animal communication, and sixes, representative of "the mark of the beast," that dominate since the world has been overtaken by an animal-like populace and dyadic scientific goals denying human characteristics.

TWOS AND SIXES

The number Percy uses for his last novel is not three, nor even four, both symbolic of human communication, but **two**, representing "sign," not symbol – the kind of communication Percy reserves for animals. Percy ends his novelistic career with a novel that uses the first number of his semiotics, the two, drawing largely what humanity would look like absent symbolic capacity. *The Thanatos Syndrome* is replete with twos, pairs, and dyads. Twos here represent a dyadic approach to the world – the view, as Lancelot Lamar describes when he speaks of death and sex as mere molecules interacting, obviously missing something significant about human experience. Human language, a triadic event, deteriorates, and the characters speak mostly in two-word sentences, as they decline and transform into animals.

The Thanatos Syndrome, unlike the other two novels (*Lancelot* and *The Second Coming*) that use numbers as a dominate symbol, has more than one number that repeatedly recurs within its pages – both twos and sixes. A clue to the number symbolism in this last novel is the feast day of the protagonist’s namesake: “The feast of St. Thomas More, June twenty-second” (TS 355), or numerically, 6/22. Along with twos, Percy uses sixes here – per their pop culture and biblical symbolism. With the 1976 arrival of the popular movie *The Omen*, it was common knowledge, that 666 was the “Mark of the Beast” or a number used in the book of Revelations (13:17-18) to represent the anti-Christ.

Sixes have the traditional number symbolism of man, whereas three represents God, so three sixes is man trying to be God, or take the place of God. This “anti-Christ” solution of the antagonist, Van Dorn (not THE anti-Christ, but literally, against Christ or the divine within us), is an attempt to solve a God-problem, a spiritual problem, with a solely human answer. Van Dorn’s solution denies the existence of the spiritual side of humans which denies the need for divine.

World views such as scientism, behaviorism, and physicalism attempt to subsume all of the human being, all human characteristics, into their paradigms, denying the existence of a divine reality or need. This is in fact what Percy wrote about his whole life. He shows, as Van Dorn and Bob Comeaux attempt to subsume humans into their non-human paradigms, the inadequacy of such a point of view, how it misses the mark. By viewing them dyadically instead of triadically, Van Dorn tries to “fix” the human malaise with drugs, and he has negated spiritual, transcendent answers (and the spiritual and transcendent within the characters). External success and adjustment is not the answer, something far greater is.

DYADIC SCIENCE VS. THE FABRIC OF LIFE

Dyadic science and dyadic psychology do not suffice for Dr. More; the key is communication and connection, not drugs. He has already stated, “I seldom give anxious people drugs. If you do, they may feel better for a while, but they’ll never find out what the terror is trying to tell them” (TS 6). For Percy,

there is a greater goal than just “feeling good” or “being well adjusted” though that goes against the general philosophy of his (and our) day. External productivity and internal “good feeling” are the values of modern society, and certainly the values that drive Van Dorn’s “something in the water” (and it’s not fluoride) project. Not so for Percy; there’s something more:

We who like our mentor Dr. Freud believe there is a psyche, that it is born to trouble as the sparks fly up, that one gets at it, the root of trouble, the soul’s own secret, by venturing into the heart of darkness, which is to say, by talking and listening, mostly listening, to another troubled human for months, years – we have been mostly superseded by brain engineers, neuropharmacologists, chemists of the synapses. And why not? If one can prescribe a chemical and overnight turn a haunted soul into a bustling little body, why take on such a quixotic quest as pursuing the secret of one’s very self? (TS 13).

Percy believes science can’t fully answer the question of what is the human soul, what are the angsts and ailments of the human soul, what are the solutions, or even, what are the causes. “Believe it or not, psychiatrists still do not know the cause of the commonest of all human diseases, schizophrenia. They still argue about whether the genes are bad, the chemistry is bad, the psychology is bad, whether it’s in the mind or the brain. In fact, they’re still arguing about whether there is such a thing as the mind” (TS 4-5). A dyadic scientist might argue that dyadic science simply hasn’t yet had the adequate time or tools to answer the question, but eventually it can be answered. The answers are within the realm of science.

Percy’s answer to that is a resounding no. The composition of human beings has more to it than science can ever imagine or begin to understand. Science, which is dyadic, can never explain “the soul’s own secret,” can never subsume “the human heart of darkness” to its method (TS 13). It takes a triadic answer for that because there is an element to human beings that is triadic. Later More elaborates: “But there’s more to it than neurons. There’s such a thing as the psyche, I discovered. I became a doctor of the soul, an old-style Freudian analyst, plus a dose of Adler and Jung. I discovered it is not sex that terrifies people. It is that they are stuck with themselves. It is not knowing who they are and what to do with themselves” (TS 88). Animals, however, do not have this dilemma. Neither do the characters

of the Thanatos Syndrome when dosed with heavy sodium causing them to revert to animal characteristics. Their actions and motivations are explainable dyadically and have dyadic solutions.

In *The Thanatos Syndrome*, Percy narrates his opinion by having the sodium influenced humans, who are becoming more like apes, also lose or greatly modify their language abilities. More writes in his book that one of the common symptoms of the more animal-like patients is reflected in their language behavior. He describes: "Change from ordinary talk in more or less complete sentences... to two- or three-word fragments... reminiscent of the early fragmentary telepathic sentences of a three-year-old, or perhaps the two-word chimp utterances described by primatologists..." (TS 69).

TWOS

It is the number two that Percy uses again and again to correspond with his theme of animal consciousness, a dyadic one that is qualitatively different from human consciousness. The opening pages are full of twos. The first page of the novel begins with reference to two "twos" – as psychiatrist Tom More is trying to decipher the reasons behind the unusual behavior his patients seem to be exhibiting: "Call it a knack, hunch, providence good luck, whatever - to know what you are looking for and to put two and two together" (TS 3). If the twos remain separately two, as the other scientists hope, the population drinking the water will continue to act as animals. Put them together, which More here acknowledges as his job, and they return to human communication in community, or four. Moreover, the seemingly unrelated and random physical events, devoid of meaning beyond themselves, become, through symbol-making capacity, a part of a "fabric" of life, and take on significance in a "world" as Percy defines the term "world." It is twos and twos that make "four," or symbolic community filled with significance and meaning.

Besides putting "two and two" together, More, a physician – a natural diagnostician – noticed "a *couple* of little things" that most would have missed. If one thing is an incident, two are a co-incident, and it takes symbol-making capacity to bring two to level of three and turn it into something with

pattern and meaning. More's friend, the natural diagnostician has done this. With "two patients," he finds a pattern: "the bipolar dumbbells of *Pastuerella pastis* [the plague]" (TS 4).

Even more twos abound: Dr. More hasn't worked in "two" years – the time of his incarceration, so he thinks of all patients in comparison to what they were like two years ago, a phrase which he repeats often as he narrates his story. While Allie in *The Second Coming* was "incarcerated" for three years, More has been for two – the number of *The Thanatos Syndrome*. More also speaks of what an analyst knows after seeing a patient "several times a week for two years" (TS 5). But it is the "third ear" (the human intuition – triangulation from the evidence) that gives the analyst the final knowing.

Twos are used frequently in conjunction with More's patients who are afflicted by the water – because the infected water has made them "dyadic" – more animal-like and computer-like. They are now "binary," as computers are binary. They are surrounded by twos, filled with twos, acting as "twos."

More summarizes his former patient's history "in a word or two" (TS 5). "Now here she is two years later" (TS 6), and More is resuming her treatment, but she is different: flat, given up on mystery, devoid of any human neuroses, and later seducing him with as little self consciousness as an animal mating. Still he sees the human side of her, and uses the number four with this observation. He says that Mickey reminds "me of my daughter as a four-year old. It is the age when children have caught on to language... How can she be at once as innocent as a four-year old and as blowsy as the Duchess of Alba?" (TS 8, 9). Besides her unusual lack of sexual discrimination, she has become an idiot savant with numbers. Her math skills have accelerated, while her language skills have deteriorated; she is less human with her loss of language capacity, and more machine or computer. "...no shifting of gears from one context to another. There is no context... her eyes go up into her eyebrows, as if she were reading a printout" (TX 9). With symbol (three), the creature has a "world" which has a context; with sign (two), there is only an "environment." Another patient, Ella, gives Tom "two volumes of Feliciano Farewell" and has shoes that are "two dollars a pair at K-mart" (TS 76). Former priest and nun, Kev and Debbie,

started a Beta house (second letter of the alphabet) Couples community with a “yin-yang logo centered between two dialoguing hearts” – representing new age solution, but not a divine solution – and the community is “open” – dyadic sex, but not triadic.

Like More’s admired diagnostician, More himself figures out “something queer might be going on hereabouts” (TS 12) with his second case. It takes two. “Two years later” (TS 17), Donna S. comes for treatment again – fat Donna, who before the water gets to her, eats “three paper boats of French fries” at “four in the afternoon” (TS 14). Percy uses threes and fours to refer to her before the contaminated water altered her. Her neuroses – comfort in food, hiding her femininity and sexuality behind fat due to molestation in childhood – were all too human, and Percy uses the numbers of humanity. “Four in the afternoon,” so prominent in *The Second Coming* and other places in Percy’s works, still retains its meaning of existential loneliness, a time of need for something greater, for another human, for community. Food is filling her loneliness, “She needed to face the old two-faced Janus of sex” (TS 17). Again, there are human characteristics underneath: “How do I know, as certainly as if she were a four-year-old, that she is telling the truth?” (TS 19). More thinks, “Is there a commonality between these two cases? Two cases are too few even to suggest a syndrome, but I am struck by certain likenesses...” (TS 21). Two elements are all the human mind needs to triangulate and find the third element. Although two is not a pattern, the human mind is triadic and can triangulate with only two entities to find the pattern.

Later, Bob Comeaux and Tom More, “two proper Louisiana gents” (TS 30), converse, and More confides he has “picked up a couple of odd things” (TS 30) regarding his patients’ unusual behavior. Bob’s response, ““Two cases are not exactly a series”” (TS 33), recognizes that it takes three to make a pattern, two is only a coincidence. But human reasoning triangulates and can determine the third from two. Humans can discern a pattern from seemingly random events and create a “world.” From his two

patient cases, More triangulates to see the clues to discover the pattern of sickness., just as Father Smith later triangulates to find fires – or the Holy Spirit.

Finding that pattern – seeing the “fabric of life” and weaving it tightly rather than loosely with random threads (events) barely connecting – is the human endeavor and the human fulfillment. Percy refers to his favorite philosopher (by now he was corresponding with Ketner about Peirce) when More says, “The great American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce, said that the most amazing thing about the universe is that apparently disconnected events are in fact not, that one can connect them. Amazing!” (TS 68). Twos, the number of this novel, represent that disconnection. But humans, the coupler in the communication triad, can connect them and find the pattern – and predict more events and see a “world” with purpose and meaning.

The most notable characteristic is the affected characters’ language deterioration, marked by *two*. Only humans can speak, so the loss of language clearly marks their decline into creaturely dyadic nature. More notes this fragmented speech is “reminiscent of early fragmentary telepathic sentences of a three year old, or perhaps a two-word chimp utterances described by primatologists – ‘Tickle Washoe,’ ‘More bananas.’” (TS 69). A secondary characteristic of the afflicted characters, context loss, is loss of human culture, that is, loss of a “world” that Percy discusses in his non-fiction writings. “Neither needs a context [meaning a “world,” as Percy defines it] to talk or answer. They utter short two-word sentences” (TS 22). Coinciding with his language theory, Percy has Dr. More speculate that it is the:

posterior speech center, Wernicke’s area, Brodmann 39 and 40, in the left brain of right-handed people.... Not only the major speech center, but according to neurologists, the locus of self-consciousness, the “I,” the utterer, the “self” – whatever one chooses to call that peculiar trait of humans by which they utter sentences and which makes them curious about how they look in a mirror – when a chimp will look in a mirror for another chimp. (TS 22)

These two symptoms – loss of language and a “world” – portray the affected characters as chimps, mere animals. Another symptom, the idiot savant response of being able to “recall any information ever received,” portrays them as computers. All of these characteristics represent a loss of humanity. By

reverse reasoning, Percy is describing the characteristics of human beings that make them human – language and a world – that are beyond the description of science and that set humans apart from both animals and machines.

Often Percy's characters in *The Thanatos Syndrome* speak in terms of two points – they have two things to say. Bob Comeaux frees them from jail, and defends the project: "So, two little numbers, Tom. One: The admissions to Angola for violent crime from the treatment area have declined seventy-two percent since Blue Boy began" (TS 195). This is not the first time Percy uses "seventy-two" – earlier, the pipe that carries the contaminated water has a "seventy-two-inch diameter" (TS 174). Seventy two is six times six times two, replete with sixes and twos. But Bob has two points to make, not three or more. The second point is that crime is down to zero.

However, the sacrifice of this social progress – well behaved creatures, no crime, good institutional performance statistics - is the humanity of human beings, the soul. *Thantatos's* scientists seek a social utopia, as Hitler did, at the cost of the individual. Bob, a lover and a theorist of mankind, and so a Hitler or anti-Christ,⁷⁶ pontificates on and on about his social theories and "accomplishments" through the water contamination. But whatever accomplishments he has achieved, the one human capacity – language – has deteriorated; his unknowing subjects, who have drunk the contaminated water, have been reduced to animal and computer characteristics:

"How about language?"

"Language?"

"You know, reading and writing. Like reading a book. Like writing a sentence."

"...We're in a different age of communication... Tom these kids are way past comic books and *Stars Wars*. They're into graphic and binary communication – which after all is a lot more accurate than once upon a time there lived a wicked queen."

"You mean they use two-word sentences."

"You got it. And using a two-word sentence, you know what you can get out of them?... They can rattle off the total exports and imports of the port of Baton Rouge – like the spread sheet – or give 'em pencil and paper and they'll give you a graphic of tributaries of the Red River." (TS 197)

⁷⁶ See Chapter 1.2 for Percy's discussion of the sentimental scientist.

More has “two questions” for Bob’s two points (TS 199). When the conversation ends, Bob says he wants More to meet his colleagues, “They’re the best of *two* worlds” (TS 202). [Italics my emphasis.]

Later, when Lucy examines the infected children, she has “two things” to say to Tom before he leaves (TS 229). Lucy finds “two behavioral items” in the abused children she examines (TS 223). And Van Dorn has “two pieces of news” (TS 294). Van Dorn, of course, the mastermind behind the project, is full of twos, dyads, and binary thinking. Later, when Tom confronts him with the photos of him performing lewd acts on children, he uses his binary thinking to defend himself: “‘It’s a simple either/or. Either the photos are phony – which in fact they are – or they are not’” (TS 302). Van Dorn’s either/or alludes to another man’s either/or – Kierkegaard’s – except Van Dorn reduces the existential question of morality to a tricky defense. More has an “either/or” dilemma of his own as he decides what to do with his career (TS 366).

By contrast, More has a *six*-layered exchange with Frank Macon, the black janitor, deacon, and Tolstoy character, virtually filled with humanity and spirituality, and untouched by the heavy sodium. The encounter is “beyond the compass of any known science of communication but plain as day to Frank and me” (TS 11). For Percy, science fails to explain the mysteries of a human being, particularly the language event. Linguistics, a scientific study of language, fails to fully explain human communication – which is very different from primate or other animal communication, and different from Mickey Lafaye’s and the other characters afflicted with extra doses of heavy sodium, essentially turning them into primates.

Thoughts and phrases as well as events and news come in twos: “Two strange thoughts occurred to me in the ten seconds it takes to spiral down the iron staircase” in Lucy’s home (TS 42). The second thought is that he hasn’t had a drink or pill in two years. His two years in the “clink” is repeated often in the novel – two years since a drink, two years since he’s treated each of his patients, two years as a grass cutter on a golf course, two years of lessons: “I don’t have to be in a demonic hurry like I used

to be. I don't have to plumb the depths of 'modern man' as I used to think I had to. Nor worry about 'the human condition' and suchlike. My scale is smaller... Instead of saving the world, I saved the eighteen holes at Fort Pelham and felt surprisingly good about it" (TS 67). Survival was the name of the game for More in prison; the existential questions of the human condition matter little there.

Percy is generous in his use of twos throughout the novel. Twos surround the world, including More and Lucy, who are endeavoring to resolve the dyadic problem. Twos are clues to the search for threes, when used by the reasoning human mind through triangulation. "Lucy catches me in the parking lot. She's got two sandwiches and two Cokes.... My two-toned Caprice, even older, is alongside [her old pickup]" (TS 102). She half faces him and holds the wheel with "her left hand and two fingers of her right" (TS 102). At the end of the novel, Lucy has "two great happenings. Exxon brought in a gas well at Pantherburn and her ex-husband, Buddy Dupre, divorced his second wife and came home" (TS 347). More must meet his "parole officers" at "two" (TS 22). He and Max sit across from Bob Comeaux in "two chairs" (TS 24). More's license has been moved from a "Class Three to a Class Two offense" (TS 97). Bob Comeaux, who has "rehearsed these two clauses," tells More that "'the human infant does not achieve personhood until the second year... only with the acquisition of language..." (TS 35). Note that Comeaux's language ability is impaired as well; he speaks in clauses, and not full sentences.

Percy also uses twos in pairs or oppositions. He speaks of liberals vs. conservatives (TS 34), of two kinds of black/white relationships – old and new (TS 36), and of Ted Kennedy and Jesse Jackson (two men) representing the second kind (TS 36). In prison, More encountered many twos and oppositions – the anti-Communist Italian Republican dentist vs. the anti-anti-Communist Jewish lawyer from New York (TS 86), men jaybirds who are doing vs. women bluebirds who are being (TS 88-89), believing thieves and decent unbelievers (TS 360). Other pairs or oppositions are lovers of mankind vs. theorists of mankind – and "if you put the two together, lover of mankind and theorist of mankind, what you've got is Robespierre or Stalin or Hitler and the Terror, and millions dead for the good of mankind (TS 129) –

which is exactly what Bob, Max, and Van Dorn are doing with their little project. While not actually yet engaging in sending the population “to the gas chamber” (TS 360), the three have, for the “good” of society, killed their humanity, turning them into computers or animals without their knowledge or choice.

Another pair or opposition, Father Smith and Father Placide, are the two priests in the novel, yet very different. Father Smith is “pie-in-the-sky,” literally transcendent, living in the fire tower, representing the outcast hermit or prophet crying out the truth in the wilderness. Father Placide is down-to-earth and firmly ensconced in community, concerned with doing the work of God through service and practicality.

More twos abound; Percy floods us with them. He writes of two historic “Dons” in *The Thanatos Syndrome*. “The quixotic quest” quoted refers to the first Don, Don Quixote. The second Don is Don Juan. The first of the two is Percy’s wayfarer engaged in the human endeavor of the search. He undertakes a spiritual quest, regardless of the physical reality of his circumstances, and enlivens and restores everyone he encounters through his simple generosity of soul and strength of ideals, despite the fact that he fails miserably at all he does – by external measure that is – and is all the while completely unaware as to his utter failure by the standards of the world. Father Smith is the spirit of this Don. “I look at his hand, still on the azimuth. It is as withered as Don Quixote’s, yet, when he clasped mine, as strong as the Don’s too” (TS 327). Percy captures the two-sided truth, the paradox of the spirit, that what seems weak to the world is strong.

On the other hand, the spirit of the second Don is spread by Van Dorn, the mastermind behind creating a spiritually vacant but physically lush world. More notices, “Van Dorn is saying something about Don Giovanni, not the opera but the old Don himself being, in his opinion, a member of this company of sexual geniuses” (TS 220). Van Dorn’s watch is “a curved gold wafer” (TS 101), as Van Dorn is substituting sex and money for Eucharist, for those things that truly satisfy the needs of the soul. As

the opposite of Father Smith's Don Quixote, Van Dorn reduces the human soul to behavioristic quantification and physicalism divorced from the soul. Humans become that which must be well adjusted and successful in society, regardless of anything else.

Van Dorn's presence is full of twos and later in the novel, sixes, representing the anti-Christ, as Van Dorn plays that role in Percy's novel. His solution, drugging the city population with contaminated water in order to achieve performance goals – reduced crime, better test scores, no neuroses, well-adjusted citizens; the individual is subsumed to society's goals, as in Huxley's brave new world or Hitler's Nazi Germany, rather than vice versa. Van Dorn's interest in A.I., artificial intelligence, shows his interest in transforming computers into human brains and conversely, reducing human brains to computers, which in fact happens with his water "remedy." And to that end, people lose their humanity and become robots, or as we see in the end, animals.

As Van Dorn boats through the swamp, twos surround them. "You see those cypress trees over there.... The two big ones?" More asks. Then two limbs must be navigated (TS 57-58). He catches a fish on the "second try" (TS 59). Then he explains the Azazel convention in bridge that Ellen had mentioned – a convention employed as a last result, when one is in "a hell of a mess" (TS 61). More explains the legend behind its name, invoking another set of twos: "God told Moses to tell Aaron to obtain two goats for sacrifice, draw lots and allot one goat to Yahweh as a sacrifice for sin, the other goat to be marked for Azazel and sent out into the desert, a place of wantonness and freedom from God's commandments, as a gift for Azazel" (TS 64). Azazel was a rebel angel thrown out of heaven to the Syrian desert, for refusing, as a "son of fire," God's commandment to worship Adam, a "son of clay" (TS 64). His name is then changed to "Eblis," or despair.

Ellen, More's wife, has run off with "two fruity Englishmen" (at separate times) (TS 31). She, of course, has been afflicted with the heavy sodium... and becomes an expert at duplicate bridge with her idiot savant ability to remember numbers and statistics. Sheri Comeaux tells him "So there we were,

two little bridge ladies” playing “duplicate bridge,” and, the “next day, it’s mixed pairs” (TS 48). Ellen competes in the Mixed Pairs competition in Fresno. The metaphor of duplicate bridge meshes well with Percy’s theme of dyads. Ellen runs away to play duplicate bridge. But duplicate bridge foregoes chance hands by dealing the same hand out to all tables, becoming sort of a mechanical process. The language of the game of bridge is sign, not symbol; “...bidding is nothing more than a code for exchanging information” (TS 63), writes Percy.

Interestingly, in *Lancelot*, sexual infidelity is a triangle – inverted, but still a matter of threes, love triangles and often even “threesomes.” In *The Thanatos Syndrome*, it is a matter of twos – just the unfaithful spouse and lover, but the other party is absent entirely, even in Percy’s telling of it. Ellen goes off, away, when she has her trysts with Van Dorn; Ellen is out of the picture entirely when More rendezvous’ with Lucy.

Later, Van Dorn signs to More that he wants to meet at *six* o’clock, and Ellen drinks “two more Absolut’s” (TS 50). Ellen and Tom sleep on the third floor, in two convent beds.

SATANIC SIXES

The first introduction of six occurs on the third page of the novel: the patient lives on the “number-six fairway” (TS 5). Percy’s use of six is not related to his language theory; this is the first novel in which the number is used deliberately as a symbol of evil. In addition to six referring to the “mark of the beast,” the antichrist, three times two, or six, is the multiplying and combining of human and animal symbols.

Just as Dante’s Virgil leads Dante through hell, Percy’s Vergil leads More and Lucy to another kind of hell, to “Blue Boy,” where the contamination takes place. This is indeed hell, a Hitlerian one, as it is masterminded by the anti-Christ mentality of the three traitors to create the “ideal society” as Hitler sought to do. Like Dante’s hell, which is an upside down cone, “not half a mile away looms the great lopped-off cone of the cooling tower, looking for all the world like a child’s drawing of Mt. St. Helens

after it blew its top” (TS 173). Later, Vergel (like Virgil, Dante’s guide through hell) leads More and Uncle Hugh on a skiff through the swamp to the hellish contaminated water plant. Vergel points out that “the pump is waterproofed against high water, which can get up to six feet here” (TS 184). The police block the jeep trail, and More recognizes the “six-pointed star of the shoulder patch” (TS 185). The excuse to try to get out of arrest is that More is a “birdwatcher” which, in fact, is true. More sees birds, or the divine spirit, everywhere. Father Smith is portrayed as a bird, with his “dry talon of a hand” (TS 238). More watches and monitors the spirit in humans, and the reason they are trespassing at the water plant is that he detected something wrong with it.

As Lucy and Tom More become immersed in deciphering the mystery of the cause of his patients’ symptoms, as they get closer to the nefarious plan behind it all, sixes proliferate in full force in the novel. They do their research on Lucy’s home computer with her top level security clearance. Percy uses sixes and multiples of six as well; the symbol for heavy sodium is Na-24. When they find heavy sodium levels in the patients and water in Feliciana Parish, they search the computer and find that the parish has levels of “6 mmg., meaning 6 micrograms. The symbol is really 6 μ but I figure this was not practical typographically” (TS 146). More says, “Six micrograms. That is very little but any number is too much” (TS 146). When they check Baton Rouge levels, they find 18 mmg. Levels (3X6); checking an individual patient, Donna, reveals 12 mmg. heavy sodium levels (2X6). (After the first three readings, the numbers are more varied.) More says, “there’s the heavy, secret, lidded, almost sexual excitement of a scientific hit – like the chemist Kekule looking for the benzene ring and dreaming of six snakes eating one another’s tails – like: I’ve got you, benzene, I’m closing in on you” (TS 149). Note that sixes here are associated with chemicals – the heavy sodium, the benzene – is the totality of Van Dorn’s view of human beings: a physio-chemical entity to be manipulated with chemicals. A dyadic view of man produces dyadic answers.

Lucy grabs him, “flushed with six emotions” (TS 149). When Lucy tells More about Ellen’s STD, she says, “Six months ago she was negative. Six months ago you were in prison in Alabama. Six weeks ago she’s positive. Six weeks ago you were still in prison in Alabama” (TS 157).

Yet twos have not disappeared; Lucy gives More two capsules: “‘I’ve taken two too.’ ‘Two too,’ I repeat.” Then he has a few drinks of “a cheap bourbon named ‘Two Natural’” (TS 159). When it’s time to get up, Lucy wakes him, and he asks the time:

“Six.”

“Six.”

“Six. Get up. It’s important.” She’s excited. (TS 166)

Percy uses three sixes together here, clearly alluding to the popular symbol for the anti-Christ, 666.

Now that Lucy and More are keying in on the cause – the tainting of the water supply on purpose to elicit better performance and social adjustment in the general population, to the detriment of the development of the soul, spirit, or any inner qualities or values, the 666 appears. It is a human attempt to accomplish a divine task, and so it can’t help the spiritual or divine cause of the malaise, only the symptoms. More says the sign of heavy sodium poisoning is “...the abatement of symptoms – of such peculiarly human symptoms as anxiety, depression, stress, insomnia, suicidal tendencies, chemical dependence. Think of it as a regression from a stressful human existence to a peaceable animal existence” (TS 180).

At Belle Ame, the boarding school where the heavy sodium is used full force and the leaders are sexually abusing the children, there are more sixes. The first cards the “poisoned” Ricky matches in his game of concentration are “sixes” (TS 286). When Lucy examines the abused children at Belle Ame, Tom asks how many she examined. She says, “‘Ah about six. Yes, six.’ Again she falls silent.” (TS 223). These six children whom Van Dorn and his cohorts abuse are in opposition to another set of six children mentioned in the novel by Father Smith – the “six little children to whom the Mother of God appeared” (TS 364).

At the very end, as all returns to normal and Van Dorn's fate, he, having been overdosed with heavy sodium and reduced to a primate mindset, is to live and "communicate" – not to speak human language, but to sign two-word sentences – with Eve the gorilla. He recovers in two months, then is tried, convicted, and imprisoned in Angola, where he ran the prison library and wrote his book, *My Life and Love with Eve*, to become "serialized with photos in Penthouse and eventually made into a six-hour mini-series for stereo-V, the Playboy channel" (TS 344). The "satanic" Van Dorn, an anti-Christ, is surrounded by sixes.

THREES

Percy's last novel is dominated by creaturely twos and sixes, but it is not without some divine signs of the presence of God and community. Father Smith and Father Placide, men of God, are surrounded by threes, not twos as the rest of the characters are. They are wayfarers, directing and showing the way to those who will listen. Father Smith indeed is out of place among the characters of this book, holing himself up in the fire tower with his azimuth (translated as "the way" in Arabic), triangulating, and refusing to come down. Azimuth is true north, or the right way, directing wanderers and wayfarers. Father Smith's map, weighted with two fish sinkers on strings, shows his plumb line is straight and he knows the right way to go (TS 115). The New Testament allusion here is a fishing one – Christ called Peter to be a fisher of men. The Old Testament image is of a plumb line: God's plumb line measured whether His people were "straight" and upright (Amos 7:7). Father Smith is, and he can measure others. Later Father Smith's plumb lines cross as he triangulates for the fires (symbolically, the presence of the Holy Spirit) – instead of being parallel, random, and never intersecting for eternity; the lines connect, show a pattern, are woven together, creating the "fabric of life": "The weighted strings intersect at a crossroads on the map. The priest, I can see, is pleased by the elegance of the tight intersected strings. So am I" (TS 120). Father Smith has "discovered a mathematical proof of what God's will is, that is, what we must do in these dangerous times" (TS 111).

Percy's Cenopythagoreanism is here in Father Smith, reflecting Pythagoras' and Peirce's world views that number can model the universe and that all is connected. The threads intersect and the fabric of life is woven tightly and elegantly. Like Ethel Rosenblum, with her achievement of unity through her mathematical equations in *The Second Coming* (SC 7), Father Smith thinks the world is mathematically unified. For mathematicians and scientists, the proof of a mathematical theorem is "elegant," and related to the beauty of art and music and poetry, only human endeavors as language is only a human endeavor. This elegant mathematical unity of the universe is the opposite of random molecules colliding – a dyadic view. It is instead, a sign of "the fabric of life." Here, Percy, like Pierce and Pythagoras before him and with whom Ketner associates him, is truly a Cenopythagorean.

Interestingly, Brian Greene published a 1999 book on superstring theory entitled *The Elegant Universe*. Though superstring theory was hypothesized and written about by the time of *The Thanatos Syndrome* (1987), whether or not Percy is referring to it, he does convey the idea of the universe as a connected whole. Father Smith's elegant strings refer to the connectedness of the universe that Percy was trying to demonstrate, and string theory does try to achieve unity as well.

As crazy as he is, the people detect that Father Smith is "onto something" and may even have something. Threes are most associated with Father Smith in this novel, and supplicants go to him in the fire tower, for help – one for a tumor, the other for a son lost at sea during a hurricane ("After three days the Coast Guard gave up on him...") (TS 112). "The very next day the first person's tumor had gone down—the doctors could not find a trace of it – and the other person's son was found clinging to a board – for three days and three nights" (TS 112). Other signs of God and church are accompanied by threes. Father Placide graduated in the bottom third of his seminary class (TS 110); a three-foot bronze statue of the archangel St. Michael adorns his church rectory. Half a dozen women gather for a church meeting, of whom More recognizes three (TS 107-108).

FOURS

Ellen and Tom, in their marriage's better days, live in "The Quarters" (four), representing community (TS 36). Infirm Hudeen, unaffected by the contaminated water and the one adult holding together the community of the More family in Ellen's absence, is surrounded by fours and resides in a square. More explains, "Ellen has installed her in a tiny square bounded by stove, fridge, sink, table and stereo-V... so that she need never take her eye from the daytime drama that unfolds for four hours, precisely the four hours she's here" (TS 39). She, like Allie in Percy's previous novel, has given up normal conversation, knowing that it is not only inadequate for communication, often it actually impedes communication.

At the book's ending, the conflict is resolved, and the twos disappear entirely. All returns to normal after Tom More overdoses the perpetrators with their own medicine, heavy sodium, so that the animal symptoms become so exaggerated none can deny them, not even the sheriff, nor can anyone deny the degrading effects and moral collapse that results. Ellen returns to Tom, slowly recovering over days and weeks as the heavy sodium works its way out of her system. They take the Bluebird camper, symbol of divine spirit, and go to Fort Wilderness next to the Magic Kingdom. Here, as the effects of modern society are left behind, and Tom and Ellen and the kids re-find their Eden in the wilderness just as Will and Allie do, twos and sixes disappear. Threes return. "I have a drink, three drinks" Tom says, and later, before he goes to bed, he has "three nips" (TS 336).

Percy's last three novels do not have the same popularity as his first three; however, most people are missing a large part of what he is doing in these novels. So dominant are the numbers from his language theory – obscure symbolism only understood by the few scholars who delve into his semeiotic – that the number symbolism goes unnoticed by Percy critics.

5 THE DIVINE: FROM SYMBOL TO SACRAMENT

5.1 SYMBOL AS ORDER IN THE MIDST OF DISORDER: THE FABRIC OF LIFE

The main lines of logical structure in all meaning-relations are those I have just discussed; the correlation of signs with their meanings by a selective mental process; the correlation of symbols with concepts and concepts with things, which give rise to a 'short cut' relation between names and things, known as denotation; and the assignment of elaborately patterned symbols to certain analogues in experience, the basis of all interpretation and thought. These are, essentially, the relationships we use in weaving the intricate web of meaning which is the real fabric of human life. (Langer 77-78)

* * *

...an astronomer... routinely examines photographic plates of sectors of the heavens and sees the usual random scattering of dots of life....You've seen the photos in the newspapers, random star dots and four arrows pointing to a single dot... What of it, thinks the laymen, one insignificant dot slightly out of place? The astronomer knows better: the dot is one millisecond out of place, click, click goes the computer, and from the most insignificant observation the astronomer calculates with absolute certainty and finality that a comet is on a collision course with the earth and will arrive in two and half months. In eight weeks, the dot will have grown to the size of the sun, the oceans risen forty feet, New York will be under water, skyscrapers toppling, U. N. meeting on Mount Washington, etc.

How can such dire and absolutely verifiable events follow upon the most insignificant of evidence? (L 19).

* * *

For Percy, contemporary postmodern society is a world in which we have no way of understanding our selves. We no longer have a communal myth or agreed upon "name" – symbolic complex for society. However, "the self is rich or poor accordingly as it succeeds in identifying itself," and its place and purpose in the world (LC 122). For thousands of years, myth (whatever myth that might be) enabled us to place ourselves in the world, to tell us who we were, to give us meaning. The twentieth century, with its religious skepticism and physical reductionism and rejection of communally established daily rituals, banished that, so man is now "lost in the cosmos," as Percy entitled his second non-fiction book. We no longer have or live in Langer's "intricate web of meaning which is the real fabric of human life" (78). For Percy, this fabric of life can be recovered through the sacraments.

The physical world at the level of Peirce's "Secondness"⁷⁷ is actually chaotic and unconnected, other than random, separate pairs of space-event events which connect only in a cause-effect relation of single instances. Through symbolic capacity, we attain a human consciousness that weaves a fabric of life out of the infinite multitude and minutia of things and objects and events in all existence. In Peirce's concept of Thirdness, laws exist that govern and predict these cause-effect events, showing order and regularity to these events, which can now be understood and predicted. But without symbol, we stay in the world of randomness and physical impulses and gratification. We do not access the world of Thirdness – all is a bombardment of infinite physical stimuli without order or reason behind it, not unlike Hume's bundles of perceptions.

Once we cross the symbolic threshold, all is perceived and filtered through symbolic consciousness and our own reigning paradigm, our fabric of life. The unconscious brain not only contains unused symbols and conceptions, but it absorbs every sense experience that has ever happened to us – and only an incredibly small percentage of all of this can filter its way up into our conscious mind. Langer describes the chaos of infinite stimuli that our subconscious receives and that our conscious then orders, separating the wheat from the chaff, so we can function in the world.

Our merest sense-experience is the process of formulation. The world that actually meets our senses is not a world of "things," about which we are invited to discover facts as soon as we have codified the necessary logical language to do so; the world of pure sensation is so complex, so fluid, and full, that sheer sensitivity to stimuli would only encounter what William James has called (in characteristic phrase) "a blooming, buzzing confusion" (Langer 89).

She continues, emphasizing the human need to create order from the confusion bombarding our senses:

Events and actions, motions and emotions, are inexhaustible in our short lives; new experience overwhelms us continually; no mind can conceive in neat literal terms all the challenges and responses, the facts and acts, that crowd in upon it. Yet conception is its essential technique, and conception requires a language of some sort. (Langer 147)

Language enables consciousness and this kind of "conception" Langer refers to here.

Conception enables us to see – but at a sacrifice. We see only selected things. We are boxed in to that

⁷⁷ See Chapter 3.1 for Peirce's discussion of Secondness and Thirdness.

world that is composed of those symbols our limited consciousness can handle; we subconsciously choose to “miss” the rest of the world, so that we can function in life. While our subconscious absorbs all, our consciousness is limited, and must function with and through the medium of symbol. Symbol propels us into “Thirdness” and enables us to see order, to weave a fabric of life.

Order is created through repetition, not randomness. Symbol is repetition. Even a single instance of symbol is repetition since symbol “re-presents” the world to us, repeating the object being symbolized. It captures the world and delivers it in a finite way – a way that can be repeated. Just as symbol involves repetition, it is often derived *from* repetition. In primitive culture, “before a behavior-pattern can become imbued with secondary meanings, it must be definite, and the smallest detail familiar. Such forms are naturally evolved only in activities that are often repeated.... Besides the general repetition of what is done there is a repetition of the way it is done by a certain person” (Langer 160), and by a certain tribe or culture, which each have their own distinctive “ways.” Such forms are naturally evolved only in activities that are *often repeated*. (Langer 160). The symbolic act is also repeated in a certain manner – personal “ways” become “tribal ways” (Langer 160).

Langer talks of following a traditional method in preparing a meal, or any other daily activity, that is repeated with each preparation. From this, a ritual arises – often a symbolic one. Order and predictability are imbued into daily life. The chaos of existence is put in order, and put in control, given pattern and purpose, through symbol which gives guidance and direction. “But the driving force in human minds is fear, which begets an imperious demand for security in the world’s confusion: a demand for a world-picture that fills all experience and gives each individual a definite *orientation* amid the terrifying forces of nature and society” (Langer 158). Symbolic or presentational images give us the tools to create this orientation or world-picture. “Images are, therefore, our readiest instruments from abstracting concepts from a tumbling stream of impressions” (Langer 145). They are “primitive abstractions” (145):

Symbolization is the essential act of the mind, and mind takes in more than what is commonly called thought. Only certain products of symbol-making brain can be used according to the canons of discursive reasoning. In every mind there is an enormous store of other symbolic material, which is put to different uses or perhaps even to no use at all – a mere result of spontaneous brain activity, a reserve fund of conceptions, a surplus of mental wealth (Langer 41).

Religious services, prayers, litanies, symbols are repetitious and therefore not random. They help create the fabric of life. “They [rites] are part of man’s ceaseless quest for conception and orientation... they give active and impressive form to his demoniac fears and ideals. Ritual is the most primitive reflection of serious thought, a slow deposit, as it were, of people’s imaginative insight into life” (Langer 157). A random event occurs singularly and is part of the chaos of meaningless chance occurrences; two events may mean something but still lie in the realm of possible coincidence; three events create a pattern and meaning. From pagan spells to fairy tales to Catholic rites, religious services recite in threes.⁷⁸ Meaning, order, and regularity to life is created through repetition; chaos is dispelled.

Now he [primitive man] can adapt himself somehow to anything his imagination can cope with; but he cannot deal with Chaos. Because his characteristic function and highest asset is conception, his greatest fright is to meet what he cannot construe – the “uncanny,” as it is popularly called. It need not be a new object; we do meet new things, and ‘understand’ them promptly, if tentatively, by the nearest analogy, when our minds are functioning freely; but under mental stress even familiar things may become disorganized and give us the horrors. Therefore our most important assets are always the symbols of our general orientation in nature, on the earth, in society, and in what we are doing; the symbols of our *Weltanschauung* and *Lebensanschauung*. Consequently, in primitive society, a daily ritual is incorporated in common activities, in eating, washing, firemaking, etc., as well as in pure ceremonial; because the need of reasserting the tribal morale and recognizing its cosmic conditions is constantly felt. In Christian Europe the Church brought men daily (in some orders even hourly) to their knees, to enact if not to contemplate their assent to the ultimate concepts. In modern society such exercises are all but lost. (Langer 287)

Repetition creates order and meaning. The cultural routines and rituals given to us by society provide a north star as a stable guide keeping us on course in the midst of the tossing seas of randomness; from the north star we can find all the other stars and plot our course. The rituals formerly provided by the Church are lost, but replaced by our own personal, less communal ones – coffee in the morning at 7,

⁷⁸ See Chapter 1.4 for greater discussion of repetition and Freud’s “uncanny” and Jung’s “synchronicity.”

work at 8, dinner at 5:30, the news at 6. These daily rituals weave the fabric of our life. Today, however, these rituals are no longer connected to a transcendent reality. They create stability and order, but a horizontal one, not a vertical one.

MAGIC

Repetition not only helps us weave a fabric of life, but brings magic and power. When the tribal member participates in the rain dance, he is not creating the rain (cause-effect, or dyadic interaction) which would then extinguish the ritual (once it failed to succeed, which it often does). He is participating in something larger than himself, in a unity. He “draws all nature into the domain of ritual.... He dances with the rain; he invites the elements to do their part, as they are thought to be somewhere about and merely irresponsible” (Langer 158). This unity is the magic of the symbol. Similarly, cleansing, purification and eating rituals are repeated and honed until “[g]radually every detail becomes charged with meaning” (Langer 161). Soon “meaning and magic pervade savage life” so he sees symbols everywhere: “any behavior pattern, any striking visual form or musical rhythm, any question or announcement made often enough to become a formula, acquires some symbolic or mystical function” (Langer 162). A societal religion is thus created – through the natural tendency and existential need of man to symbolize. “The first idea of a god is not that of an anthropomorphic being that dwells in an object, e.g.: in a certain tree; it is simply the notion of the object itself as a personality, as an agent participating in the ritual” (Langer 163).

The meaning provides a pattern and direction and “fabric” that rescues life from chaos and pure biology. The physical world then becomes not some random material happenstance without transcendent purpose or reason to even prolong itself; it is now ordered and connected to something much greater than itself. The physical world becomes intimately and inextricably intertwined with the something transcendent that explains itself and demands its continuation for a reason other than itself – other than a circular one. It is not static, but dynamically progresses forward.

Langer says not only verbal words, language, but also “presentational” images – visual, aural, kinesthetic (and perhaps more) in nature - are symbols; she calls these fantasies and cites dreams (“madly metaphorical,” “riotous” images that make “no literal sense whatever”) as examples of these kinds of symbols (144-147). The emerging languages of primitive peoples have this kind of dream disorder to them (148-149). “[I]t is the symbol, not its meaning, that seems to command our emotions” (149). The symbol becomes as unconsciously meaningful to us in our waking moments as in our sleep, and becomes sacred – we do not know why. “The imaginative process is carried over from dream to reality; fantasy is externalized in the veneration of ‘sacra,’” or the sacred object, which now evokes unique emotions not merited by the physical purpose and presence of the object or event that is the vehicle of this emotion (154). Religious symbolism evokes a joy that is transcendent of the symbol’s physical self. “Sacred objects are not intrinsically precious” (Langer 155). They are actually random physical objects. Their value and sacredness originates from their creation of and connection to meaning – just as a child who learns language for the first time, connects an arbitrary sound to the object it contains *in alio esse*, feels joy.

Langer insists that these characteristics – the need for symbol, rite, ritual, order – must be included in any theory of mind, in any anthropology. “The love of magic, the high development of ritual, the seriousness of art, and the characteristic activity of dreams, are rather large factors to leave out of account in constructing a theory of mind. Obviously the mind is doing something else, or at least something more, than just connecting experiential items” (Langer 38). Langer proposes that the mind be considered not only as an organ in “service of primary needs, but of *characteristically human needs*; instead of assuming that the human mind tries to do the same things as a cat’s mind, ...the human mind is *trying to do something else*” (Langer 39). Percy of course identifies this need as an epistemological existential one, for which symbol serves as a means.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ See Chapter 2.7 for a discussion of symbol as a means to this new human need.

5.2 SYMBOL AS MAGIC AND MYSTERY

As such, the patient's delight has good and bad, authentic and inauthentic components, which must be traced out and identified within an adequate triadic theory. Thus, the patient's sentence It's oedipal! must be investigated for Platonic and even magical components in its mode of coupling as well as for its valid intersubjective celebration of an important discovery. (MB 188)

The need for naming, the satisfaction at naming, has been called "primitive word-magic" (SSL 133).

* * *

*Cassirer asks the question, how can a sensory content become the vehicle of meaning? And answers in effect it cannot, unless it, the symbol, the word, the rite, the art form, itself **constitutes** the meaning.... How indeed can a sensible vocable, an odd little series of squeaks and grunts, **mean** anything, represent anything? Therein surely lies the mystery of language. (MB 294)*

* * *

Language, for Percy, is one of those magical mysteries of life. It is a nature that is not dyadic, not a series of space-time events, not able to be investigated with a microscope or explained by dyadic science – it is "extraordinary" and one that our "theoretical world view completely ignores" (MB 151):

It comes down to the mysterious naming act, this *is water* (the word spelled out in her [Helen Keller's] hand). Here, of course is where the trouble starts. For clearly, as the semanticists never tire of telling us, the word is *not* water. You cannot eat the word oyster, Chase assures us; but then not even the most superstitious optimistic tribesman would try to. Yet the semanticists themselves are the best witnesses of the emergence of an extraordinary relation – which they deplore as the major calamity of the human race – the relation of an imputed identity between word and thing. (MB 260)

Mystery is the acknowledgement of something that is not known in its entirety – in this case, something that cannot be fully comprehended by the normal means we use to know things: scientific investigation, the laws of cause-effect, induction and deduction. The world is full of mystery – things that we do not know the answer to, and many of those things, we cannot possibly know the answer to using normally accepted means of dyadic (scientific) investigation and understanding. Science can tell us how a flower grows, but it cannot tell us why a flower grows – or what entity or force is behind the impulse to grow.

Science can tell us how the world developed, but cannot tell us what came before that. It cannot explain the infinite or the void. Science can tell us that a human has died, but not what happens after that death – if anything. We can explain the processes by which living things grow, but not what impels them to do so. We can proffer theories of the process of the origin of the world, but not where and why it came from. Those are mysteries. Mystery seems like it is magic because it transcends science and cause-effect relations and space-time events, which are logical and clearly understood. “Magic” lifts the world out of the mundane physical and conveys a spark of the divine, beyond the tangible, infused within it.

The relation of denotation (symbol) differs radically from signification (sign – a cause-effect interaction). “To give something a name, at first sight the most commonplace of events, is in reality a most mysterious act, one which is quite unprecedented in animal behavior and imponderable in its consequences” (MB 254). The mystery of language is the mystery of what it is to be a human, and how that differs from other creatures. Percy explains, “Language is an extremely mysterious phenomenon... as soon as one scratches the surface of the familiar and comes face to face with the nature of language, one also finds himself face to face with the nature of man” (MB 150). Both of these – language and the nature of man – are mysterious in that dyadic science cannot explain them in totality, through its paradigm of cause and effect.

One of the “magical” aspects of naming is that a name is paradoxically two things at once: the word (signifier) itself, and the essence of the thing signified carried within the word. Percy says,

Is it not premature to say with the mythist that when the primitive calls the lightning serpentine he conceives it as a snake and is logically wrong? Both truth and error may be served here, error in so far as the lightning is held to participate magically in snakesness, truth in so far as the conception of snake may allow the privately apprehended inscape of the lightning to be formulated. (MB 73)

Percy is using the scientific understanding of truth and error; that is, truth confirms the facts of the physical world, error contradicts them. Yet language, though “magical” and “mysterious,” is still as “real” as anything else.⁸⁰

In fact, we can only encounter reality through the medium of symbol, according to Langer, Cassirer, and Percy:

...symbolic forms are not imitations, but organs of reality, since it is solely by their agency that anything real becomes an object for intellectual apprehension, and as such is made visible to us. The question as to what reality is apart from these forms, and what are its independent attributes, becomes irrelevant here. For the mind, only that can be visible which has some definite form; but every form of existence has its source in some peculiar way of seeing, some intellectual formulation and intuition of meaning. ...language, myth, art and science... all function organically together in the construction of a spiritual reality, yet each of these organs has its individual assignment. (Cassirer 8-9)

Language is a different kind of reality, Cassirer says – a parallel reality. Just as language is magical, magic is language. Magic’s purpose is not at its core a cause-effect function (a rain dance to bring rain for example), but rather, magic is a form of language, a different kind of thought, one that is communication with a religious or spiritual world, that is capturing a Presence. It is not a causal act, nor a method for accomplishing something external. Langer illuminates:

Whatever purpose magical practice may serve, its direct motivation is the desire to symbolize great conceptions. It is the overt action in which a rich and savage imagination automatically ends. Its origin is probably not practical at all, but ritualistic; its central aim is to symbolize a Presence, to aid in the formulation of a religious universe. “Show us a miracle, that we may believe thou art God.” Magic is never employed in a commonplace mood, like ordinary causal agency; this fact belies the widely accepted belief that the “method of magic” rests on a mistaken view of causality. ... Magic, then, is not a method, but a language; it is part and parcel of that greater phenomenon, ritual, which is the language of religion. Ritual is a symbolic transformation of experiences that no other medium can adequately express. Because it springs from a primary human need,^[81] it is a spontaneous activity – that is to say, it arises without intention, without adaptation to a conscious purpose... No one made up ritual, any more than anyone made up Hebrew or Sanskrit or Latin. (Langer 49)

Language is a different kind of thought. Langer introduces Cassirer’s book, *Language and Myth*, by pointing out that theories of knowledge today mistakenly take “facts” as man’s earliest currency in

⁸⁰ See chapter 3.8 for a discussion of “real” vs. existing.

⁸¹ Percy later objects to this claim (see Chapter 2.7).

knowledge. The real progression of human intelligence is instead, Cassirer reveals, from a *pre-logical conception* which culminates in symbolic expression of many forms (art, religion, poetry, mathematics), including language and myth. Language can manifest as either creative imagination or discursive logic and has more in common with man's mythmaking tendency than his rationalizing tendency.

But though language and myth are "born in that same magic circle," it is language that enables humans to think logically and discursively, and therefore becomes the means by which man gains the capacity to reason and factual knowledge (Cassirer viii-x). We cannot know reality except through the mediation of symbol. It is language that enables us to reason and conceive of facts – but the origins of language and the first language event of naming were not from human factual knowledge, but from a conception of an entirely different sort.

MAGIC COGNITION

Percy defines naming, symbol-mongering, as word-magic, and as something completely different than fact, logic, and physical preservation or nurturance:

"...word-magic" is a common practice among primitive peoples, and so is vicarious treatment – burning in effigy, etc. – where the proxy is plainly a mere symbol of the desired victim. Another strange universal phenomenon is ritual. It is obviously symbolic, except where it is aimed at concrete results, and then it may be regarded as a communal form of magic. Now, all magic and ritual are hopelessly inappropriate to the preservation and increase of life... I propose, therefore to try a new general principle: to conceive the mind, still as an organ in the service of primary needs, but of characteristically human needs... the human mind is trying to do something else [than a cat's]... the cat does not act humanly because he does not need to. (Langer 36, 38, 39).

Percy posits two modes of thought that exist side by side simultaneously: "logic sign" and "magic sign" (SE 147). The logic sign is rational thought; the magic sign is the sphere of dream and imagination, whether sensory or of the mind, which covers the whole "world." Humans, creatures who live in the "world" (welt), create this "world" with the tool of magic sign. Percy disagrees with Levy Bruhl who believes that this kind of thinking is a "pre-logical" genetic stage through which the race must pass (SE 152). Other cultural anthropologists/cultural evolutionists agree with Bruhl: "Cultural traits as magic,

totemism, polygamy, polytheism, animism, etc., are ‘early’ forms of /which monotheism, monogamy, metaphysics, poetry, are taken to be the late refined versions (or rudimentary deposits)” (SE 152-53).

However, Percy believes, “Magic Cognition is not a primitive but a perennial mode” (SE 162). It is NOT a stage in the development of the human race, but an alternative mode of cognition available to BOTH primitive and modern humans. If so, then (1) primitive man should have higher logical mind operations, and (2) modern man should have magic cognition, not as remnants, but as an alternative method of conception. Both cases are true, according to Percy. Magical cognition exists in the modern world, and it is not a remnant of past civilizations that is dying out, but an ongoing way of perceiving (SE 162). Modern man’s magical cognition has the same characteristics of the primitive: “passivity and remotion” (SE 153). Percy explains the:

...process of simulacrum formation and magic participation – by magic cognition, I mean the effortless *a priori* synthesis of pure symbolic transformations dissociated from either experiential or abstract knowing. Pure symbolic knowledge, the knowledge of dreams, of magic, of idolatry, is neither apprehension nor comprehension, knowledge of or knowledge about.... the true domicile of the *a priori* category and the archetype. (SE 170)

Percy identifies the three traits of magic cognition as (1) totality of conception, (2) the law of participation, and (3) magic gesture (SE 170-172). The first trait, ***the totality of conception***, is the idea of a gapless “world” (“*welt*”) as opposed to an organism’s environment.⁸² There are no gaps in the figurative world – no passive awareness of ignorance of anything in the world either. “It is a condition of the symbolic transformation that everything be transformed” (SE 171). The Melanesian islander “knows” what lies beyond the seas, what he has never seen nor heard. “The traveler has, despite himself, a total conception of Canada, and if he has never been there, it is apt to be conceived in terms of a large pink place transected by lines” (SE 171-72).

⁸² See Chapter 2.5 for discussion of world vs. environment.

The second trait, the *law of participation* (SE 172), is the symbolic transformation.⁸³ Here Percy applies it not only to primitive man's totemism, but also to modern man's use of language – and totemism within the modern world. The law of participation has three expressions: (a) mystic participation, (b) mystical connection, or (c) magic causality. Mystic participation between one thing and another is “things [that] can in some way incomprehensible to us be both themselves and something else” (SE 151). For example, Bororos believe they are both man and parakeets at once. This is the symbolic transformation, the symbol carrying the thing within it *in alio esse*. Rather than being an inferior cultural stage, this “mystic participation,” “mystic abstraction,” “symbiosis,” or “close association with” as it is variously called by anthropologists, “is a manifestation of the same basic function which undergirds all human knowing – and especially the linguistic symbol... the universal occurrence of symbolic transformation [is] not only in primitive man but in modern man, that here too, one ‘thing’ is identified with another” (SE 156).

For Percy, mystic participation occurs in modern thinking as well as primitive thinking. In fact, all symbol takes place through mystic participation. “This principle, far from being a peculiar trait of prelogical mentality, is the very essence of the symbolic transformation itself—as it operates without the saving correctives of reason and experience” (SE 172). Percy gives an example: “When I, a young Bororo, grow up, I shall become a parakeet,” and “When I, a young American, grow up, I shall become a nuclear physicist” may be logically different since one can materially occur, they are figuratively alike – in each, there is “the expectation that the self will participate in and be informed by another identity” (SE 172). The main difference is insight into intentionality of symbol – modern man seems more aware the word is not the object – but even the Bororo who thinks he is a parakeet “would not presumably try to fly or mate with another parakeet” (SE 158). Percy concludes that mystic participation is a

⁸³ See Chapters 2.1 and 3.2 for discussion of the symbolic transformation.

characteristic of both primitive and modern man. This magical mystic participation, the symbolic transformation, is the mystery of language:

Cassirer asks the question, How can a sensory content become the vehicle of meaning? And answers in effect it cannot, unless it, the symbol, the word, the rite, the art form, itself constitutes the meaning... How indeed can a sensible a vocable, an odd little series of squeaks and grunts, mean anything, represent anything? Therein surely lies the mystery of language. (MB 294)

While Levy-Bruhl overlooks the areas of primitive thought that are magical, and he also can't see magical cognition in modern thought, viewing magic as a "stage" in evolution (SE 164-65), not so Percy. Percy says, "Magic cognition is not a pre-logical 'stage' which evolution puts behind us once and for all. It is rather a perennial pitfall" (SE 165). Modern man is just as much a magical thinker as primitive man. However, magical thinking is reversed in primitive societies and modern societies – for the primitive, magical thinking is in nature, not technics; for the modern, it is in technics, not nature (SE 163).

Where in modern life is to be found the mysterious, the remote the autonomous? Hardly in nature. To the apartment dweller in New York, nature is a trivial affair, a patch of sky between buildings, a few wilted trees, a few bedraggled zoo animals. To the suburbanite, nature is a backdrop to be manipulated like stage scenery.... Modern man... sees nothing mysterious or wonderful about natural events. Nature has been explained. The planets revolve, cells divide, organisms flourish and perish. *The mystery and remoteness and complexity to which the mass man in a technical society falls prey is to be found nowhere else than in the world of technics which has created, or rather which others have created for him, and which as a consumer he enjoys passively* (SE 163-164).

Modern man is just as subject to the magical thinking of "totemism" as the primitive, but the media of the totem differs. Totemism is the symbolic transformation of the self or the group through identification with an "other." Percy gives the example of football teams with mascots in American society. Fans may even dress or paint themselves as the mascot. This is no different from the Bororo "becoming" the parakeet; he is validated through identification with the animal, and "totemism" often confers social place and status as well.

Totemism exists in modern society in other ways than sports; for Percy, our consumer society – the need to own the object – is a type of totemism:

What happens to a man who buys an automobile toward which he has contributed nothing and about whose workings he has not the slightest curiosity? For the strange fact is that he does not primarily buy the car as a means of getting from place to place, but in order to *have* the car. He becomes subject to a dialectic of fashion in which his old car, though it runs well enough, has somehow been emptied out; the new car constitutes itself by virtue of its new style as an overwhelming something to which he falls prey. If he can only have the new car, his own nothingness (which has invaded his old car) will surely be informed. The proper conjuration of technical man is not Tiger! Tiger! But Jaguar! Jaguar! (SE 164)

Percy believes Levy-Bruhl rightly recognized the presence of mythico-magic thought in modern society, but he mistakenly viewed it only as a disappearing remnant, and also errs by identifying monotheistic Christianity as a remnant of mythical thought. His mistake was “his level of abstraction... His criterion of magic cognition was *material* content: thoughts about religion are mythic; thoughts about science are rational” (SE 165). Percy disagrees, however: “Who is the myth-minded man in our society? ... The practicing Jew or Christian or the mass man of our culture [with his magical Jaguar]? Which is more likely to fall prey to the myths of the state, the magic of technics?” (SE 165). It is not the subject or the content of the thought, but the *mode* of the thought that makes it magic. “The modern analogue of the Arunta tribesman is not the Christian Communicant; it is the passive consumer of technics who in his selflessness and anonymity is easy prey for magic and fetishism in his consumer goods and tyranny in his government” (SE 165a). The consumer finds his identity in his purchase and his possessions; he becomes symbolically transformed by them.

The law of participation’s second expression besides mystic participation (identifying one thing with another) is the “construing of a mystical connection or magic causality **between** one thing and another” (SE 158), or “not just conceiving what things are, but also how they are related to another” (SE 159). Magical causality entails a magical force, or, Percy says, “the most universal of all the traits of magic cognition, that of the ubiquitous mystic force, variously called *mana*, *makosie*, *waken*, *crenda*, *taboo*, etc.” (SE 159). Westerners interpret *mana* as God or some kind of higher power, but “nothing could be more alien to the conception of *mana*. It is above all a natural force, immanent in all things” (SE 159). Rain dances don’t appeal to supernatural beings – all of life is *mana*:

Everything is mana, but it is the mysterious rhythms of nature, the ebb and flow of life, with which this all-pervasive force is most characteristically associated. The coming of season, the rains, the heavens, what lies beyond the horizon, life and death, puberty and marriage – these are the things in which the concept of which the primitive has recourse in his mystical force, mana. It is the enigmatic, the uncertain, the dangerous, the remote, the mysterious, to which is irresistibly imputed this magic power. The causal principle is post hoc, ergo propter hoc.” If an event out of the ordinary occurs in nature, “it immediately becomes invested with an air of mystery and incalculable potency” (SE 159-160).

Passivity and **remotion** are the necessary prerequisites of magic thinking. Where there is passivity and remotion, there is magic thinking, mystical connection, or magic causality. Where there is activity and the familiar, there is empirical knowledge and reason. “Remotion” is the individual’s remoteness from the event, concept, or thing. Primitive man cannot control and does not understand the processes of nature and how they happen, so nature, for the primitive, is often the world of “the remote, the autonomous, the mysterious, in which by the very fact of their remotion, things are open to mystic participations and magic causes” (SE 162). In primitive societies, magic thinking does not exist in the area of the “homely arts... agriculture, house-building, lagoon-fishing, homely Technics,⁸⁴ where he [the primitive] displays a shrewd knowledge of soil conditions, botany, skill with tools, and so on” (SE 159). Here, the primitive uses empirical knowledge and reason. Magic thinking and causality exist only in the area beyond everyday knowledge, understanding and control, such as “life and death, the seasons, the coming of the day and night, the stars and the sun, remote places, the origins of plants and animals—in a word, the manifestation of nature” (SE 161).

Percy offers examples of statements in which logical structures are the same, but the figurative structure (magic cognition or reasoning cognition) varies based upon the referential point of the viewer – the distance of the viewer from the topic. The two statements, “John Smith is a carpenter,” and “Paul Jones is a doctor,” are the same, but if the hearer of the statements happens to be a carpenter, so that carpentry is “a familiar business entailing familiar tools and operations” to him (SE 166), this statement

⁸⁴ Technics, for both modern man and primitive man, is: “the world of the familiar thing, existing in a familiar milieu of causal relations, identity, predictable change, and susceptible of control by a familiar pattern of too using manipulation and so on” (SE 159).

is clear, logical and rational. The hearer, if a carpenter, will think of the actual activities involved in carpentry. However, if the hearer, a carpenter, is unfamiliar with a doctor's activities and actions he will view the other statement about Paul Jones, as "... quite different," and that "Paul Jones IS something else. He, a man like myself, has participated in another identity" (SE 166). Percy compares this to a child's statement, "*I am a cowboy*," in which the child is not logically and rationally referring to a cowboy's activities of riding and roping. The child means, rather, "'I AM a cowboy.' He is transformed first, he participates in another identity, and he does cowboy things as a result of his transformation" (SE 166-67).

Percy offers two other examples: "Carpenters repair houses," and "Doctors treat patients" (SE 168). The first statement means, to the carpenter, something quite familiar, factual and rational, that is, specific, concrete, logical, and sequential pictures of the acts of repairing houses; the second statement calls up "magical" thinking to the extent that the hearer of the statement is remote and passive to a doctor's activities:

Carpenters repair houses means that men like myself perform certain familiar operations on familiar structures. The operations take place in a human milieu and according to familiar kinetic and sensory configurations: feeling, judging, lifting, hitting, measuring, prizing, pushing, fitting, etc. there is predicated a whole intricate, yet natural, interplay of human knowing and doing.*Doctors treat patients*, however, means... that certain transfigured individuals perform certain mysterious operations on people like me to whom something mysterious has occurred. The verb *treat* contains within itself all the paraphernalia and magic gesture which 'science' holds for the layman (but not only science: lawyers *practice* law, try cases, Hemingway *publishes* a book, sailors *trim* tackle...). Even though... an educated carpenter might protest that [he is] well aware that medical and surgical treatment obeys universally valid scientific laws..., [he is] not likely to mean ...that surgery takes place in the same human milieu of cutting and fitting and pushing as my carpentry (as the surgeon knows it does). (SE 168-69).

Neither modern man nor primitive man believes he is using magic cognition. The modern man might believe he is thinking in terms of universally valid laws, but likewise the primitive does not believe his statement is one of superstition either, "since to him the principle of *mana* or *waken* is eminently natural in its operation," but from a practical point of view, the surgeon's action is a mystery and magic to the layman, "an act on the tissue by a kind of magic gesture" (SE 173).

Percy believes our modern day “scientism” (not science as a method, but science as a worldview) is a result of magic cognition. The sophomore is more interested in the trappings and tools (as symbols); the real scientist is more interested in doing the science itself:

It remains to be determined to what degree popular scientism is a respect for and interest in the real achievements of science / and to what degree a seduction by that mysterious entity called ‘Science’. Perhaps the major task of a real scientific education is to disabuse the student of his expectations of participation and magic, and to restore “science,” the autonomous and the immanent, to science of real knowing and doing. (SE 169-70)

Magic gesture – or the magic transformation in which one thing magically acts upon another – is the third and final trait of magical thinking:

Magic cognition as opposed to abstract or experiential thought, postulates an immanent and autonomous activity. The motto is, A causes B, not through mediation of secondary causes, but directly and of itself. All operations in dreams, in childish syntheses, in the passive consumer’s conception of technics, occurs in the purely symbolic rather the existential mode. ... Event B follows upon Event A, not through any succession of circumstances which I recognize as valid for my experience, but immanently: the manufacturer makes a manufacturing-pass-with-a-tool over the raw metal and there emerges a Chevrolet. (SE 174).

Percy posits “magic a priories” as responsible for this kind of thinking, that is, “the association of one symbol-thing complex with another in an a priori category of magic causality” (SE 174). Percy believes Jung’s archetypes, occurring across time and place, are not a result of a “collective psyche” but rather, “the natural proclivities of pure symbolic synthesis: the magic a priories” (SE 177). Symbolic knowing, an alternative way of knowing and an existential way of knowing, gives us choice. Purely biological and purely rational views do not allow for the existential reality or choices: “authentic-inauthentic, freedom-falling prey to, wonder-boredom, and so on. If man is ordained to being in all of its inexhaustibility, its causal implications, its degrees of perfections, it is precisely the price of this gift that he can fall prey to idolatry and magic – which after all is the only thing that is really dull” (SE 177-78).

Magic cognition is the same mental activity as the symbolic transformation. Both primitive man and modern man engage in magic cognition in which

both kinds of identification that one thing is transformed in to another and that the original symbol is in a sense lost to sight. The symbolic transformation occurs in both cases: The matter

of transformation is different and the insight into the intentionality of the transformation is different. In one case, a *word* (sound) is intentionally transformed into a thing; in the primitive, a *thing* (nurtunja) is transformed into a thing. (In a sense, our transformation of the sound *glass* into the thing glass is even more astonishing than the Aruntas' transformation of the *nurtunja* into an emu: for it is a trans-sensory transformation). (SE 175-76).

Here is Percy's observation that symbol is not a cause-effect event, but a pairing or an identity.⁸⁵ The single word, the name, is immediate and mythical; the putting together of words into a discursive use of language and the resulting awareness of facts and thought about them is a mediation of reality that allows humans to reflect logically on himself and his world.

Naming is a quite different process than sentence-making. Naming, the "primary linguistic form," is "directly hostile" to the spirit of intellectual unity, or that kind of discursive logic that language enables. Naming is more like "mythic ideation" – the creative world of myth and poetry, not a logical process, but an intuitive one, which is

captivated and enthralled by the intuition which suddenly confronts it. It comes to rest in the immediate experience; the sensible present is so great that everything else dwindles before it. For a person whose apprehension is under the spell of this mythico-religious attitude, it is as though the whole world were simply annihilated; the immediate content, whatever it be, that commands his religious interest so completely fills his consciousness that nothing else can exist beside and apart from it. This ... is the prerequisite for all mythical thinking and mythical formulation. (Cassirer 32-33)

Usner calls this a "momentary god" (Cassirer 33), in which the named is not categorized, classified, or analyzed, but encountered and deified (Cassirer 33). Here we have a clue as to the "magic" and "mystery" of the genesis phenomenon, and of Helen Keller's reaction of joy at the name, and of human need for and fulfillment in symbol.

This is Percy's concept of naming satisfying an epistemological need – of knowing an "other." Percy explains that a child learning a name is the same experience of a primitive human's mythic configurations, or Cassirer's "mythico-religious Urphenomenon" (MB 69), of the primitive coming "face to face with something which is both entirely new to him and strikingly distinctive, so distinctive it might

⁸⁵ See Chapter 2.3 for discussion of pairing and identity.

said to have a presence – an oddly shaped termite mound, a particular body of water, a particular abandoned road” (MB 69). Both the child and the primitive are encountering a “presence.” This is the beginning of metaphor and myth: “The Tro or momentary god is born of the sense of unformulated presence of the thing; the metaphor arises from the symbolic act in which the emotional cry of the beholder becomes the vehicle by which the thing is conceived, the name of the thing” (MB 69). For both the child and the primitive, the symbolic encounter is the same experience, a resolution “of inner tension, the representation of subjective impulses and excitations in definite object forms and figures” (MB 69). Naming is the genesis of myth – an encounter with the “other” in what seems a magical way. For Percy, this existential encounter is a primary human need, and naming – symbol-mongering of any sort – is the means by which it happens.

5.3 SYMBOL AS DIVINE: “THE WORD”

In the beginning was alpha, the end is omega, but somewhere in between came Delta, man himself. Man became 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. (“The Delta Factor,” MB 45)

* * *

According to Lawson’s exegesis of Percy’s passage above, the divine logos (word) was present at and participated in creation, the Alpha; will be present at the end of time, the Omega; and is present in every human worldly experience in-between, the Delta. Percy’s Delta factor, human language, not only is the fall of man, enabling a god-like “knowing,” consciousness and will; but is the way back (Lawson 5,11). Delta, the immanent, connects us, is literally the “door,” to the transcendent, the Alpha and Omega (Lawson 8). Symbol, language, is what makes us human rather than creaturely, but it is what connects us to the divine, and the “word” itself is divine. When discussing Percy’s use of symbol, a great many scholars as well as Lawson point out Christian references to “the Word” being present and having a significant role from the beginning of the history of humans, even of the history of the world.

Christian references to the “Word” are many. The gospel writer John speaks of “the Word” as creator God:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. (John 1:1-5)

The passage continues later, describing the Incarnation of the Word as Christ: “The Word become flesh and lived for a while among us” (John 1:14), and the Word (as Christ) as equal to and present with God: “No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son who is at his right side has made him known” (John 1:18). The gospel writer here notes that it is the “Word” that enables us to access God, to access the spiritual realm, that makes it alive and real. Here, the incarnation of Christ is the Word, and so the spoken Word can be seen as an incarnation, as spirit made flesh. The Word is God, and God is the Word.

And in the creation story, God refers to himself with the plural pronoun. The Word is with God, and co-creator, or perhaps even the means of creation. God speaks the world into being (“And God said,...”) in Genesis, reflecting the fact that a world comes into being with symbolic capacity and the ordering power of language. In the Genesis creation of God, God is making a physical world from mere spirit, abstract idea, formless void – just as any symbolic creation, a book, music, painting begins as a “formless void,” an abstraction, and becomes real and concrete through symbolic media, an item to be “known” – known in Percy’s existential sense. From random and undifferentiated chaos comes division, separation, definition, order, concrete identity – and reality is formed. Naming creates and solidifies the world, just as God is incarnated in Christ, and as all things were created and made solid from nothing but a “formless void.” Adam’s first task was to name the creatures of the earth – he is asked to be like God, a namer, a creator of a world. Naming creates a fabric of life for all of existence, as well as for individual namers.

Lewis Lawson breaks down Percy's "Delta Factor" essay quote by noting that it refers not only to the gospel of John passage, but also to Genesis's first line of the creation story, and also to the Apocalypse of John 22:23 in which Jesus says, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (Lawson 4). Considering these passages together, they show the power and importance of the Word. In John, the divine Word, the divine Logos, pre-exists its incarnation as Christ and is with God at creation, reflecting "the primacy of the uttered word" in ancient Hebrew tribal society, carried over into the Greek gospels (Lawson 4).

The primitive Hebrews were not alone. It is not just the Judaic and Christian religion that elevated "the Word" to deity status "In the creation accounts of almost all great cultural religions, the Word appears in league with the highest Lord of creation; either as the tool which he employs or actually as the primary source from which he, like all other Being and order of Being, is derived" (Cassirer 45-46). Cassirer illuminates that in creation myths from most cultures, the Word has the same role as it does in the Christian myth. For example, the Uitoto Indian passage says: "In the beginning, the Word gave the Father his origin" (Cassirer 45). Thought and speech are both responsible for creation. Egyptian theology refers to the creation god Ptah's "heart and tongue" producing and governing all that lives; he thinks the world, then uses the Word as a tool to create it. Further, all the world – physical, spiritual, ethical – rests in him, the god of the Word (Cassirer 46). A creation hymn of Polynesia has the same events.

In ethical religions – which contain the dualism of good and evil – the Word is the means by which Chaos is transformed into Cosmos (Cassirer 47), as is the case in the Judeo-Christian tradition, where in Genesis, the word of God sequentially divides the Chaos into order and calls it "good." However, man must take over the naming duty by naming the creatures. In Bundahish, the good god, Ahura Mazda speaks "the twenty one words" of the Holy Prayer and victory over the evil god is accomplished – necessary before the material world is to be created. In India, the "Spoken Word (Vāc)

[is] exalted even above the might of the gods themselves. 'On the spoken Word all the gods depend, all beasts and men; in the Word live all creatures... the Word is Imperishable, the firstborn of the eternal Law, the mother of the Veddas, the navel of the fine world'" (Cassirer 48). Chaos in the Babylonian-Assyrian creation myth was described as an "unnamed" state; the Egyptians also call this the "time when no god existed and no name for any object was known" (Cassirer 82). Interestingly in the Egyptian myth, the creator god and the sun god Ra create themselves, giving themselves their own names (Cassirer 82).

The "Taboo-Mana Formula," regarded as the "minimum definition of religion" and a generally universal human phenomenon, arises from this "magical power" of the "momentary god" of the name (Cassirer 64). In early development of religions, there seems to be a mythical "field of force" in the world permeating everything, and which can be concentrated in objects, people, or words, which then contain power, holiness, and/or danger. English missionary Codrington (*The Melanesians: Studies in their Anthropology and Folk-Lore*, 1891) found it in South Sea Islanders, as well as American Indian, Australian, and African tribes (Cassirer 64).

Characteristics of this force field, of "mana," vary – it can be a dynamic force or a material object or an event. It has not only supernatural, magical power, but a mental, spiritual power. It evokes "wonder" and "delight" and "mystery" and is recognized as extra-ordinary, non-mundane, "remarkable, very strong, very great, very old, divine,...or power, magic, sorcery, fortune, success,... power sacred, ancient, grandeur, animate, immortal..., unusual, wonderful, marvelous, or terrifying" (Cassirer 66, 69, 71). It can be a noun, verb, adjective, adverb, or even an interjection.

The original bond between the linguistic and the mythico-religious consciousness is primarily expressed in the fact that all verbal structures appear as *also* mythical entities, endowed with certain mythical powers, that the Word, in fact, becomes a sort of primary force, in which all being and doing originate. In all mythical cosmogonies, as far back as they can be traced, this supreme position of the Word is found (Cassirer 44-45).

Cassirer defines repeating characteristics of the “Word” that show up in so many different cultures: First, if not entirely first in origin, the Word is at least in tandem with the creation deities, usually existing from the beginning of time. Second, the Word is magical in nature, with a variety of manifestations – the ability to unlock knowledge as well as to create and manifest a physical world. The Word is not just an abstract symbol, but a tangible part of the material world, interacting with it and bringing it into being. Third, it is supreme in power, often the name of the deity itself which carries the powers of the deity and can act as proxy for the deity. Cassirer uses the example of Christianity – the phrase “in God’s name” or “in Christ’s name” carries the same power as the presence of God himself. “‘Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them’ (Matthew 18:20) means simply, ‘Where they pronounce my name in their assembly, I am really present’... a much more concrete sense than one would ever suspect...” (Cassirer 54). Fourth, the Word undergoes a “hypostatization or transubstantiation” (Cassirer 58), which is a merging with its object...

...in an indissoluble unity. This is the Scholastics’ *in alio esse*. The conscious experience is not merely wedded to the word, but is consumed by it. Whatever is fixed by a name, henceforth is not only real, but is Reality. The potential between ‘symbol’ and ‘meaning’ is resolved;... we find a relation of identity, of complete congruence between ‘image’ and ‘object,’ between the name and the thing. (Cassirer 58).

A deity’s evolution is then from anonymous (no name) to being named, and usually, given multiple names, as there is power in a “wealth of attributes,” in an “abundance of epithets” (Cassirer 72-73). The anonymous God becomes polynomous. “So it may be said that the concept of godhead really receives its first concrete development and richness through language.... But a contrary impulse, too, inherent in the nature of language, is awakened anew in this process: for as speech has a tendency to divide, determine and fixate, so it has also, no less strongly, a tendency to generalize” (Cassirer 73). From this tendency to generalize, the variety becomes one and the Godhead becomes unified. The cycle doesn’t end there, however. Its final destination is silence, as taught in mystical tradition which realizes that language is finite and limited, and God is not. “Thus all mysticism is directed toward a world

beyond language, a world of silence. As Meister Eckhart has written, God is ‘the simple ground, the still desert, the simple silence’ ... for ‘that is his nature, that he is one nature’” (Cassirer 74). Cassirer adds, “The spiritual depth and power of language is strikingly evinced in the fact that it is speech itself which prepares the way for that last step whereby it is itself transcended” (Cassirer 74). We see this at the end of Percy’s *Moviegoer* when questioned by Aunt Emily about Kate – he gives no answers. And he responds to wonder about sacrament, God and life: “impossible to say” (MG 235).

On a more mundane level, the symbol, that is, the everyday word, carries the bodily, concrete object within it, *in alio esse*, or rather, the signified is incarnated through the naming transformation.

Both God and Christ are transcendent sources of meaning and consciousness that lie beyond all human knowing, but they paradoxically exist and make themselves perceptible through signs in the sensible, incarnate universe. Words are also sensible, perceptible signs of physical experience that reveal immaterial meaning and consciousness. Language signs are absolutely, empirically existent in the actualities of time-space events, but at the same time are the sources of a human consciousness transcendent of physical phenomena. (Pridgen 33)

Across time, space, and cultures, “the word” is the means by which we know both the world and God. It is the Delta, the door to the immanent and the transcendent. Through symbol, the reality in the material world is encountered, and wedded, and “known” – and through symbol we encounter God. Symbol “knowing” is the primary human need, according to Percy.

5.4 SYMBOL AS DIVINE: SACRAMENT

Percy’s study of symbol was profoundly influenced not only by Peirce, but also by Catholic Scholastic realism and sacramentalism. (In fact, the scholastics influenced Peirce, hence their affinity with each other.) Sacrament is symbol, exalted and intended and empowered. Sacraments are central to Percy’s novels; all end in a sacrament (or two).⁸⁶ The answer for Percy’s protagonists is always to return to a sacramental life in a sacramental world.

Clearly, Percy’s Catholic faith is the most influential aspect on his writing, according to many Percy scholars. “But it was Percy’s reading in Catholic theology at Trudeau [Sanatorium, recovering

⁸⁶ See chapter 5.5 for a discussion of each novel’s sacrament(s) in the endings.

from tuberculosis in his twenties] that had the most influence on the novels and nonfiction he produced in the next four decades” writes Percy scholar Allen Pridgen (20), and Pridgen cites Percy in a 1983 interview, “ ‘I’ve been a Catholic ever since I’ve been writing, so the whole framework is, I suppose, Catholic’ ” (qtd. in Pridgen 20). Percy had many sources and thinkers that shaped his philosophy, but if there is an external institutional worldview that defines Percy more than any others, it would be the Catholic Christian view – more than Southern stoicism and noblesse oblige, more than European existentialism (atheist or theist), more than Protestant work ethic and salvation theology and morality, more than modern semioticians or philosophers, more than even semeioticians such as Suzanne Langer or perhaps even Charles Sanders Peirce (of whom Percy claimed he was only a “thief”). Pridgen explains:

In his earlier study of the medieval Scholastics he learned about a Catholic sacramental view of symbolization and knowing that he believed in many ways anticipated these modern thinkers. The Catholic concept of a sacramental universe of signs continuously “speaking” to mankind of meanings that lie beyond immanent experience has its roots in the ancient Hebrew reverence for language as a divine gift and in a belief in a God (‘the Word’) who “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1.14). In the Judeo-Christian incarnational tradition, God speaks the world into existence and Christ is the “Logos of God.” Both God and Christ are transcendent sources of meaning and consciousness that lie beyond all human knowing, but they paradoxically exist and make themselves perceptible through signs in the sensible, incarnate universe. Words are also sensible, perceptible signs in physical experience that reveal immaterial meaning and consciousness. Language signs are absolutely, empirically existent in the actualities of time-space events, but at the same time are the sources of a human consciousness transcendent of physical phenomena (Pridgen 32-33).

Even Peirce expert Ketner views Walker Percy’s Catholic influence as just as important as Pridgen and others do. He concludes that Percy uses other philosophies secondarily:

I knew (know): (a) that your interest in logic is detectable only on a high-powered Bausch and Lomb lapsometer, (b) that you have no use for [Peirce’s] Firstness, (c) that you are hot after apologetics, using a little CSP in same, (d) that you are unimpressed by Buddhism or Peirce’s claim about the same. ... [And finally that] Walker Percy is a Roman Catholic intellectual. (TP 132)

For Percy, Scholastic realism and sacramentalism are a more accurate view of reality than any other;

Percy says that the Scholastics “had a far more adequate theory of symbolic meaning in some respects

than modern semioticians" (MB 156; Pridgen 33). Ketner further emphasizes Percy's affinity for the Scholastics over Peirce's philosophy: "You say you are a thief of Peirce's Scholastic realism. You can't be; he stole it from your gang [Catholics]!" (TP 135).

If Peirce's scholastic realism came from Catholic sacramentalism, both of which Percy relied on more than anything else in his writings and his world view, what exactly is that? Catholic sacraments, while centuries old and centuries in the making, did not arise out of the blue. Sacrament is an anthropological characteristic of most cultures even from their primitive origins. While simple, more ensconced in daily ritual than the Catholic sacraments are, primitive ones have the same characteristics. The theologically complex Catholic sacraments were developed uniquely from more culturally widespread and common primitive sacraments.

PRIMITIVE SACRAMENT

Sympathetic magic, springing from mimetic ritual, belongs mainly to tribal, primitive religion. There is however a type of ceremonial that runs the whole gamut from the most savage to the most civilized piety, from blind compulsive behavior, through magical conjuring, to the heights of conscious expression: that is Sacrament. (Langer 159)

* * *

Sacrament is the domain of humans – it is what separates us from the animals. It brings "meaning" to physical activity that otherwise is only for biological functions (such as eating, washing). Through sacrament, we access something other than biology, we access the spiritual side the side that needs to know, to encounter the "other" – and through that, we access the meaning of life.

Sacrament arises from repetition. The primitive sacrament arises out of a daily practice – such as washing or eating:

The overt form of a sacrament is usually a homely, familiar action, such as washing, eating, drinking; sometimes a more special performance – slaughter, or sexual union – but still an act that is essentially realistic and vital. At first sight it seems strange that the highest symbolic import should attach to the lowliest activities, especially as the more commonplace and frequent of these are the most universal sacraments. But if we consider the genesis of such profound and ancient symbols we can understand their origin in commonplace events. (Langer 159-160)

Ritual permeated the daily activities of primitive societies. For example, they had great ritual associated with the hunt and slaughter of an animal. (Modern society has no ritual associated with its slaughterhouses – mechanical processes in which the “other” is anonymous and unknown. Much of our daily activities are disconnected from any greater meaning.) These are simple practical acts, but have a natural symbolic meaning. When the symbolic import is realized, it becomes more formalized and ritualized to reflect the characteristics of the symbol (i.e.: eating an animal, for example, becomes an occasion to receive the characteristics of the animal) and soon:

...every detail becomes charged with meaning. Every gesture signifies some step in the acquisition of animal virtue. According to the law of all primitive symbolization, this significance is felt not as such, but as genuine efficacy; the feast not only dramatizes, but actually negotiates the desired acquisition. Its performance is magical as well as expressive. And so we have the characteristic blend of power and meaning, mediation and presentation, that belongs to sacraments. (Langer 161)

Sacrament gives deeper meaning to the lowliest physical activity – a search which Percy's novels illustrate. Sacrament is assent and affirmation and participation; it brings meaning and magic:

What matters in the present context is merely that meaning and magic pervade savage life to such an extent that any behavior-pattern, any striking visual form or musical rhythm, any question or announcement made often enough to become a formula, acquires some symbolic or mystical function; this stage of thinking is the creative period for religion. In it the great life-symbols are established and developed. Concepts which are far beyond the actual grasp of savage or semi-savage minds are apprehended, though not comprehended, in physical embodiments, sacred fetishes, idols, animals; human attitudes, vaguely recognized as reasonable and right, are expressed by actions which are not spontaneous emotional outlets but prescribed modes of participation and assent. (Langer 162)

The mundane activity or object in everyday life becomes a symbol of something greater than itself. The sacrament is symbolic, but also, symbol is sacramental. Simple symbol, not elevated to sacrament, is still sacramental in nature. Percy explains:

The symbol has a fundamentally sacramental function. Like a religious sacrament, it is a sensuous thing which mediates a higher operation. It is both analogical and anagogic, analogical in that it must bear a resemblance to the meaning which it mediates, anagogic because the meaning which it mediates is higher than the symbol itself. Like a sacrament too, it undergoes a transformation. It is not only the vehicle of meaning, it is also transformed by its meaning

toward the end that it carries its meaning within itself in another mode of existence, *in alio esse*. (SE 310)

Symbol operates like sacrament in that both contain the essence of the symbolized within itself. The Eucharist has Christ within it; the word has the signified within it.

Sacrament evolved from primitive ritual. Play, mimicry and imitation of “an oft-repeated enactment” are the origins of more formalized rituals and religious rites.

We are often told that savage religion begins in magic; but the chances are, I think, that magic begins in religion. Its typical form – the confident practical use of formula, a brew, and a rite to achieve a physical effect – is the empty shell of a religious act.... Religion is a gradual envisagement of the *essential pattern of human life*, and to this insight almost any object, act, or event may contribute. There is no ingredient in ritual that may not also be found outside it. Sacred objects are not intrinsically precious, but derive their value from their religious use.... Before a symbolic form is put to public religious use – before it serves the difficult art of presenting really profound ideas – it has probably had a long career in a much homlier capacity. (Langer 154-55).

Sacrament is evolutionary – from simple animal worship to higher religions with a systematic theology, from a daily ritual that becomes a religious rite.

CATHOLIC SACRAMENT AND ITS METAPHYSICS

[Percy's protagonists] exemplify Percy's self-as-wayfarer in search of what to do in a sacramental world full of signs. These sacramental signs have the power to show them a life not available in the ruins of their culture, a life hidden from them as they desperately search for daily happiness in their professional achievements and family relationships. (Pridgen 23)

* * *

The soul speaks to us in dreams and symbols; we speak to it through myth and ritual. Myth and ritual are composed of and communicated by symbols of various kinds. According to Thomas Moore⁸⁷:

To the soul, the ordinary is sacred and the everyday is the primary source of religion. But... The soul also needs spirituality.... It is obvious that the soul, seat of the deepest emotions, can benefit greatly from the gifts of a vivid spiritual life and can suffer when it is deprived of them. The soul, for example, needs an articulated world view, a carefully worked out scheme of values, and a sense of relatedness to the whole. It needs a myth of immortality and an attitude towards death. (Moore, 204-05)

⁸⁷ Former Catholic monk, author of *Care of the Soul*, not Percy's protagonist with the same name in his third and sixth novels.

In short, the soul needs a world, not an environment. It needs a fabric of life, drawn by symbols and sacraments weaving the events and things of life together.

What are the symbols of the divine – specifically as delivered through Walker Percy's faith, Catholicism, and thus, the symbols from which he drew for his novels? Catholicism is a faith of ritual, symbol, and sacrament. Its origin was in an almost pre-literate era, delivered to an uneducated, illiterate population with no idea of themselves as creatures with "mind" – a concept that came to fruition in the Renaissance in tandem with the Protestant Reformation.

In contrast, Protestants speak to the follower through a sermon only, through "the word" of Christ, literally the words in the Bible and the words of the preacher's sermons. Often logic and reason, rational justifications and appeals, are the basis of the persuasive rhetoric used to bring followers to God. This becomes their primary medium of proselytizing their flock. In many cases, they strip their services entirely of ritual and material symbol. (For example, repetitive phrases and prayers, stories told or saints depicted in stained glass windows, mosaic floors, statues, pictures, or architecture, as well as physical actions such as standing and kneeling, genuflecting, walking to the altar to receive the Eucharist, even the Eucharist itself are absent and often considered idolatrous to Protestants.) Thus the physical means, sacraments and other symbols beyond merely "the word," by which the Catholic Church communicated God and the sacred, are missing in many or most Protestant churches.

Catholics have elevated some symbolic objects or actions to the level of "sacraments." The church has seven sacraments, and these have frequent and high importance in Percy's novels." The symbols of faith – the Eucharist, the incarnation, the cross, the trinity, are not tools of the mind, but bypass the mind. None of these (in their symbolic essence) are rational, that is, scientifically explainable, objects or events. So divine symbol, like all symbol, operates on an arational level (not irrational, not contradicting the rational, but beyond the rational) and points to something mysterious – mysterious to the mind, but illuminating to the heart – which does not live in the realm of the rational,

physical, cause-effect world, nor does it operate by those rules. The perfect example is dreams, which operate not by any understandable linear story-line or time-space consistency, but by symbol and meaning. Symbolism (and religion, which has its ground in symbol) is arational:

The dilemma – between reason and faith, head and heart... is one that has long tormented religious believers, and the strain against accepting beliefs that cannot be scientifically proven has become particularly pressing since the Enlightenment's emphasis on rationality.... religious belief is quite obviously in conflict with some of the basic tenets of rationality growing out of the Enlightenment. (Nisly 2, 10)

However, religious faith has, by the very definition of "faith," always included a non-rational (arational as opposed to irrational) element.⁸⁸ Christianity as well as other religions contain sacred texts that say to "rely not on your understanding" and to have "the conviction of things not seen" (Nisly 2). Miracles, mysterious events, magical occurrences have no classical cause-effect physical explanation and yet, not only make up incidental folklore about the saviour, holy man, or God figure of any religion, but often constitute central doctrines of the religion itself (such as Christ's turning water into wine, walking on water, feeding the 5000, the immaculate conception, and, fundamental to Percy's Catholicism, the death and subsequent resurrection of Christ). Likewise, symbol is the realm of magic cognition and mystery – not discursive logic. Symbol is ineffable experience.

Lamar Nisly's 2002 study of religious mystery in four fiction writers (including Percy) explains the characteristics of religious mystery.

At the center of religious mystery, and what belief in nonrational doctrines is ultimately designed to bring about, is a sense of – in Rudolf Otto's now familiar term – the numinous. By the numinous, Otto refers to the "clear overplus of meaning" in the concept of holiness, the aspect of sacredness that cannot be rationally understood. While Otto argues that the numinous cannot be taught but only evoked, he nevertheless suggests that an encounter with the numinous brings a sense of "creature-consciousness," awe, "absolute inapproachability," even stupor before the wholly other. So even though Otto says that a concept of God begins in what is "clearly to be grasped by our power of conceiving,... beneath this sphere of clarity and lucidity lies a hidden depth, inaccessible to our conceptual thought, which we in so far call the 'nonrational'" (Nisly 2).

⁸⁸ "Non-rational" is to be differentiated from "irrational." "Non-rational" transcends the mind and intellect and logical reason, but does not necessarily conflict with it; "irrational" opposes or conflicts with logical reason.

Several important elements of Nisly's passage on mystery arise here. Clearly, one element of many religions, especially Catholicism, is the non-rational – a mystery to ordinary human understanding. What is a mystery is another question. Is it merely something that is, at present, beyond human comprehension, though as the human race progresses (spiritually or mentally, depending on what one decides is the basis of the mystery), will it be understandable further down the line of history? Is it something that makes perfect "sense" according to some kind of consistent universal law that is unknown to us at present – though if known would be comprehensible to rational understanding? Or is it subject to different, transcendent principles that will be forever be unattainable to human understanding? (Perhaps the limitations of the human mind, a non-transcendent entity, cannot ever fully comprehend a transcendent entity or event?) Or is it referring to a more radical sense of the illogical and irrational (not non-rational, that is, outside the rational, but rather, contradictory to the rational) and therefore pointing to the fact that not only is human understanding not able to make sense of occurrences such as miracles or the numinous, but that they indicate the universe as a chaotic, jumbled, non-ordered reality that belies a seemingly organized and mundane world?

Further, Otto's use of *meaning* is significant. The term and concept of "meaning" occurs an immeasurable number of times when referring to religion and life. Victor Frankl uses "meaning" to describe the most important part of human beings – the one thing that makes life worth living – and he, too, concludes that meaning is non-rational. But Frankl goes beyond – it is not just arational or nonrational, but "super-rational" - above, surpassing the rational:

This ultimate meaning necessarily exceeds and surpasses the finite intellectual capacities of man; in logotherapy, we speak in this context of a super-meaning. What is demanded of man is not, as some existential philosophers teach, to endure the meaninglessness of life, but rather to bear his incapacity to grasp its unconditional meaningfulness in rational terms. *Logos* is deeper than logic. (Frankl 122)

Frankl observes in his World War II concentration camp experiences that survival of his fellow prisoners was less dependent on nutrition, physical abuse, accommodations – most of the prisoners were equally

starved, abused, beaten, and otherwise suffered deprived accommodations (freezing, hygiene, no medical care). Those prisoners that had meaning survived; however, those who lost meaning – such as discovering their wife in another camp had died – then died themselves. Thus Frankl sees the need for meaning not only as equivalent to the need for biological sustenance for survival, but superseding it and more important.

Meaning of life for Frankl has three permutations: a cause, mission, or duty to complete; a love to serve; or an involuntary suffering suffered nobly. Meaning for Otto is an intense concentration and presence of the transcendent. Meaning for Cassirer and Langer is found in symbolic activity.

Meaning, in symbol (such as a word in language), seems on the surface, to simply stand for the object being named. Yet, its evocation of joy, ontological affirmation, and order in life hints at something far beyond a simple identification of a random physical object. Helen Keller becomes fully “human” at the advent of “naming,” at the recognition of meaning. None of these views of “meaning” denote something that assists us with biological sustenance, propagation of the species, or acquisition of resources. The need for meaning is directed to something other than biology. It is triadic, not dyadic.

For these thinkers meaning is a need unique to humanity and as important or more important than biological needs. Interestingly, meaning seems, in all cases, to have an element of mystery, of the non-rational, something Catholics and other religions have recognized and incorporated into their practice and theology. (Even language, the coupler, transcends rationality, just as religious mystery does.)

Nisly cites Robert Detweiler’s 1989 text, *Breaking the Fall: Religious Reading of Contemporary Fiction*, as encouraging a reversal of both literary criticism’s and science and technology’s goal to “demystify” the text and life itself, respectively, and to respect and revere rationality. Religious liturgies, according to Detweiler, are a models “for celebrating mystery instead of seeking to explain existence rationally” (Nisly 6), and all narrative form itself, according to Kort (*Story, Text, and Scripture: Literary*

Interests in Biblical Narratives, 1988), is related to both mystery and the sacred (Nisly 7). Narrative, as with any art, is not **only** “symbol” but uses symbol (language and the events of the text as much as literary symbol) and so contains the normal characteristics of any symbol. Narrative also recreates life – reveals something about humans and life, and one of the primary characteristics of both is the mystery inherent in them – so narrative reflects that mystery. For Percy it is the ontological encounter with the “other,” the need to know the “other.”

A crucial point Nisly makes is where religious mystery stands on the scale between Enlightenment rationality and postmodern indeterminacy. While not rational, it is also not irrational, nor is it postmodern chaos. It has its own “logic” – comprehended not through mental reasoning but through ineffable experience:

A contemporary Jewish philosopher defines faith as “the positive answer, given by way of personal commitment, to existential questions of ultimate significance, which reason can still [in the twentieth century] raise, but no longer answer” (Fackenheim 215). Friedrich von Hugel’s assessment in *The Mystical Element of Religion* (1927) is that religion is “rather felt than seen or reasoned about, is loved and lived rather than analyzed, is action and power rather than either external fact or intellectual verification” (52). (Nisly 10)

This does not mean reason and faith are conflicting, however, as Enlightenment rationality and dyadic science would typically have it. However, it does mean that faith transcends reason. Nisly cites Martin Buber’s statement that:

Religious belief cannot be subsumed under the powers of reason: “My rationality, my rational power of thought, is merely a part, a particular function of my nature; when however I ‘believe,’ ... my entire being is engaged, the totality of my nature enters into the process, indeed this process becomes possible only because the relationship of faith is relationship of my entire being” (7). (Nisly 12)

Meaning, faith and symbol are the superset; that is, logic and rational thinking is the subset of symbolic, mythical knowledge. Symbol is not subsumed under science and reason. – symbolic pre-logical conception is the basis of language, which then gives the capacity for discursive logic and reason.

The challenge to the supremacy of classical physics and reason as the sole lens from which to perceive and know the universe, including humans, came, however, not from religious faith –

marginalized among academics – but from physics itself. The implications of Heisenberg's indeterminacy principle and quantum uncertainty mean that:

“ [n]ot a single feature [of Newtonian physics] ... remains unchallenged, either directly or implicitly, by contemporary physics” (38), Milic Capek, in *The Philosophical Impact of Contemporary Physics* (1961), argues that “the effects of these theories on the imagination of physicists, philosophers, and even laymen was truly shattering (xi). When the scientist, whose method has long been seen as exemplifying objective observation, becomes a central figure in affecting measurement, ‘the entire set of relations between mind and world has changed’ (Strehle 13). At least on the subatomic level, no longer is there stable identifiable ‘truth’ for scientists to discover. (Nisly 12)

The implications for life on the larger human level are not universally agreed upon, but modern philosophy's postmodernism reflects modern physics' indeterminacy and religious faith's non-rationalism. Postmodernism, deconstruction, and poststructuralism all point to a world that cannot be grasped by linear reason – that systematic knowledge is impossible, even that “truth” itself is relative and changeable.

As similar as this is to religious mystery in its difference from Enlightenment rationality, religious faith and postmodern thought are at their core, two opposing philosophies as well. Postmodern philosophies purport that reason is insufficient, that any science is insufficient, to understand the world, and because of that, the world must be incomprehensible at core, and ultimately random and chaotic. Postmodernism is right about the inadequacy of reason as the sole tool and method for perceiving the reality of the universe, but it does not say there is anything beyond that. It still relies on reason as the sole way of knowing in that it offers nothing more by which to know the world. It also offers nothing beyond the world than that which is physically present. It does not get beyond surface observations (sometimes intentionally); ironically, by limiting what can be known to only what physically exists on the temporal plane and a rational epistemology (which fails, postmodernism insists). Postmodernism does not get beyond rationality and so remains a rationally dependent philosophy. If reason cannot comprehend something of sense out there, then nothing is out there but a kind of chaos, or so says postmodernism.

Religious faith, however, says reason cannot tell us ALL that is “out there” – all that the world and humans are – but that doesn’t mean it is only chaos. Something is there that is either knowable or sensible in a transcendent way beyond physical perception and reason, but not contradictory to either.

Nisley explains further:

While a postmodern stance acknowledges that truth is ultimately knowable, much as believers in God recognize that God is beyond human comprehension, postmodern thinkers seem to confuse an epistemological problem with a metaphysical one: just because humans cannot adequately articulate knowledge about the divine does not mean that there is no center, no God to encounter. Advocates of indeterminacy not only question the power of rationality but insist that no transcendent truth is possible; all knowledge is constrained, all understanding is subjective.... Although not necessarily setting out their beliefs in terms that a rationalist would accept, religious believers do hold that the nonrational, unexplainable aspects of their religion are a matter of human’s imperfect insight, of “seeing through a glass darkly,” rather than a result of there being only heterodoxy, pluralism, and randomness. (Nisley 14-15)

Thus while religious mystery is clearly at odds with Enlightenment values, it also does not coincide with the major tenets of postmodernism – which is exactly Percy’s thought as well. Both of these world views, for Percy, failed to adequately explain the world or human beings; for him the Catholic faith captured the best picture of the nature of the human being. At the center of the Catholic faith and theology is mystery, conveyed through symbol and symbolic situation, and religious mystery is encouraged and fostered in the *practice* of the faith. faith is not found through logical exercise, but through experience. Like Marcel, Percy believes that love and faith in God is found through the experience of loving and faithfulness to those in our lives.

However, Percy still embarks on a quest to demystify (ironically, find a rational explanation for) the symbol, the coupler, the human, through the scientific method – while others insist that faith will forever be outside the grasp of human understanding, remaining by its very nature indecipherable by reason. As for the mystery of symbol and the coupler, at times Percy speculates on such scientific solutions as brain locations; at other times, he says only that it is a mystery. Was Percy’s quest doomed to fail for the misplaced grounds of his search? He wants, in the name of science, to correct science, and

so to gain a proper understanding of human beings – a corrected radical anthropology. Yet to explain human and divine mystery in terms of even a corrected science is to fail to grasp its fullness.

Some mysteries are not meant to be understood; they are meant to be mysteries. Reason cannot comprehend mystery – the latter is greater, larger, than the former and cannot be subsumed by it. So when Percy writes Ketner at the end of his life that he is after the coupler, wishes to decipher that indecipherable mystery, and wants to begin with the scientific method, he may be using an inadequate tool and approach for such a task – which can only reduce the larger mystery of the coupler to a smaller realm of science, dyads, and rationality, rather than understand it. In fact, Catholic doctrine holds that sacraments, symbols, are *meant* to be mysteries:

Taking the word “sacrament” in its broadest sense, as the sign of something sacred and *hidden* (the Greek word is “mystery”), we can say that the whole world is a vast sacramental system, in that material things are unto men the signs of things spiritual and sacred, even of the Divinity. “The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of his hands” (Ps. XVIII, 2). The invisible things of him [i.e. God], from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; his eternal power also, and divinity” (Romans 1:20).... *The redemption of man was not accomplished in an invisible manner....* The Incarnation took place because God dealt with men in the manner that was best suited to their nature.... The Church established by the Saviour was to be a visible organization: consequently it should have external ceremonies and *symbols* of things sacred.⁸⁹ [italics my emphasis]

Although the mystery of God and God’s spiritual presence in the world and our life may be “invisible” to our understanding, God provides visible means by which to know Him. The presence of the Church and its sacraments is not invisible, and, as stated above, the Incarnation of God is a visible sign of His presence in our world, but though visible, they all remain a mystery.

In fact, the whole world is a sometimes visible, sometimes unnoticed, but always connected, sacramental system of signs and symbols indicating God’s “hidden” presence. This “sacramental system” is Percy’s and Langer’s and Peirce’s “fabric of life” that the symbol-monger, the wayfarer, is able to perceive and participate in as he realizes and lives (not understands, but lives) in God’s presence.

⁸⁹ From the Catholic Encyclopedia: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13295a.htm>

Rather than postmodernism's meaningless randomness, Hume's disconnected bundles of sensations, all that exists becomes a connected creation of meaning – a fabric being woven with purpose and direction and a role for each and every existent – human or object. Whether we remain oblivious to the fabric and our role in it or not, is our choice. Life is a dance – and we may be out of step or in step. Percy's novels are populated mostly by characters oblivious to the dance or the fabric of life; his protagonists themselves are seekers for a fabric of life revealed through signs and symbols.

How then are we to comprehend such mysteries if reason is insufficient? As Marcel says, it is through living, through action in daily life, that we find God. We perceive and weave the fabric of life through love of God and fellow man in and through the community, through decisions and commitments to action in love. And, we find order in the dance through physically acting out intention to these commitments in ritual and liturgy, through designated sacred actions and objects, through the *practice* of the faith. The lived life of faith, of “doing” in the world, transcends any mental attitudes, precepts, convictions, or understandings. We are creatures of body, heart, soul, and mind. We don't just understand faith with our minds; we participate in it wholly. Our bodies must live these mysteries. Our mind alone cannot bring us into communion with God. Through physically acting in faith, it becomes real. Not through the mind is mystery understood, but through the whole self's experience, the heart and body, of which the mind is but a participant, mystery becomes known and lived, and therefore understood – but in a different way than through rational and logical understanding. It becomes *known* far more fully. The body is important and not disconnected; it is the means by which we encounter and live out the spiritual.

This is the repudiation of Descartes' error, the error Percy sought to refute. Mind, spirit, and soul are NOT separate from body. The Catholic Church for years before Descartes recognized that faith is lived, the soul is fulfilled, through action in the physical world. The faithful are not meant to just have an “attitude adjustment” – an abstract, mental change of world view, a mental re-alignment towards

faith in God, but are meant to live out their faith in the physical world. Why? Because they are physical creatures that find God through designated actions, such as the sacraments and the sacramental world, that are doorways to the experience of and participation in the numinous in this world.

Religious mystery is best experienced, not understood. “There are two ways of thinking about church and religion. One is that we go to church in order to be in the presence of the holy, to learn and have our lives influenced by that presence. The other is that church teaches us directly and symbolically to see the sacred dimension in everyday life” (Moore 214). The mystery, the Catholic Church says, should be manifested physically:

And as human nature is such that it cannot easily raise itself up to the meditation of divine realities without external aids [participation in sacraments], holy mother church has for that reason duly established certain rites... by which the majesty of this great sacrifice is enhanced, and the minds of the faithful are aroused by those visible signs of religious devotion to contemplation of the high mysteries hidden in it. (Council of Trent, Session 22, Chapter 5, qtd. in Nisly 22)

Our minds “know” divine reality and spiritual unity not through discursive logic but through “vital signs,” symbol and sacrament. Sacraments – sacred symbol - are one concrete vehicle for us to live the mystery physically. All other symbols (including language, Binx’s MG, Kate’s derriere) also remind us of the presence of this mystery, though to a lesser extent than sacraments simply because they are not communally designated as windows to the transcendent mystery, only individually and situationally designated. Yet they too can function as vehicles to divine presence. The paradox and the caveat is, as O’Connor says, that God’s grace can be efficacious through all things – even the most mundane or even evil of things. So this grace can be conveyed through the most unassuming of media, though it is the sacraments that are designated as instrumental and operate as such more often than not.

The Catholic religion offers physical, concrete, tangible means to enter into this mystery of faith, like many other religions, such as Eastern or tribal religions. Through the ritual of the mass, God is encountered. Specifically through the seven sacraments (baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance and reconciliation, anointment of the sick, holy orders, and matrimony), the believer enters into the

mystery of God's presence and encounters God's grace. Church theologians' positions on the exact degree and manner in which God is encountered or salvation received through the sacraments have varied throughout time, but all agree that the human being, as a bodily creature (not just mental or spiritual), needs to participate in a bodily way in his encounter with God, hence the sacraments.

Catholic doctrine holds:

Almighty God can and does give grace to men in answer to their internal aspirations and prayers without the use of any external sign or ceremony. This will always be possible, because God, grace, and the soul are spiritual beings.... God is not restricted to the use of material, visible symbols in dealing with men; ... This truth theologians express by saying that the sacraments are necessary, not absolutely but only hypothetically, i.e., in the supposition that if we wish to obtain a certain supernatural end we must use the supernatural means appointed for obtaining that end. But, if it is known that God has appointed external, visible ceremonies as the means by which certain graces are to be conferred on men, then in order to obtain those graces it will be necessary for men to make use of those Divinely appointed means.... It is the teaching of the Catholic Church and of Christians in general that, whilst God was nowise bound to make use of external ceremonies as symbols of things spiritual and sacred, it has pleased Him to do so, and this is the ordinary and most suitable manner of dealing with men. Writers on the sacraments refer to this as the *necessitas convenientiae*, the necessity of suitableness. It is not really a necessity, but the most appropriate manner of dealing with creatures that are at the same time spiritual and corporeal.... The principal reason for a sacramental system is found in man. It is the nature of man, writes St. Thomas (III:61:1), to be led by things corporeal and sense-perceptible to things spiritual and intelligible; now Divine Providence provides for everything in accordance with its nature (*secundum modum suae conditionis*); therefore it is fitting that Divine Wisdom should provide means of salvation for men in the form of certain corporeal and sensible signs which are called sacraments.⁹⁰

For Catholics, sacraments (external symbols of hidden spiritual presence of God and his grace) are necessary – not on a divine basis, as God is spiritual and can do all things without need of tools or instruments – but on human basis, because the corporeal nature of humans can better comprehend and live and participate in these corporeal signs of the presence of things unseen.

But more than comfort and knowledge of divine presence, more than mere psychological healing, the physical sign contains a metaphysical power to act in God's place, and transform the believer and the world through its action, regardless of the believer's state – in an almost magical way, just as the use of the divine name as proxy for the person and power of God in primitive religions.

⁹⁰ From the Catholic Encyclopedia: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13295a.htm>

Catholic theology throughout history has varied on some minor points as to what extent the sacrament is an instrument of grace and a medium of God's presence – but always, they are not just a rather ineffectual sign or indication or mere reminder of God's presence (per Protestant theology), they actually effect or create God's presence. The magic of divine presence is inherent to a greater or lesser degree in any symbolic act; this is Percy's repeated observation of the magic of ANY kind of symbol-mongering.

Nisly succinctly captures and summarizes the history of sacramental theology, ending with the present view of sacraments as an actual cause of grace. Nisly quotes the present-day Catechism as saying that the sacraments actually confer grace themselves – they are “efficacious” because Christ himself is at work and acts in each of His sacraments (Nisly 27-28). In other words, rather than simply being a “sign” or a mental knowledge, they actually *effect* change and effect (or cause) God's presence in the world.

And throughout church history, sacraments have always had this efficacious character, to a greater or lesser extent. The Catholic sacraments were not fully instituted until the Middle Ages, when St. Thomas Aquinas became aware of a 12th century work by Peter Lombard listing seven sacraments. Lombard defined sacrament as something that both is a *sign* of God's grace as well as a *cause* of God's grace. Aquinas adopts this and offers characteristics of sacrament that make them a means and even necessary for salvation, emphasizing the physical nature of sacrament as necessary for humans:

People reach knowledge deductively through experience, so sacraments give a physical sense of faith; because of sin, people have a natural affection for the physical, so sacraments remedy the sickness by means of human tendency; and in general activities, humans tend to enter into physical action, so sacraments are made to be not too difficult for people (Summa Theologiae 31, 61, 1) (Nisly 29).

Like Lombard, Aquinas believes sacraments cause grace, but adds the difference between *principal* and *instrumental* causes. Principal causes have the power to produce effects in the world (and, in a religious venue, in the believer); instrumental causes are, like their name implies, merely instruments of the

principal causes – the medium through which the principal cause acts and have no power on their own. God is the principal cause of the sacraments, which are instrumental causes of a believer's encounter with God.

Despite this qualification, sacraments are extremely powerful, "necessary" according to Catholic theology (for humans, not for God), and actually can effect or cause change in the believer – the encounter with or state of grace, by virtue of their own power (with God acting through them) regardless of the spiritual state of the believer, the recipient, or even the bestower of the sacrament. Sacrament's efficacy transcends the limitations of the human spiritual condition. Aquinas' view of the sacraments as powerful vehicles of grace – regardless and transcendent of the spiritual state of either the recipient or minister – became accepted church theology, lasting today, though not all agreed with him. Duns Scotus and Franciscans thought that sacraments merely prepared a person for grace, which is then given by God separately. The "canonists" thought the sacramental ritual had to be performed exactly right and without flaw in order for sacraments to confer grace. In the end, the Council of Trent held with Aquinas, and to this day, the independent power and efficacy of the sacraments to accomplish their spiritual work, "by the very fact of the action's being performed," or *ex opere operato* regardless of the spiritual state or holiness of the provider, is the doctrine that survives (Nisly 29-30). The believer's spiritual state **may** affect how it is received, but God's presence is always present within the sacrament, to be availed upon in any situation. Aquinas and the church believe that the sacrament is much more than the mere symbol, as a sacrament is necessary for salvation (as in baptism) and since sacrament is more powerful than human qualities, "[f]or the sacrament is perfected not through the righteousness of the minister or the recipient of baptism [the sacrament], but rather through the power of God' (*Summa Theologiae* 31, 68, 2)" (Nisly 31). Sacrament is capable of overriding the spiritual state of both giver and recipient; its efficacy is never compromised.

However, symbols other than sacrament, individual designations of divine sign and symbol, are only symbolic to the particular individual – providing hope, answers, and spiritual sustenance nevertheless – but not able to sustain a transcendent presence, or even transcendent clue, outside the awareness of the individual who has named it as such. One human can find or designate symbol, such as Gideon and his fleece, but two or three can create symbol of greater sacredness or power, one that overrides the mental, emotional or spiritual state of the sinner. The symbols of the church, authenticated as such over the centuries, have undergone a transformation of their physical properties, according to Catholic theology. They actually BECOME the transcendent, regardless of the mental or spiritual state of the recipient (or the deliverer) of the sacrament, rather than merely *representing* the transcendent by virtue of the original mental or spiritual state of the recipient or even the bestower of the sacrament.

Perhaps the most illustrative and powerful sacrament Percy uses is the Eucharist. The Eucharist, designated by the whole of the church throughout the centuries as carrier of divine essence of Christ himself, contains within it the power and grace to transform and affect human souls that transcends even the knowledge of the recipient (as well as, according to Catholic doctrine, the spiritual state of the deliverer of the Eucharist). Other, everyday, symbols can be accessed through our awareness of them all around us – we can even create them as symbol, as Gideon does with his fleece. When the individual designates a physical object as symbol, it becomes such – just as a sound “becomes” a symbol containing the object within it when the community designates it so, and just as a bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ when the church designates it so. This is Percy’s intersubjective community as necessary for language, and therefore consciousness, to be possible, and for God’s presence to manifest in the world.

Catholic sacraments enter into the awareness of the individual and can “override” the predisposition of that individual regardless of the individual’s prior mental and spiritual state. They

transform and enlighten by virtue of their own presence and power – a power that transcends the physical world, that transcends rational understanding – and that transcends even the suppliant's own faith. The faith of the church takes precedence over the faith of the individual. Percy's and Peirce's both believed in the primacy of relations over the individual.

This is the mystery of the church, that spirit, revealed within sacramental symbol, takes precedence over the visible physical world, and this mystery is the subject of the longing and quest of humankind. This is the mystery behind Christ's saying, "If you have faith you can move mountains." The spiritual state of faith transcends the physical world.

As Peirce says, Secondness (cause-effect) is secondary to Thirdness (relations), which are primary. The reason that sacrament, designated as carrier of the transcendent by millions for centuries, is so powerful is hidden in the meaning of "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I will be." The consensus of the church, of many, or even just two or three, has transformative power over the physical and that of the individual. Percy's intersubjective challenges the American idea of "rugged individualism" and the Cartesian solipsism of the individual. The faith of the church transcends even the faith of the suppliant – so the suppliant's spiritual state can be overridden by the grace of God given through the sacraments. This communal aspect of faith is a major theme and message of Percy's novels, with five of the six ending in sacramental community. Community is not only necessary for any symbol-mongering to take place, but for faith to live fully.

Catholic sacramental theology differs from the Protestant view of sacraments in that, for Protestants, sacraments are merely signs of something, but do not have causal efficacy or "magic causality." The best example of this is Catholic doctrine of "transubstantiation" of the Eucharist; the closest equivalent is the Episcopalian "consubstantiation." The former is transcendent and acts regardless of understanding of the human involved; the latter requires the mental acknowledgement and activity of the recipient. Protestants, however, disempowered the sacraments. They no longer

cause any divine action. Protestants reduce the power and significance of the sacraments so their presence in the world may merely serve as a reminder of God, but have little to no role in the experience and encounter with God, or in the reception of God's grace and presence. They have no power to change the spiritual or physical world of the believer:

Protestants generally hold that the sacraments are signs of something sacred (grace and faith), but deny that they really cause Divine grace. Episcopalians, however, and Anglicans, especially the Ritualists, hold with Catholics that the sacraments are "effectual signs" of grace. In article XXV of the Westminster Confession we read: "Sacraments ordained of God be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's [sic] profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses and effectual signs of grace and God's good will towards us by which He doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken but strengthen and confirm our faith in Him (cf. art. XXVII). ..." Luther and his early followers rejected this conception of the sacraments. They do not cause grace, but are merely "signs and testimonies of God's good will towards us" (Augsburg Confessions); they excite faith, and faith (fiduciary) causes justification. Calvinists and Presbyterians hold substantially the same doctrine. Zwinglius lowered still further the dignity of the sacraments, making them signs not of God's fidelity but of our fidelity. By receiving the sacraments we manifest faith in Christ: they are merely the badges of our profession and -the pledges of our fidelity. Fundamentally all these errors arise from Luther's newly-invented theory of righteousness, i.e. the doctrine of justification by faith alone. If man is to be sanctified not by an interior renovation through grace which will blot out his sins, but by an extrinsic imputation through the merits of Christ, which will cover his soul as a cloak, there is no place for signs that cause grace, and those used can have no other purpose than to excite faith in the Saviour. Luther's convenient doctrine on justification was not adopted by all his followers and it is not baldly and boldly proclaimed by all Protestants today; nevertheless they accept its consequences affecting the true notion of the sacraments.⁹¹

So Protestants not only divest the sacrament of the power and presence of God, but they lose religious mystery along the way. The Catholic sacraments provide a tangible vehicle for the hidden presence of the mysterious encounter with God. Many other religions do the same, as in the Jewish faith's practice of "mitzvoth," every day actions that have been sanctified as an act of worship (such as extended rules for honoring the Sabbath, kosher eating, marital relations), a way of living with God in daily life (Nisly 23). In Protestant theology, the mysterious presence of God remains an abstract idea, to be mentally grasped, and emotionally and spiritually felt, but without physical manifestation. No formal ritual or

⁹¹ From the Catholic Encyclopedia: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13295a.htm>

instructions are given by the Protestant faith for living that out, no practices for encountering God in the ordinary in everyday life, to be manifested in the corporeal world. Faith is rational – a mental act. Protestants preserve the Cartesian rift and Enlightenment rationalism.

However, Percy was Catholic; mystery is not abandoned. “Many critics in the 1990s have emphasized that the single most important feature of Percy’s fiction and philosophy is his Catholic Christian ‘anthropology’” (Pridgen 22). In a 1974 interview, Percy said that this Catholic “sacramental view” provided him with “a way of seeing the world” that enriched his capacity to create his fictional wayfarers (Con I 88). It is a key element of his “Judeo-Christian anthropology” (MB 24), a Catholic “anthropology” that asserts a “sacramental and historical-incarnational” (WPP, Series 2, D:27) understanding of individual and cultural experience (Pridgen 23).

5.5 THE WANDERER AND THE WAYFARER

The psychical forces presently released in the postmodern consciousness open unlimited possibilities for both destruction and liberation, for an absolute loneliness or a rediscovery of community and reconciliation. The subject of the postmodern novel is a man who has very nearly come to the end of the line... he runs out of meaning...the need of recovering oneself as neither an angel nor organism but as a wayfaring creature somewhere between. (MB 113)

Percy finds meaning in the tetradic life: living a sacramental life which brings the essence of the transcendent into physical everyday actions, just as the essence of the signified is brought into the signifier in the symbolic act as designated by community. Words and symbols are reflections of the greater windows to the transcendent – the sacraments and signs of God’s presence:

Both God and Christ are transcendent sources of meaning and consciousness that lie beyond all human knowing, but they paradoxically exist and make themselves perceptible through signs in the sensible, incarnate universe. Words are also sensible, perceptible of signs physical experience that reveal immaterial meaning and consciousness. Language signs are absolutely, empirically existent in the actualities of time-space events, but at the same time are the sources of a human consciousness transcendent of physical phenomena. (Pridgen 33)

The wanderer through life does not see signs, does not transcend the physical in the world, does not live a sacramental life in community. Percy exhorts us to live lives of wayfarers. The wanderer and the

wayfarer are both travelers on their journeys through life. But there are significant differences. For most of Percy's novels, his characters are wandering aimlessly. Once they make a commitment, they search purposefully, with an eye to and an awareness of "signs." They are wayfaring. Percy's novels are about the growth and transition of the lone and lost wanderer to the intersubjective, signpost-seeking wayfarer. One interviewer encapsulates it to Percy: "In other words, essentially what you're interested in is in the wandering and the searching and being in doubt, but once the character makes his commitment, that's the time when you've got to hit the road and end the book" (Con I 234).

For the wanderer, the destination is arbitrary; the journey is a distraction; the end result is exactly the same spiritual place. The physical world offers no signs, no signposts, to anything beyond itself, beyond the physical world. The physical world points only to the physical world. The items and events in the physical world are just that, and nothing more. The sights one sees are only visual and sensual, no more. The wanderer is a postmodernist. The surface chaos of the world is all that there is; the physical world ends with only itself. There is no meaning underneath it all to search and discover. There is no pattern, no purpose to the world; the fabric of life is threadbare and cannot hold. Sometimes it unravels completely and life becomes nothing more than Hume's fleeting, disconnected bundle of sense-impressions. Life events, far from being orderly, are random.

A wayfarer is searching as well, but has a destination, however unclear that may be to him at the moment. He believes there is a significance to the search and he sees signs along the way to guide him, even if he cannot see his final goal. He is certain that as each step along the journey presents itself, the next step will become clear, if not the final destination itself yet:

Of more concern to [this particular kind of] novelist are other signs, which, if he reads them correctly, portend a different kind of danger.... The signs are ambiguous.... He is more apt to set forth with a stranger in a strange land where the signposts are enigmatic but which he sets out to explore nevertheless. ... signifying a radical bond, as the writer sees it, which connects man with reality – or the failure of such a bond – and so confers meaning to his life – or the absence of meaning. (MB 101-03).

A wayfarer's wayfaring is thus done in faith of some pattern and purpose and some knowledge beyond himself that will be given at the right time – one symbol at a time, like manna in the desert bestowed one day at a time. For the wayfarer, the pilgrim, there *is* an end destination a particular and real place of experience – or an end-all to his day-to-day be-all, as Allie would say. The destination is all-important, not random, and it is different than the starting point of the journey. Indications and signs along the way point to the spiritual place/destination. The destination is always a sacramental life, encountering the transcendent through the world itself in an intersubjective community.

The Marcellian life of service and love to others does not end in this world; it is essentially the fertile ground through which transcendent Being can present itself and grow. "Man... is, in Heidegger's words, that being in the world whose calling it is to find a name for Being, to give testimony to it, and to provide for it a clearing" (MB 158). Percy rejects "biological success" or even "self-actualization" or even "devotion to a cause" as adequate purpose and meaning for human beings. In fact, his picture of the world itself is one in which humans should not get too comfortable. It is a "strange land" in which humans are rightly strangers, looking for signs of "home." They are "castaways" on a foreign island, and somewhat lost:

Our subject is not only an organism and a culture member; he is also a castaway.... He should be what he is and not pretend to be somebody else. He should be a castaway and not pretend to be at home on the island. To be a castaway is to be in a grave predicament and this is not a happy state of affairs. But it is very much happier than being a castaway and pretending one is not. This is despair. The worst of all despairs is to imagine one is at home when one is really homeless. But what is it to be a castaway? To be a castaway is to search for news from across the seas... one lives in hope that such a message will come. (MB 142, 144)

A human is "a stranger in a strange land where the signposts are enigmatic but which he sets out to explore nonetheless" (MB 102). And as such he is searching – he is interpreting these messages and signposts for an answer to who he is and why he is here in this strange world. Percy refers multiple times to humans as wayfarers and pilgrims, searching for meaning, most notably at his National Book Award Acceptance Speech early in his career: "In short, the book attempts a modest restatement of the

Judeo-Christian notion that man is more than an organism in an environment, more than an integrated personality, more even than a mature and creative individual, as the phrase goes. He is a wayfarer and a pilgrim" (SSL 246). The observation is echoed over and over again throughout his works, and he elaborates:

...it's a view of man, that man is neither an organism controlled by his environment, not a creature controlled by the forces of history as the Marxists would say, nor is he a detached, wholly objective angelic being who views the world in a God-like way and makes pronouncements only to himself or to an elite group of people. No, he's somewhere between the angels and the beasts. He's a strange creature whom both Thomas Aquinas and Marcel called *homo viator*, man the wayfarer, man the wanderer. So, to me, the Catholic view of man as pilgrim, in transit, in journey, is very compatible with the vocation of novelist because a novelist is writing about man in transit, man as pilgrim. (Con I 63-64)

This existential need for meaning, for knowing, unique to humankind is indissolubly connected to our nature as "symbol-mongerers," a nature that transcends the biological-physical-scientific realm, and enters into another world, a subjective, existential one, a world that a purely dyadic science is insufficient to fully capture and explain. In this world (not environment), is an epistemological need to "know" an "other," to know Being that is satisfied through the means of symbol, sacrament, and a sacramental life. We aren't even aware of this world until we become symbol-mongerers.

These "signs" are more than a structuralist or physicalist cause-effect sign; they are Peirce's and Percy's "symbols": physical entities that point to something non-physical (though real). The symbol must point to something transcendent, unlike the humanist response that a human should aspire merely to be a well-adjusted, well-functioning organism. Psychological well-being and self-actualization are never the answer – the self's journey then only points back to self, a tautology that goes nowhere. The self cannot save itself, nor can it be its own "raison d'être." The symbol cannot point to something in this world or it is nothing more than a dyadic sign. And, for Percy, the most powerful symbol is the sacrament.

PERCY'S ENDINGS: A SACRAMENTAL LIFE IN AN INTERSUBJECTIVE COMMUNITY

As Marcel says, the life of commitment, service, and love is the conduit through which we know⁹² God. The sacraments assist us in this knowing God. In fact, each of Percy's six novels revolves around the protagonist's search for meaning that leads to transcendent realizations and goals – and to community. Each novel ends with sacraments, and with priests – icons of Christ and God's presence and bestowers of sacraments. Percy's protagonists turn to a sacramental communal life – in their own imperfect, human way. Still riddled with sin, they are at least each embarking upon a journey in the right direction, seeking signposts along the way, seeking God through and in the mundanity of life. The priest is present to lead and mediate the sacramental journey.

Percy's first novel, *The Moviegoer*, ends in the sacraments of marriage and last rites. Enthralled by pretty girls throughout the book, it is not until the very end that Binx settles with Kate and begins a sacramental journey – a journey of community – with her and the rest of the extended family. As late as the last chapter of the book, Binx is still aimlessly wandering about. He goes in search of Sharon, who is only a distraction for him, and instead proposes a date with her roommate Joyce, whom he has just met, when he finds Sharon gone (MG 229). Each is as good as another; both are meaningless distractions that will lead him nowhere. Yet he has an epiphany and finds himself – and his direction – immediately after asking Joyce out. It is in Kate, who grounds him, and he her. He says to Joyce: "May I bring along my own fiancée, Kate Cutrer? I want you and Sharon to meet her" (MG 321). With these words, with this intention to partake in the sacrament of marriage and commitment to an "other," he has his direction, and he encounters signs and sacraments constantly. Immediately after proposing, he sees the man coming out of the church, whom he thinks has received the sacrament of Penance, but isn't sure – because all God's signs transcend the rational and are a little mysterious:

⁹² Know, not in the intellectual sense of attaining information about, but in Percy's semeiotic sense of existentially encountering and experiencing an "other," in the same way the Namer encounters the named through the signifier. See chapter 2.7.

It is impossible to be sure that he has received ashes.... It is impossible to say why he is here. Is it part and parcel of the complex business of coming up in the world? Or is it because he believes that God himself is present here at the corner of Elysian Fields and Bons Enfants? Or is he here for both reasons: through some dim dazzling trick of grace, coming for the one and receiving the other as God's own importunate bonus? It is impossible to say. (MG 235)

The Hopkins reference ("dim, dazzling") invokes Hopkins' view of God infusing all of nature, the whole world, that is evident to those who will see. Dazzling dimly – the light is strong but seen only dimly in this world, as the prophet Paul said, "Now I see through a glass darkly." But God is dazzling dimly through the signs, to those who will see. Now, Binx's every orientation, his very perspective is in terms of and towards God and the eternal and he has been transformed: "So ended my thirtieth year to heaven, as the poet called it" (MG 236). He no longer thinks of himself in terms of earthly years, but in terms of his heavenly destination. Signs and sacraments and God's presence now permeate Binx's life. He is also no longer alone; he lives in community with the sacrament of marriage – and the sacrament of the anointing of the sick: "Was he anointed?" Mathilde asks of Lonnie's death. The community enlarges as the novel ends with "my brothers and sisters call out behind me" (MG 241). Binx answers the call of the community – and so, God.

The Last Gentleman ends also with Will's intention to marry:⁹³ "Dr. Vaught, Kitty and I are getting married" (LG 413), as well as his desire to settle in community. Immediately after, the priest is in Jamie's hospital room, giving Jamie, who is dying (just as Lonnie is in the first novel), the sacraments of baptism and the anointing of the sick, an account which is extended and detailed. Will reaffirms his intent to marry on the last page: "I'm going to do what I told you I planned to do" (LG 441), and is essentially pleading to Sutter Vaught to enter into community – and life – as Vaught's intent was to commit suicide. Will's plea is successful.

Percy ends *Love in the Ruins* again with the protagonist married to a sensible, practical woman he chose after pursuit of many beauties; and a priest – giving the mass, the sacrament of the Eucharist

⁹³ Percy changed his intended story in his sequel, however. We discover that Will has not married Kitty after all.

and the sacrament of penance, described again in great detail (LR 395-400). The Eucharist is prevalent throughout the novel, with More speaking from the beginning of going to mass with his daughter Samantha and “eating Christ.” Thomas More unites the everyday and the sacred in the last scene, “Barbecuing in my sackcloth” (LR 402). The sackcloth is the penance from his sacrament of confession; he lives out the sacramental life in the most mundane and stereotypical American suburban lifestyle. We are not meant to run away from the world to a cloistered life of meditation and hermitage; we are asked to live a life of service and sacrament *within* the world itself. More also has not overcome his problems – he takes six drinks of Early Times in six minutes – because a holy life is not found by solving internal character issues or external problems (though often as not those may be improved through the holy life – and may also, through divine irony, improve the holy life). It is found through love and commitment to God and service in love to others.

The entire novel of *Lancelot* is itself a sacrament, of confession to a priest who is present throughout the telling of the story – a dramatic monologue in which the patient/penitent confesses to the priest/counselor Percival. *Lancelot* also ends in union and community – an implied future marriage and family – with Anna. Lancelot asks Percival, “Will she [Anna] join me in Virginia and will she and I and Siobhan [his daughter] begin a new life there?” [Percival answers,] ‘Yes’” (L 257). The very last exchange, in which Lancelot tells Percival, “Very well. I’ve finished. Is there anything you wish to tell me before I leave?” (L 257), is greeted with Percival’s affirmative answer, the last word of the novel. If the novel has been a confession, the priest is now to give the sacrament of penance as well as his forgiveness and blessing.

The Second Coming ends again with a pledge of marriage – and a priest. Father Weatherbee is central to the last few pages, talking of signs and clues of God’s presence and Will eagerly questions and searches his face for these answers (SC 356-360). In this novel, God’s presence in earthly signs is more

overt than in any other. And it is clear that God is found in everyday life and community, commitment and love to others. In the book's very last paragraph, when Will thinks of Allie,

His heart lept in secret joy. What is it I want from her and him [the priest], he wondered, not only want but must have? Is she a gift and therefore a sign of a giver? Could it be that the Lord is here, masquerading behind this simple holy face? Am I crazy to want both, her and Him? No, not want, must have. And will have. (SC 360)

God comes to us through this world, shows Himself in signs and through our living the sacramental life – an everyday life in community and love which reveals the divine. Here, Will's commitment and love for Allie and the community he creates reveals God to him, masquerading behind her face and all of life. We encounter God through the "other" – an act of joy – just as in naming, we encounter the essence of the named through the name itself, another act of joy.

Openness to signs enables Will to see and know and experience the essence of God THROUGH the world. For Percy, faith is not found in Kierkegaard's rejection of the world and those in it, but through Marcel's embracing of the world and commitment to loving community. The symbol, the name, does the same for the human – enabling the human being to see and know and experience the essence of the object through the word.

The Thanatos Syndrome ends with a priest, Father Smith, and multiple sacraments as well – with Father Smith saying a garbled but prophetic mass in a kind of dementia, debating with Tom about serving the Eucharist, and then enlightening Tom on reasons for the loss of faith due to current times. Tom and Father Smith secretly promise to meet at the mass for the Feast of the Epiphany. And, as with all the other novels, the sacrament of marriage is celebrated with the reunion of the marriage of Tom and Ellen.

Each of Percy's protagonists move from wanderers to becoming wayfarers as each novel ends. The wayfarer is a modernist just as Percy is a modernist at heart. Underneath the surface chaos and meaninglessness the world provides, there *is* a meaning and purpose and order to be found, a meaning

and purpose and order that is *created* by the human being and rests in community and connection and becomes the magical medium through which transcendent Being is experienced.

The wayfarer leads a sacramental life, seeing the sacred behind ordinary things, seeing signposts in the mundane, giving it meaning – just as each of Percy’s novels end in sacrament. There is magic, joy, and continuity. The fabric of life is woven richly and beautifully, full of wonder and worship – and we create it, we weave it ourselves out of a volition to create a world of connected meaningful experience. It matters not *what* we weave nor whether what we choose to create is pre-destined or chosen for us. Langer and Percy would say that, like symbol, is as likely to be our own arbitrary choice as not. It matters only *that* we weave, that we create connections of love and responsibility and commitment to what we choose. The fabric of life must be woven with the colors of the world, as well as with gold and silver of the transcendent – shining glowing threads that are the light of Being, signs shimmering through our ordinary days and presenting the divine to us, if we choose to see.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: THE FOUR STAGES OF SYMBOLIC TRANSFORMATION

The symbol (or “signifier”) is no longer just a random sound or scribbling when it functions as symbol in the interpreter’s mind. The signifier BECOMES the signified. “In a sign [symbol], the signifier and the signified are interpenetrated so that the signifier becomes, in a sense, transformed by the signified” (LC 103). This transformation of sound or scribbling to carry and “be” the essence of the object it represents has distinct stages. It does not become symbol with meaning and statically remain the same meaning forever. The symbol’s ability to convey meaning changes. “Signs undergo an evolution, or rather, a devolution,” says Percy (LC 104). Percy identifies two stages of symbolic awareness (three stages, actually, when he includes the pre-symbolic stage) in his final manuscript, *Symbol and Existence*:

- (1) presymbolic sentience (Helen Keller before understanding “water” as symbol) in which biological adaptation and biological relevance are the primary communication concern,
- (2) symbolic awareness – of something as something, accompanied by an unprecedented joy that is not biologically significant, and finally,
- (3) a deterioration, a malaise, the arrival of new object becomes construed as something similar to what was already known, and can no longer be “seen” (SE 125).

In *Lost in the Cosmos*, he identifies the change more discretely - four stages of symbolic transformation, dividing the last two stages above into two separate stages each, and omitting the first stage above, (LC 104-05). From the stage of presymbolic sentience, the human first crosses the symbolic threshold, which is experienced progressively as follows:

At first, there is a sudden flash of insight and joy, as the signifier (word) takes on the essence of the signified (object or idea), and the signified is able to be encountered by the interpreter in a unique way. This encounter of the object now transcends its function for merely physical survival – which had been its only relevance prior to its symbolization. It now has meaning and significance in a *world*,⁹⁴ a place that is a web of meaning, and that gives significance to every existent, regardless of its biological

⁹⁴ See Chapter 2.5 for definition of “world.”

relevance. It even gives significance and “life” to things that don’t exist, that don’t have a physical presence, such as ghosts and bogeyman and Hamlet.

In the next stage, the signifier then becomes more full and nuanced, as more characteristics of the signified become clear and accessible as well as the original meaning. The signifier (symbol) still functions to enable us to see and access the signified and “a world,” and to avail us of the encounter with the reality of both. The “thing” becomes certified to us and more “real” when it is in this second stage.

But it doesn’t stay there; our symbolic understanding, and our symbols are constantly changing, and they never can perfectly capture the thing being symbolized. It is a process, in flux. Percy explains:

...the pairing or formulation itself, as Cassirer has said, ...comprises the act of knowing. Each conscious recognition may be regarded as an approximation, a cast of one thing toward another the end of a fit. Thus, if I see an object at some distance and do not quite recognize it, I may see it, actually see it, as a succession of different things, each rejected by the criterion of fit as I come closer, until one is positively certified.... But most significant of all, even the last, the “correct” recognition is quite as mediate an apprehension as the incorrect ones; it is also a cast, a pairing, an approximation. And let us note in passing that even though it is correct,... it may operate quite as effectively to conceal as to discover. (MB 273)

Because, eventually, the symbol loses its efficacy. In the third stage, it becomes “worn out” and is no longer able to function with such clarity as struck the interpreter in the beginning. It becomes deadened and escapes our notice. The signified is no longer encountered in the signifier, and symbol activity is now blocking our apprehension of it. Percy writes at length of the deadening of language in both fiction and non-fiction.

In the fourth stage, however, the signifier’s clarity and meaning can be recaptured, however, and renewed and refreshed – through activities such as the endeavors of poets, who use language in a new and unexpected ways, ways that call attention to the meaning. “In naming we grasp hold of something from the flux of Being and Becoming until it becomes rigid and we must re-view it” (CITE XX: *LC middle?*). Percy notes especially that Gerard Manly Hopkins’ poetry, with his unique mixing of old

words and creation of new words, communicates far better than use of traditional language. In Percy's novels, certain characters use unique, even "made up" language.

STAGE ONE: TRANSFORMATION

"At first, the signifier serves as the discovery vehicle through which the signified is known" (LC 104). The first stage of symbol formation is instantaneous and sudden, an immediate transformation of word into symbol. The symbol now is something beyond its physical characteristics, and serves a purpose beyond physical survival or gratification. A random vocable or scribbling into a symbol now carries the essence of the signified within it and has meaning. The symbolic glimpse of the world, the insight, is a grasping of reality as a "world," a web of meanings, not an "environment," a place of physical survival, for the first time. The signified, through the signifier, is now placed within the web of meanings. "Is it not possible that this startling semantic insight, that by the word I have the thing, fix it, and rescue it from the flux of Becoming around me, might not confirm and illuminate the mysterious Thomist notion of the interior word, of knowing something by becoming something?" (MB 297).

Helen Keller's illumination at the water pump is this first stage. Percy quotes her account:

Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten – a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language as revealed to me. I knew then that "w-a-t-e-r" meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. The living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! ... Everything had name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object I touched seemed to quiver with new life. That is because I saw everything with the strange, new sight that had come to me. (MB 35)

Helen then writes that she found her doll that she had broken in a fit of rage earlier, and she says, "Then my eyes filled with tears; for I realized what I had done, and for the first time I felt repentance and sorrow" (MB 35). Guilt and remorse do not have purpose or place in an environment in which physical survival or gratification are all that exists. Guilt and remorse are human qualities and human feelings, a world Helen is now able to access with her newly acquired language ability. One of Percy's primary language theses is that symbol-mongering is necessary for human consciousness and a human "world." Helen's story exemplifies that: sans symbol awareness, she is an "environment" and

interested in survival and physical gratification. Once symbol awareness is gained, she is in a human “world,” and experiences uniquely human awareness, perceptions, and feelings.⁹⁵

The signifier (symbol) and the signified (object) have now become so united that the symbol not only is the vehicle through which the object is known, it also carries the essence of the object inside it (*in alio esse*) and seems to be almost transformed into the object:

Children go through a stage when they’re around two or a little after when they begin to associate names with things. They start making a connection between the word “*ball*” and the thing, ball. Actually some psychologists have done some work – Werner and Kaplan – on symbol formation. How does the word “brittle” mean brittle? Actually the word gets transformed, because it actually sounds brittle; the word “brittle” sounds brittle. That’s called false onomatopoeia. Of course the word “brittle” is not brittle; it doesn’t sound brittle to a Frenchman who doesn’t know English. Why does it sound brittle?” (Con I 227)

The transformational event in symbol was important to Percy, and one he iterated constantly. Signs merely point to what they represent – symbols are transformed INTO what they represent so that the two (signifier and signified) are quite literally one in the symbol-monger’s mind. Cassirer asks, “How can a sensory content [the word, or signifier] become the vehicle for meaning?” (MB 294). For Cassirer, it cannot; it “constitutes” the meaning. That is, it is not a *vehicle* for conception of the signified, it IS the conception of the signified. For all practical purposes, in our mind, which is all conception, this means the word IS the thing. Percy cites the effect of onomatopoeia again, noting that “an articulation of word to thing [is] so powerful that word can still be taken for thing... the sound I make can become for me the thing I see” (MB 294):

In a sign, the signifier and the signified are interpenetrated so that the signifier becomes, in a sense, transformed by the signified.... *Brittle* sounds brittler than *limber*. But there is no such resemblance. Or rather, what resemblance there is far more remote and problematical than it appears. The resemblance occurs because the signifier and the signified have been interpenetrated through use by the sign-user. *Slimy* does not sound slimy to a German speaker (LC 104).

Percy cites the work of well-known linguists Sapir and Whorf to support this. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis shows “the controlling influence of language on the development of perception within a

⁹⁵ See Chapter 2.5 for a greater discussion of World vs. Environment.

particular culture” (Con I 142). Percy doesn’t feel the hypothesis is crucial to his argument – but “the fact that a word can be transformed is” (Con I 143). It is that onomatopoeic effect that he feels provides the best support:

A word can be transformed to what it stands for: “There is a curious psychological phenomenon, where you take a word like ‘glass,’ and I say to you, ‘It’s very hard to hear the sounds of the word for themselves.’ When I hear the word, and maybe you, the word itself seems brittle and shiny and maybe even transparent... try saying it aloud fifty times or a hundred times...[then] the word sheds its transformation, and you can actually hear all the linguistic sounds (Con I 143).

Percy emphasizes that the two, signifier and signified, are one; the word does not “conjure up” the object nor does it “conjure up qualities of the object (Con I 143). This is sign’s “pointing to” and separation in time and space. Instead, the word becomes “one” with the object and is TRANSFORMED into the object. In *Message in the Bottle*, Percy again refers to the transformation of symbol in our minds, once the sound becomes symbol – and the reverse transformation of symbol and its signified (contained *in alio esse*) back into mere sound:

The transformation of word into thing in our consciousness can be seen in the phenomenon of false onomatopoeia. The words *limber*, *flat furry*, *fuzzy*, *round*, *yellow*, *sharp*, sound like the things they signify, not because the actual sounds resemble the thing or quality, but because the sound has been transformed in our consciousness to “become” the thing signified. If you don’t believe this, try repeating one of these words several dozen times: all at once it will lose its magic guise as symbol and become the poor drab vocable it really is. (MB 156)

Not all objects in the world receive a new symbolic identity. Percy says upon the symbol-monger’s sighting an unusual bird: “The new thing is either known, if it is a sparrow or jay or cardinal; or not known. Unless it is startlingly different, it simply disappears into the nearest symbolic category” (SE 128). But, if the object is different enough from other known things, or if it stands out as “unknown” and the individual demands a name for it. The individual does not demand to be informed of its characteristics, he or she demands a name. Percy says, “I am more satisfied to be given a name for something even if the name means nothing to me (especially if?), than to be given a scientific classification” (MB 72). Percy says that a sick patient comes to the doctor or psychologist under the

intent to be “healed” – but once he or she is given a name for the illness, he is perfectly satisfied.

Naming the anxiety reduces the anxiety (MB 187).

STAGE TWO: EXPANDING AND INFORMING THE SYMBOL

Once the symbol goes through its first transformation, it continues its transformation. Next, the symbol expands our perception of the signified, by assuming all the qualities of it. “Next the symbol becomes transformed by the signified: the signifier *balloon* becomes informed by the distention, the stretched-rubber, light, up-tending, squinch-sound-against-fingers signified” (LC 104). The symbol now carries not only the primary essence of the signified *in alio esse*, it communicates secondary characteristics and attributes. At this point, the symbol still functions to convey meaning – but the meaning is deeper and fuller and the signified is even more real to us as the signifier reveals even more of the signified.

Moreover, it is not in an “environment,” of only physical survival or sustenance, but in a “world” with existential implications. The signified thing, by virtue of the signifier, not only is now seen and experienced more fully, but it also has a place and a significance in the fabric of life, the web of the world. As Percy says of “worlds,” everything is disposed of and nothing is leftover.⁹⁶ The signified now becomes “certified” and more real to us. Art, also an activity due to uniquely human symbolic capacity,⁹⁷ can function in the same role as “names” can. In *The Moviegoer*, Kate recognizes that Binx enjoys the movie filmed in the New Orleans, in the very neighborhood in which he views the movie, because “it represents certification... it certifies the place,” as opposed to living in an ordinary neighborhood, which remains uncertified. Seeing a famous movie star, such as William Holden (*The Moviegoer*), is a type of certification, making reality an ultra-reality, elevating it to stardom in the web of the world (Con II 165).

STAGE THREE: RIGIDITY AND DEATH:

⁹⁶ See Chapter 2.5 for greater discussion of words and environments.

⁹⁷ See Chapter 2.6 for greater discussion art, religion and culture as symbol.

THE FIXING OF THE SYMBOL AND THE WEARING OUT OF LANGUAGE

Derrida's got an essay on metaphor and the wearing-out process, and he cites a metaphor that Nietzsche uses about a coin that eventually loses its inscription, loses its image, loses its sign-bearing nature and simply becomes a piece of metal again. (Con I 242)

* * *

In Stage Three, the symbol loses its ability to convey meaning. It now serves as an obscurer of the signified, rather than an illuminator. It has been overused and, like the cliché, is now ignored.

Next there is a hardening and closing of the signifier, so that in the end the signified because encased in a simulacrum like a mummy in a mummy case: First bird watcher: What is that? Second bird watcher: That is only a sparrow. A devaluation has occurred. The bird itself has disappeared into the sarcophagus of its sign. (LC 104)

The very act of signification is a two-edged sword. It illuminates at the same time it obscures. The act of symbol is to label, to "name," to categorize, to capture, and to box – creating a still photograph of the ever-changing "thing" that becomes fixed for a moment in the symbol, able to be perceived. As Peirce says, it is a "slowing down of the flow" (101). Therefore, symbol defines and certifies the thing, but also blocks the encounter with the true essence and totality of the thing:

Each conscious recognition may be regarded as an approximation, a cast of one thing toward another toward the end of a fit. Thus if I see an object at some distance and do not quite recognize it, I may see it, actually see it, as a succession of different things, each rejected by the criterion of fit as I come closer, until one is positively certified. ... even the last, the 'correct' recognition is quite as mediate an apprehension as the incorrect ones; it is also a cost, a pairing, an approximation. And let us note in passing that even though it is correct, even though it is borne out by all indices, it may operate quite as effectively to conceal as discover. When I recognize a strange bird as a sparrow, I tend to dispose of the bird under its appropriate formulation: It is only a sparrow (cf. Marcel's 'simulacrum') (MB 273-274).

Life is infinite – in constant flux and relationship, bombarding our senses with an infinite number of possible perceptions – only some of which can possibly be comprehended by our finite consciousness. The entirety of the world cannot all be perceived or understood unless captured by symbol and molded into a framework comprehensible to a finite consciousness, unless the flow is stopped at least

momentarily and the object becomes a “hypostatic abstraction,” as Peirce calls it, in an imposed framework, a “world” of meaning and significance as opposed to an “environment” of entities necessary for biological sustenance.⁹⁸ (However, the subconscious, being infinite as all of life is, perceives all, according to Jung). The paradox of this captivity is that while the signifier enables us to see the signified, it enables us to see only part of the signified; much of it is lost. Symbol “affirms that this *is* something, but in so rescuing the object from the flux of becoming, it pays the price of setting it forth as a static and isolated entity – a picture book entity” (MB 283):

The signifier, a finite tool, can only capture a finite amount of that which it signifies. And the signified is always in danger of becoming an opaque, rather than transparent, carrier of meaning if it becomes too fixed. The signified within that it once illuminated can no longer shine through. Should the symbolic understanding of the signified be grasped too tightly, it becomes lost completely, and only the shell of the symbol is seen. (CITE XX)

In “Loss of the Creature,” Percy discusses how the experts and scientists and ethnologists appropriate our experience into a symbolic complex that disables our seeing the world freshly, for the first time, and instead causes it to be hidden behind the pre-assigned symbolic complex. The symbol loses its transparency and becomes opaque; the signified no longer is encountered through the symbol, or is encountered muddily:

Why is it almost impossible to gaze directly at the Grand Canyon under these circumstances and see it for what it is – as one picks up a strange object from one’s back yard and gazes directly at it? It is almost impossible because the Grand Canyon, the thing as it is, has been appropriated by the symbolic complex which has already been formed in the sightseer’s mind... Where the wonder and delight of the Spaniard (first explorer encountering the Canyon) arose from his penetration of the thing itself, from a progressive discover of depths, patterns, colors, shadows, etc., now the sightseer measures his satisfaction *by the degree to which the canyon conforms to his preformed complex* (MB 47).

The symbolic complex no longer allows the sightseer to see more of the Canyon or to see it better – it now rigidly dictates what he can and cannot see. The thing, in this case the Canyon, becomes

⁹⁸ And this is why symbol is necessary for consciousness, and why symbol creates a “world,” a framework and context for us to formulate and view all that happens to us. See Chapter 2.5 for more discussion of world vs. environment, and Appendix A for more discussion of “hypostatic abstraction.”

visible and available to us as symbol and so fixed – attributes outside the symbolic complex cannot be seen.

Percy elaborates later on modern social implications: that in a society of experts and laymen, planners and consumers, experts and planners package and present the “thing” for understanding and consumption, resulting in a “double deprivation” (MB 61). First, there is a “loss of title” by its packaging, in which the thing is removed “from the sovereignty of the knower” (MB 62). Codified and certified “symbol” – such as art or tourist sites – are available to be seen in a museum or in parks, but no one can really see them. Secondly, the theory disposes of the thing so it is now one of a class of objects, and cannot be seen as an individual: “The tree loses its proper density and mystery as a concrete existent and, as merely another specimen of a species, becomes itself nugatory.... the thing is twice lost to the consumer. First sovereignty is lost: It is theirs, not his. Second, it is radically devalued by theory” (MB 63). Percy writes of a hypothetical American couple who travel to Mexico, where they long for their ethnologist friend. “They wanted him, not to share their experience, but to certify their experience as genuine” (MB 53). A loss of sovereignty to the “experts” takes place in modern society. We have a loss of sovereignty among laymen not only with experiences, but with natural objects and with one’s own self (doctors must confirm who we are and what is happening to us). We are “twice removed” from the world (MB 58), and believe the world must be disposed of by theory.

STAGE FOUR: REBIRTH: RECAPTURING THE SYMBOL

Symbol can become stale, worn out, and ineffective – just as the lives of Percy’s protagonists become stale, worn out, and ineffective. Percy says that words become “pretty well used up” (Con I 41), especially religious words. However, from that stale and worn out platform, they move on to new possibilities, fresh frameworks, new terminology. Percy says, “Language undergoes a period of degradation, words wear out. ...in the novels, people say words and words have become as worn as poker chips, they don’t mean anything. Particularly religious words: baptism, sin God. These get worn

out and there is always a problem of rediscovering them. As the Psalmist says, you have to sing a new song: I think that's one of the functions of the novelist (Con I 140). Art – poetry, the novel – is one of the best tools for recovery. Then words move to this hopeful new world of meaning not from an ocean of pure potential, but from a context. Percy says:

But a recovery is possible. The signified can be recovered from the ossified signifier, sparrow from *sparrow*. The German soldier in *All Quiet on the Western Front* could see an ordinary butterfly as a creature of immense beauty and value in the trenches of the Somme. A poet can wrench signifier out of context and exhibit it in all its queerness and splendor. Cézanne recovered apples from the commonplace sign, *apples*. Scientists recover the inexhaustible mystery of the signified from the mundane closed-off simulacrum of the world-sign (LC 105).

Language that has become deadened can be recovered through ordeal (such as the German soldier at war above) as well as art – Percy speaks often of the deadness of ordinary Wednesday afternoons at 4 pm, as compared to the euphoria of being caught in a hurricane, a brush with death, where everything seems brighter, clearer, more present, more alive:

A sparrow becomes invisible in ordinary life because it disappears into its symbol.... The sparrow is no longer available to me. Being is elusive; it tends to escape, leaving only a simulacrum of symbol. Only under the condition of ordeal may I recover symbol. If I am lying wounded or in prison and a sparrow builds his nest at my window, then I may see the sparrow. This is why new names must be found for being, as Heidegger thinks, or the old ones given new meaning, as Marcel think. (SSL 135).

Percy complains particularly and often about the deadening of religious words; he finds their deadening – and their misuse and overuse – is a difficult obstacle for the novelist, but it can be overcome:

The words of religion tend to wear out and get stored in the attic. The word “religion” itself has a certain unction about it, to say nothing of “born again,” “salvation,” “Jesus” even though it is begging the question to assume there that these words do not have valid referents. And it doesn't help that when religious words are used publicly, at least Christian words, they are often expropriated by some of the worst rogues around, the TV preachers.

So decrepit and so abused is the language of the Judeo-Christian religions that it takes an effort to salvage them, the very words, from the husks and barnacles of the meaning which have encrusted them over the centuries. Or else words can become slick as coins worn thin by usage and so devalued. One of the tasks of the saint is to renew language, to sing a new song. The novelist, no saint, has a humbler task. He must use every ounce of skill, cunning, humor, even irony, to deliver religion from the merely edifying...

....

One reason the poet and novelist these days have a hankering for the apocalypse, the end of the old world and beginning of the new, is surely their sense that only then can language be renewed, by destroying the old and starting over. Things fall apart, words regain their value. (SSL 306).

As a novelist, Percy tackles this task in a variety of ways throughout his novels. One means of recovering sight of the symbolic world is by ordeal, through apocalypse or danger and near death, such as “a national disaster” (MB 49). Percy refers to this as *Schadenfreude*, joy in disaster, and talks about the exhilaration of hurricanes or other catastrophic events. He speaks often about the dullness of an ordinary Wednesday afternoon – and the new meaning in life that a hurricane or other disaster infuses.

Another way of recovering symbol is the novelist presenting characters who, for one reason or another, give up the ordinary use of language. Often that reason is the character’s conscious recognition that ordinary language doesn’t work. Sometimes it is psychological trauma, other times something unrelated. In *Lancelot*, Anna, Lancelot’s also hospitalized friend whom he never sees, doesn’t speak but communicates through tapping on the wall. Ally in *The Second Coming* speaks quite oddly, a unique language that she makes up in a stream-of-consciousness sort of way, and one that few can understand. Hudeen, the Mores’ aged servant in *The Thanatos Syndrome* also speaks oddly and cryptically. Yet these characters are more authentic and in touch with reality than any of the characters that surround them. “Long ago Hudeen gave up ordinary conversation. Her response to any greeting, question, or request is not the substance of language but its form. She utters sounds which have the cadence of agreement or exclamation or demurrer” (TS 39). These characters are the breath of fresh air, as Hopkins poetry is, that keeps meaning alive. Percy’s characters of Ally, Anna, and Hudeen, whose unique speech patterns challenge the listener’s mind, enable a fresh re-viewing of old and stale concepts and realities. Percy explains:

I very consciously, in almost all of my novels, I deal with the pathology of language. There is usually some character or some person who has difficulty speaking, or perhaps has some pathology in his speech or her speech – cannot speak at all, perhaps one character can only tap messages through a wall. This has to do with the fact, which I’ve written about and studied elsewhere in the philosophy of language and semiotics, of the phenomenon of the exhaustion of

language, the wearing out of language. The Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky speaks of the over familiarization of words so that words become, instead of transmitting meaning, a kind of simulacrum, a covering, a disguise of meaning. So that it is a task of the poet, and the artist, to break through the simulacrum in order to, as Shklovsky says, to familiarize, to render strange words and symbols so that they then convey. So when I have people speaking strangely, the idea is that in spite of the strangeness, in spite of the dislocations in syntax or the inappropriateness of the use of the words, the intention is that the words nevertheless convey meaning whereas the ordinary words do not.... And the trick of the novelist, the task of the artist, is always to somehow renew language, make it fresh, make it strange, if you like, pathological, if you like anything in order to transmit meaning, and to renew the process of communication. (Con II 168)

Symbol can be recaptured not only by a character's giving up or altering language, but by a poet's or novelist's intentional transformation and revitalization of language through metaphor. Percy's essay on "Metaphor as Mistake" speaks of the unintentional recapturing of symbol – of the essence of the object – through mistaken metaphor, creating "an authentic poetic experience – what Blackmur calls 'that heightened, that excited sense of being' – can experience, moreover which was notably absent before the mistake was made" (MB 65). A breakdown of the symbolic machinery is necessitated for the signified to be seen again. Gerard Manly Hopkins was much admired by Percy for his ability to do just what Percy has his characters Ally and Hudeen do – breakdown the hardened symbolic machinery of language and invent words that are fresh, new carriers of meaning and new insight:

[Gerard Manley] Hopkins had an extraordinary sense of metaphor. You see him using words, metaphors, which are like and yet very different from what they signify. He loved nature and he loved nature-descriptions, and he would use the strangest metaphors to describe, for example, clouds: rafts of clouds, slivers of clouds, shafts of clouds. He would go out of his way to distance the metaphor. (Con I 241)

When the symbol becomes too close, too familiar, it becomes overlooked and ignored and is no longer a carrier of meaning. Distance is necessary. A delicate balance between connection and distance must be struck, and the signifier that is most transparent is not hardened, but in flux, just as its signified is.

There must be a space between name and thing, for otherwise the private apprehension is straightened and oppressed. What is required is that the thing both be sanctioned and yet allowed freedom to be what it is. Heidegger said that the essence of truth is freedom. The essence of metaphorical truth and the almost impossible task of the poet is, it seems to me, to

name unmistakably and yet name by such a gentle analogy that the thing beheld by both of us may be truly formulated for what it is (MB 73).

APPENDIX B: NEW PHYSICS: QUANTUM MECHANICS

*“... advances in scientific knowledge have legitimated an alternate view of the relationship between mind and world that could obviate or displace the Cartesian view....”
(Nadeau and Kafatos xv).*

* * *

The “new physics” differs dramatically from classic Newtonian physics – which still constitutes our larger view of the world. The two theoretical foundations of the twentieth century physics, Einstein’s relativity, and especially, quantum physics, present a dramatically different, seemingly illogical, world that we live in. For the first time in the history of physics, our understanding of space and time do not correlate with what we “see” in the world. What is happening at the mathematical and microscopic and quantum level contradicts with what we understand the world to be like from a common sense, logical perspective:

In the strange new world of quantum physics we have consistently uncovered aspects of physical reality at odds with our everyday view of this reality.... The reason why nonphysicists should be intimidated by the prospect of attempting to understand the implications of the description of nature in relativistic quantum field theory are easily appreciated. The mathematics in the new physical theories was far more complex and difficult to understand than that in classical theories, and the reality described was largely unvisualizable. Hence the general consensus was that the new physics could only be understood by physicists and the rest of us could safely ignore the bizarre and strange reality described in this physics (Nadeau and Kafatos 1, 9-10).

Yet it is that bizarre and strange reality which has keys and clues to the connection between mind and matter – the coupler that Percy pursues. In this first place, the new physics refutes Descartes. “But what we have only recently begun to fully recognize and properly understand is that the description of physical reality in the new physics effectively resolves or eliminates the two-world Cartesian dilemma” (Nadeau and Kafatos 10). The new physicists almost universally reject the Cartesian view of the world:

The Cartesian order is suitable for analysis of the world into separately existent parts (e.g. particles or field elements).... However, we... discover that both in relativity and in quantum theory the Cartesian order is leading to serious contradictions and confusion. This is because both theories imply that the actual state of affairs is unbroken wholeness of the universe rather than analysis into independent parts. (Bohm xv)

However, there is still no consistent theory that arises as to the structure of matter and the universe, for several reasons. Not only are these discoveries so very different from our previous world view; their description of what matter does is often impossible to imagine - almost too bizarre and peculiar to visualize and to adopt as a working paradigm of the world. The actions of quantum entities take place "everywhere" unless we observe them (in which case they are "transformed" into particles and then have locality). Quantum entities act like both waves and particles at the same time. To add to the confusion, they don't travel in a straight line, but split themselves into twins and become two or more, become entangled, affect each other at distances, travel crazy random trajectories – parallel universes, parallel minds, multiple dimensions, curved space, warped space, particles jumping in and out of existence, acausal interactions, nonlocal principles of matter, and mind and matter seen as two aspects of the same reality. Newton's straight lines were so much easier to picture!

And the world view that comes out of the discoveries of the new physics requires such a complete paradigm shift that most people, even the physicists conducting the experiments yielding these radical results, often refuse to accept the implications of these on a "big world" level. This creates a physics not correlated with a "big" world view and not widely accepted as possible at the macro level (our visible world) even though at the micro level (quantum world) it is accepted.

For the first time since Galileo, physics is incoherent. These new quantum discoveries aren't changing our understanding of what the world is like, and, for the most part, we adhere to the old traditional view, before the discoveries that physics has made in the past century. Not just the general population, but most physicists find the implications of these findings too outlandish and unbelievable to adopt wholeheartedly. We are on the verge of a scientific revolution (a la a Kuhnian paradigm shift) or perhaps even in the middle of an unrecognized one. "One may suggest here that we are in a position which is in certain ways similar to where Galileo stood when he began his inquiries" (Bohm 138). In

Galileo's day, it took decades and centuries to change the view of the universe to that which more closely coincided with experimental results; the same is happening now.

One of the most famous examples of classical physics' inability to explain quantum activity is Heisenberg's well known Uncertainty Principle (Principle of Indeterminacy), which says that quantum particles are affected and change their behavior depending on whether or not someone actually views them. His famous experiment (in which a particle in a box is shot through a partition with two slits onto a screen behind it) shows different results solely depending on whether or not the particle has been viewed; there has been no physical change or interaction with the particles, and yet the experimental results have changed. This completely contradicts Newton's science and Descartes mind-matter divide. If there is an observer, the results show that the particle goes through one of the slits behaving as a particle; if no one observes the particle as the experiment is taking place, the results reveal that the particle went through BOTH slits, and behaved not as a particle, but as a wave, therefore making a wave pattern on the screen behind the partition. Clearly the experiment does not conform to Newton's laws ; the same kind of particle acts differently under the same conditions, with the only change being the addition of the observer? How does the particle "know" it is observed and so act differently?

But the other problem is that the two most important theories of the universe, Einstein's relativity and quantum mechanics, disagree with each other:

Calling it a cover-up would be far too dramatic. But for more than half a century – even in the midst of some of the greatest scientific achievements in history – physicists have been quietly aware of a dark cloud looming on a distant horizon. The problem is this: There are two foundational pillars upon which modern physics rests. One is Albert Einstein's general relativity, which provides a theoretical framework for understanding the universe on the largest of scales: stars, galaxies, clusters of galaxies, and beyond to the immense expanse of the universe itself. The other is quantum mechanics, which provides a theoretical framework for understanding the universe on the smallest of scales: molecules, atoms, and all the way down to subatomic particles like electrons and quarks. Through years of research, physicists have experimentally confirmed to almost unimaginable accuracy virtually all predictions made by each of these theories. But these same theoretical tools inexorably lead to another disturbing conclusion: As they are currently formulated, general relativity and quantum mechanics cannot both be right. These two theories underlying the tremendous progress of physics during the last hundred years

– progress that has explained the expansion of the heavens and the fundamental structure of matter – are mutually incompatible. (Greene 3)

Furthermore, neither of these theories have yet to alter the general population's picture of the universe – they both contradict our normal view of matter, mind, space and time. Physics is in a state of confusion; all that is clear is that physicists agree the old Newtonian and Cartesian order doesn't work anymore, but the rest of us haven't heard anything better otherwise.

THE NEW COSMOLOGY

What are the characteristics of the new physics that challenge classical physics?? Einstein believed space and time are relative, and that space is warped, not linear. Cause-effect interactions need space and time. They occur in space and time, no matter how brief or long that time or space. For one billiard ball to hit another, it must be at some distance (no matter how close or far) and has a start point that differs from the time it reaches the second ball. In classical physics, space and time are clearly described and objects within that world operate according to clear laws – Newton's mechanics. But, according to Einstein's physics, light does not exist in space and time as we know it. Not only is its speed constant, but from the point of light's origin and the point of its ending, even if that is stars or galaxies away – even if it takes, say millions of light years, in our time – for the light, the time that it took was zero. The light from the Big Bang to now took a zero amount of time to reach here – from the light's point of view. (This is why as you approach the speed of light, time slows down.)

Einsteinian physics – though it challenges Newton's simplicity – is still considered classical physics. Usually a classical theory includes observers and strict determinism, while a non-classical theory has participators and randomness. General relativity adheres to principles of logic and reason, as Einstein believed everything makes sense, and was convinced that "God does not play dice."

In quantum physics, however, things do not make sense; they appear illogical. Quantum physics proposes at least three challenges to classical physics: Bell's theorem; complementarity as in the wave-particle duality of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle; and wave function collapse, or the process by

which a particle, originally appearing to be in many states, appears to reduce to only one state after interacting with the external world.

NON-LOCALITY: BELL'S THEOREM

*Quantum mechanics is certainly imposing. But an inner voice tells me that it is not yet the real thing. The theory says a lot, but does not really bring us any closer to the secret of the 'old one'. I, at any rate, am convinced that He does not throw dice. (Einstein 1926, in *The Born-Einstein Letters*, 1971).*

* * *

But no previous discovery has posed more challenges to our usual understanding of the 'way things are' than the amazing new fact of nature known as nonlocality. This new fact of nature was revealed in a series of experiment testing predictions made in a theorem developed by theoretical physicist John Bell in response to a number of questions raised by Albert Einstein and two younger colleagues in 1936. ...Bell's now famous theorem led to the discovery that physical reality is non-local...." (Nadeau and Kafatos 1)

* * *

Einstein's famous dice quote means that he believed that physical theories must be deterministic to be complete. When particles are affected only by local actions that can be determined and measured, it is called local realism, which Einstein believed in. Therefore, he said that quantum theory could not be complete because quantum particle actions did not follow a deterministic paradigm. The famous paper by Einstein, Podolsky, and Rosen (EPR) attempted to prove the incompleteness of quantum mechanics by showing that it failed to account for some elements of physical reality, meaning the theory had hidden (unknown, that is, as yet unaccounted for but still present) variables. Einstein felt it violated the principle of finite propagation speed of physical effects, meaning that there was instantaneous communication, faster than the speed of light between one particle to another (violating Einstein's theory of special relativity regarding the speed of light). The fact that QM showed particles that did not conform to local realism meant, for Einstein, that there was missing information, these hidden variables were not accounted for, and thus, QM was incomplete.

Bell's paper, "On the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen Paradox" (1964) has been called "the most profound in science" (Stapp), and refuted the idea of hidden variables, and thus local realism. Bell's theorem states: "No physical theory of local hidden variables can ever reproduce all of the predictions of quantum mechanics." Bell's theorem shows that either quantum mechanics or local realism is wrong as it showed that local realism leads to a requirement for certain types of phenomena that are not present in quantum mechanics, called Bell's inequality, later called Bell's inequalities after experiments revealed numerous of these phenomena, (a violation of which by quantum mechanics implying that at least one of the assumptions must be abandoned (Experiments were needed to determine which is correct, but it took many years and many improvements in technology to perform them)).

Bell's theorem refutes the EPR paper. He started with these two assumptions of Einstein: (1) *reality* (microscopic objects have real properties determining the outcomes of quantum mechanical measurements), and (2) *locality* (reality is not influenced by measurements simultaneously performed at a large distance). He then theorized two observers, Alice and Bob, independently measuring two particles in a system, in which, if local realism were true, the measurement would not only reveal some objective physical property of the system (reality), but each measurement (being independent of the other) would have no effect on the other (locality). Bell's test experiments overwhelmingly showed that these principles are violated, providing empirical evidence against local realism and in favor of QM. The no-communication theorem proves that the observers cannot use the inequality violations to communicate information to each other faster than the speed of light.

"Bell inequalities" concern measurements made by observers on pairs of particles that have interacted and then separated. According to quantum mechanics they are entangled, and their measurements will coincide in some way. However, local realism says the correlation of subsequent measurements of the particles should not coincide as they are now separate, or non-local. The results of Bell's inequality experiments show that formally entangled particles do not follow the expectations of

local realists. The inequalities assume that each quantum-level object has a well defined state (explained by hidden variables) that accounts for all its measurable properties and that distant objects do not exchange information faster than the speed of light. These inequalities (the correlation limit) may be violated, Bell demonstrated. Instead, due to quantum entanglement, even separated particles' properties can be well defined only after a measurement is made on either particle. It is not the local hidden variables that explain particles' actions; instead, correlations (their actions) are predicted due to quantum entanglement, so their state is only well defined after a measurement is made on either particle. That restriction agrees with the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, an inescapable concept in quantum mechanics.

One result of Bell's theory coincides with Peirce's view of the entire universe as primarily relation, or sign (symbol) as well as with Percy's view that symbol is necessary for consciousness. In other words, at the most basic level, the smallest components of the universe operate not according cause-effect dyadic Secondness, but continuity and relation. Bell's theorem eventually proved (in the opinion of most physicists) that Einstein's local hidden variables are impossible.

The characteristics of the new physics are exactly the characteristics of the language event – nonlinear, nonenergetic; or, in this case, nonlocal and acausal.

CONTINUITY AND NON-CAUSAL CORRELATIONS - BOHM'S IMPLICATE ORDER

It is an inference from the quantum theory that events that are separated in space and that are without possibility of connection through interaction are correlated in a way that can be shown to be incapable of a detailed and causal explanation. (Bohm 129)

While the two major theories to arise out of the 20th century don't agree on many points: "in relativity, movement is continuous, causally determinate and well defined, while in quantum mechanics it is discontinuous, not causally determinate and well defined" (Bohm xv), they do, according to physicist David Bohm, "agree in that they both imply the need to look on the world as an undivided whole, in

which all parts of the universe, including the observer and his instruments, merge and unite in one totality” (11).

Physicist David Bohm in *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* presents another picture of this new order (by no means universally accepted – at this point in time, many competing theories of the universe abound) that he calls the “implicate order,” or, a kind of stream of consciousness, in which “in this flow, mind and matter are not separate substances. Rather they are different aspects of one whole and unbroken movement” (Bohm 11). Our traditional ideas of space and time are not the underlying basis of matter and the universe but are actually “forms derived from a deeper order” (Bohm xv). Bohm’s theory is obviously one answer to the Cartesian split.

Bohm proposes the everyday world of space, time and causality is the *explicate order*, and underlying this everyday world is an interconnected one which he calls the *implicate order*, with, conversely, no spatial or time separation. Wheeler illustrates Bohm’s “participatory universe” with a “U” with an eye on top of one leg of the U, viewing the universe itself at the top of the other leg; they seem separate but are actually connected just as two ends of the U are connected.

The implicate order is non-local. Bohm called a part of the quantum equation the *quantum potential*. The quantum potential is non-local, and is responsible for all the non-local effects predicted by the theory. The quantum potential acts like a radio beacon guiding the electrons. The photon is not a particle; it is an electromagnetic field whose particle-like behavior arises because of its interaction with the quantum potential, which is Einstein’s hidden variable. Bohm explains:

Yet, since these projections exist only as abstractions, the three-dimensional reality *is* neither of these. ... What is actually found [in the experimental tests of Bell's theorem] is that the behavior of the two [electrons] is correlated in a way that is rather similar to that of the two television images of the fish, as described earlier. Thus ... each electron acts as if it were a projection of a higher-dimensional reality [the implicate order].... What we are proposing here is that the quantum property of a non-local, non-causal relation of distant elements may be understood through an extension of the notion described above. (Bohm 187-188)

If Bohm's interpretation is correct, quantum mechanics despite being non-local is still deterministic. Bohm's unbroken wholeness of the implicate order implies that any kind of fragmentation and separateness in the world – even our selves, minds and thoughts – is an illusion. He writes that "fragmentation is continually being brought about by the almost universal habit of taking the content of our thought for 'a description of the world as it is'" (Bohm 3), and recommends meditation to get past the illusion of fragmentation (25).

Bohm hoped his theory would be experimentally testable; however, this has not happened to date.

CONTINUITY - A THEORY OF EVERYTHING

Bohm's implicate order is by no means the only explanation for the odd behavior of quantum particles. Many physicists speculate as to what this "deeper order" or new cosmology of the universe – mind and matter – might be. Roger Penrose, who also was searching for the key to consciousness, believes it is "hidden in the fissure between the two major theories of modern physics: Quantum mechanics, which describes electromagnetism and the nuclear forces, and general relativity, Einstein's theory of gravity" (Horgan 1). Penrose tackles the "unified theory" that will unite the two, and all physical forces, into one single theory "which involved exotic quantum and gravitational effects percolating through the brain," in an attempt to unify physics (quantum and Einsteinian theory) – a "monumental achievement, a theory that in one stroke would unify physics and solve one of philosophy's most vexing problems, the link between mind and matter" (Horgan 1, 2).

Other theories abound – the many worlds interpretation, for example. The most popular and well-known, or "hottest," theory around (by the standards of the world of physics) is "superstring" theory, or a theory of everything. Superstring theory says that the smallest units of "matter" are not particles or waves, but rather circular strings, vibrating in and out of 7 to (up to) 11 dimensions. Superstring theory also may lead to the idea that space and time disappear at some levels of the

universe (Greene 387). Only when strings “appropriately undergo sympathetic vibrations do the conventional notions of space and time emerge” (Greene 378).

Physics is still wrestling with important hurdles to reconciling quantum mechanics and relativity – a theory of everything – to reduce everything to the one explanatory mathematical sentence the encompasses everything (also viewed as seeing all the forces – strong, weak, gravitational, electro-magnetic, as one). Obviously, mind and body, consciousness and matter, fall under the umbrella of everything. At least one clue to the answer, which Percy’s more traditional view didn’t encompass, was clearly in 20th century physics discoveries and advancements.

CONTINUITY – THOMAS’S INTERSUBJECTIVE BIOLOGY

Physicists were not the only scientists engaged in a paradigm shift; biologist Lewis Thomas looks at the entire biological world as connected: “We do not have solitary beings. Every creature is, in some sense, connected to and dependent on the rest” (Thomas 7). He sees our world as a sort of whole entity, with an organic oneness, continuity and connectedness that quantum particles show. The community of organisms make an organism itself qualitatively different than the sum of its parts; Peirce’s idea of the individual as secondary and derivative and Percy’s ideas of tetrads and intersubjectivity is echoed in Thomas’ biology.

I have been trying to think of the earth as a kind of organism, but it is no go. I cannot think of it this way. It is too big, too complex, with too many working parts lacking visible connections. The other night, driving through a hilly, wooded part of southern New England, I wondered about this. If not like an organism, what is it like, what is it *most* like? Then, satisfactorily for that moment, it came to me: it is *most* like a single cell. (Thomas 5)

Like a cell, the individual parts of the earth have no identity or place; they are essentially useless. When combined, it is a functioning organic entity. Like a quantum particle, the solitary ant or termite is directionless, purposeless, and unpredictable. Put thousands together, and you have an organized ordered social unit working towards a common purpose – not unlike matter, which on a larger scale

than quantum, makes sense in that it conforms to predictable laws as defined by Newton's laws of mechanics. Thomas says:

A solitary ant, afield, cannot be considered to have much of anything on his mind; indeed, with only a few neurons strung together by fibers, he can't be imagined to have a mind at all, much less a thought. He is more like a ganglion on legs. Four ants together, or ten, encircling a dead moth on a path, begin to look more like an idea. They fumble and shove, gradually moving the food toward the Hill, but as though by blind chance. It is only when you watch the dense mass of thousands of ants, crowded together around the Hill blackening the ground, that you begin to see the whole beast, and now you observe its thinking, planning, calculating. It is an intelligence, a kind of live computer, with crawling bits for its wits... Termites are even more extraordinary in the way they seem to accumulate intelligence as they gather together. Two or three termites in a chamber will begin to pick up pellets and move them from place to place, but nothing comes of it; nothing is built. As more join in, they seem to reach a critical mass, a quorum, and the thinking begins. (Thomas 12-13)

Percy, too, says consciousness does not exist in isolation. Only in community is language and consciousness possible.

Just as it seems the nature and rules of matter change from a micro level (quantum) to a macro level (visible matter), so do the biological creatures of the world seem to transform:

When social animals are gathered together in groups, they become qualitatively different creatures from what they were when alone or in pairs. Single locusts are quiet, meditative, sessile things, but when locusts are added to other locusts, they become excited, change color, undergo spectacular endocrine revisions, and intensify their activity until, when there are enough of them packed shoulder to shoulder, they vibrate and hum with the energy of a jet airliner and take off. (Thomas 53)

Thomas also wonders if this social group that acts as a unit has a consciousness of its own.

Individual minds are thought to have consciousness; when combined, does the unit have a consciousness?⁹⁹ Just as human minds are made up of cells and made of particles that as a whole, giving humans consciousness, could this be true of the "particles" (the individual social creatures) of a social group? "It may turn out, as some scientists suggest, that we are forever precluded from investigating consciousness by a sort of indeterminacy principle that stipulates that the very act of looking will make it twitch and blur out of sight. If this is true, we will never learn" (Thomas 52). Interestingly, physicists

⁹⁹ Peirce drew that conclusion. See CP 6.155-157 and CP 6.271

today also speculate about quantum consciousness; quantum particles seem to act “with a mind of their own” when acting individually – or in entangled pairs. Thomas says these social creatures, as solitary entities, are not too dissimilar from quantum particles.

There is an underlying force that drives together the several creatures comprising myxotricha, and, then drives the assemblage into union with the termite. If we could understand this tendency, we would catch a glimpse of the process that brought single separate cells together for the construction of metazoans, culminating in the invention of roses, dolphins, and, of course, ourselves. It might turn out that the same tendency underlies the joining of organisms into communities, communities into ecosystems, and ecosystems into the biosphere. If this is, in fact, the drift of things, the way of the world, we may come to view immune reactions, genes for the chemical marking of self, and perhaps all reflexive responses of aggression and defense as secondary developments in evolution, necessary for the regulation and modulation of symbiosis, not designed to break into the process, only to keep it from getting out of hand. If it is in the nature of living things to pool resources, to fuse whenever possible, we would have a new way of accounting for the progressive enrichment and complexity of form in living things. (Thomas 29-30)

IMPLICATIONS OF A PARADIGM SHIFT TO CONTINUITY - INFLUENCE NOT FORCE

Who could have guessed that the intuitive mechanical clockwork Newtonian perspective would turn out to be so thoroughly parochial – that there was a whole new mind-boggling world lying just beneath the surface of things as they are ordinarily experienced. (Greene 386)

* * *

...what we have only recently begun to full recognize and properly understand is that the description of physical reality in the new physics effectively resolves or eliminates the two-world Cartesian dilemma. (Nadeau and Kafatos 10)

* * *

What do we really mean by the fabric of the universe? ... Newton declared space and time to be eternal and immutable ingredients in the makeup of the cosmos... Gottfried Leibniz and others vociferously disagreed, claiming that space and time are merely bookkeeping devices for conveniently summarizing relationships between objects and events within the universe. The location of an object in space and in time has meaning only in comparison with another... Although Newton's view... held sway for more than two hundred years, Leibniz's conception, further developed by the Austrian physicist Ernst Mach, is much closer to our current picture. (Greene 377)

* * *

How does this relate to dyads, triads, tetrads, and couplers? Heisenberg's light quanta changing behavior depending on whether or not there is an observer. Greene's strings vibrating in harmony and Bohm's unbroken stream of consciousness (or reality) present a very different picture of reality from the Newtonian view of hard material objects knocking and crashing against one another and producing effects – a dyadic interaction. Also real, though invisible, are Peirce's third category of signs, triads, or what Percy referred to as symbol. Ideas, relations, relationships, are triadic.

Percy's goal: to show us, his readers, that the universe is not solely dyadic, not solely explainable by causal analysis. Percy moves, as do Peirce and others, to triads to explain that the world transcends causality and he adequately describes and accounts for, through triadic theory, world events and entities (such as symbol, language, humans) that aren't accounted for with dyadic science. However, Percy could have continued further, examining not just THAT triads explain these things, but how and why triads work. A synchronistic model of the universe explains that. As Ketner says, Percy "did and didn't" make a paradigm shift to a synechistic, continuous view of reality (KK). At times, in places, he grasps many of Peirce's principles; in other places, he is reluctant to consider their further implications. But he did grasp fully that something was clearly wrong with the reigning paradigm of dyadic science.

One significant outcome of quantum physics is that it shows the classical physical view of the world is inadequate to fully describe it. The complete micro/macro universe works differently than our common understanding of it:

With solid faith that laws of the large and small should fit together into a coherent whole, physicists are relentlessly hunting down the elusive unified theory... and the challenges these developments pose to our previous way of seeing the world are monumental: loops of strings and oscillating globules, uniting all of creation into vibrational patterns that are meticulously executed in a universe with numerous hidden dimensions capable of undergoing extreme contortions in which their spatial fabric tears apart and then repairs itself. Who could have guessed that the merging of gravity and quantum mechanics into a unified theory of matter and all forces would yield such a revolution in our understanding of how the universe works? (Greene 386-87)

However vague or unsupported or entirely different these “pictures” of the universe are, now created by the top physicists in the world, they do agree for the most part on some important points that would have been of interest to Percy. First, Cartesian duality is a grossly inaccurate picture of the world. Mind and matter are not separate, and they are at least some way interrelated, if not different aspects or actions of the same substance. That they at least are interacting, in a noncausal or nonlocal manner, is generally agreed upon by most of the new physicists. If we do acknowledge at least these generally agreed upon principles of the structure of the universe, while allowing that the whole picture as yet is unclear, we have insight into the “reality” of Peirce’s principles of abduction, tychism and synchesim; Jung’s synchronicity; and Percy’s coupler – as they also do not conform to the laws of Newton’s mechanics.

The four dimensional world (three dimensional space plus time) that is visible to us is a manifestation or result of what happens at the quantum level; however, the invisible quantum level has aspects never imagined or pictured by those of us at the macro level – and that we may never be able to picture or verify through experiment. The scientific method requires experimental verification with repeatable results. Because quantum particles are so unpredictable, because verification usually takes place in a four dimensional realm and we have no idea how to observe much less verify other dimensions, and because instrumentation to verify actions are so small and so fast does not exist, a “theory of everything” may have to remain confirmed only with logic and math. In addition, experimental verification assumes the universe is logical and isn’t a game of “dice” as Einstein insisted. Greene concludes:

However, maybe there is a limit to comprehensibility. Maybe we have to accept that after reaching the deepest possible level of understanding science can offer, there will nevertheless be aspects of the universe that remain unexplained. Maybe we will have to accept that certain features of the universe are the way they are because of happenstance, accident, or divine choice. The success of the scientific method in the past has encouraged us to think that with enough time and effort we can unravel nature’s mysteries. But hitting the absolute limit of scientific explanation – not a technological obstacle or the current but progressing edge of

human understanding – would be a singular event, one for which past experience could not prepare us. (Greene 385)

Whatever the specific shape of a quantum theory, it shows rather a universe flowing together, a web of life, in which not force, but influence shapes the world.¹⁰⁰ Force destroys and can do so immediately. Influence creates, shapes, and calls into being, and does so over long periods of time.

“Influence” and flow are in the realm of Thirdness – and relationship. Force is the realm of Secondness. Influence of thought, of desire, of intention, of individual action beside, not upon, other particles.

As Charles Sanders Peirce said – relation is basic, and material entities are derivative – and modern physics is revealing this. All is connected, continuous, and all influences and affects each other. While Walker Percy denied that metaphysics was the way to answer the problem of the coupler, and chose as his diagnostic tool the human, modern physics as well as the philosophers he corresponded with, continually tried to redirect him back to metaphysics. Peirce said it himself before physics did, when he said all is fundamentally relations or Thirdness – and it was the answer Percy sought but never found – or perhaps found but had difficulty accepting wholeheartedly because of his traditional mindset which was more comfortable with established worldviews.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ We see this happen at the macro level: communities – friends or even whole towns – may start out quite differently but gradually start to become alike and complementary – with no conscious intention to do so. It is well known that married couples look alike, not just in dress, but in mannerisms, voice inflection and phrasing, facial expressions and even facial features. Communities adopt similar values; just rubbing off on each other by being around each other. Even women who live together begin to have their menstrual periods aligned for no outside discernible physical reason; they have become biologically entangled.

¹⁰¹ See chapter 1.6 for a discussion of Percy’s preferences for traditional paradigms.

If we know triadic activity is synchronistic, not linear, it goes far to explain what is happening, to refute the dyadic model and the behaviorist's scheme of things, and to explain what happens with the triadic event. Percy himself describes symbol and triadic activity synchronistically: He describes the use of symbol as a "*pairing* [as opposed to a succession]... a laying of symbol *alongside* thing" [my italics]." He continues, it is "intentional relation of identity" (SSL 134). Simultaneity is implied here, which belies a cause-effect paradigm in which events are *separate*, separated in time as well as space. Human symbol mongering is not entered into in order to obtain, but to wonder about and encounter the signified. Percy writes, "A symbol does not direct our attention to something else, a sign does. It does not direct at all. It 'means' something else. It somehow comes to contain within itself the thing it means" (MB 153). This is the continuity of Thirdness and the new physics.