# Voices That Matter: Walker Percy's Semiotic Masculinity in *The Moviegoer*

*Ryoichi* Yamane*

Walker Percy's novel *The Moviegoer* (1961) not only echoes mid-twentieth century American male anxiety similar to that found in two seminal works of the time, William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956) and Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.'s essay, "The Crisis of American Masculinity" (1958), but it also offers a fresh perspective on the issues of masculinity during that era. The novel challenges the traditional focus of masculinities studies centered on the body, presenting literary voices that act as a conduit through which the physical and the linguistic, the material and the discursive, and the biological and the social intersect, to shape masculine identity. Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound* (1988) describes the novel's setting in post-World War II America as a time of an unprecedented surge in birth rates, fervor for the traditional family, and intensified fears of nuclear weapons. Percy's novel tells the story of its narrator Binx Bolling as he navigates social pressures regarding fertility and individualistic masculine identity. This essay illuminates how Percy, influenced by the semiotic theories of Charles S. Peirce, crafts his literary voices to explore male anxiety about fertility in response to hegemonic masculinity embodied by movie stars. Ultimately, it emphasizes the importance of addressing gender issues in relation to the proliferation of human life, highlighting voices that matter—those that affirm one's presence in the human community based on human language and bodies.

## 1.   IDENTITY, BODY, AND VOICE

At the beginning of Walker Percy's first novel, *The Moviegoer* (1961), the narrator Binx Bolling, a single stock and bond broker about to turn thirty who lives in suburban New Orleans, learns that Hollywood star

* Associate Professor, Tokyo Institute of Technology

William Holden is shooting a film at a hotel in downtown New Orleans. Binx decides to take the bus to the hotel to try to catch a glimpse of the famous leading man. Binx steps off the bus and onto the street jammed with shoppers who were "nearly all women" (12), and fortuitously Holden appears right in front of him. At this point, Binx also notices a newlywed couple, probably in their twenties and likely from the Northeast, walking nearby. As Binx observes the pair, he notices that the young husband appears to be anxious and wonders whether the husband may be concerned that he might not be satisfying his wife during their honeymoon at the clichéd tourist destination. When the young couple catches sight of Holden, the husband's anxiety seems to worsen. Binx imagines that the husband is saying to himself, "What a deal …trailing along behind a movie star—we might just as well be rubbernecking in Hollywood" (16).

*The Moviegoer* tells the story of Binx's search for meaning in his life as an adult male in mid-twentieth century America. This episode at the beginning of the novel provides the reader a first glimpse at Percy's linking his protagonist's self-searching, first-person narrative voice and the discourse on the masculinity crisis taking place during America's post-war baby-boom from the mid-1940s to the early 1960s. As historian Elaine Tyler May explains, the baby boom was a time when "family fever swept the nation and affected all Americans" (3), compelling men to adhere to communal norms to build stable families, thereby alleviating fears of the Cold War world characterized by the threat of nuclear war and the presence of ideological enemies abroad. In this context, the contrast between Holden and the young groom reflects the narrator's own inner conflict—his anxiety over his life as a bachelor, about to turn thirty.

Most previous scholarship on *The Moviegoer* has focused on the novel's regionalist-existentialist perspective and not on Binx's masculine narrative voice. For example, in *The New South 1945–1980* (1995), historian Numan V. Bartley interprets *The Moviegoer* as a reflection of diminishing regional identity within the national consumerist mass culture of the post-World War II era: "In the brave new existentialist world of Southern thought, people searched for individual identities amid the ruins of community disintegration and ethical chaos" (267).

Analysis of the novel's regional and philosophical perspective dominates more recent scholarship as well, with the narrator's masculinity a relatively peripheral matter. While Tiffany Messick, for instance, analyzes Binx's father's masculine identity, stating that "[b]eing a man means Dr. Bolling is presumed to have control over his nervous system and body" (392),

her analysis does not completely deviate from the hitherto regionalist-existentialist scope. According to Messick, Binx's father's masculinity represents "Cartesianism in Southern US culture" (377), a traditional regional epistemology influenced by Descartes's *cogito*. Messick does attempt to go beyond the regional frame of the American South by applying Karen Barad and Stacy Alaimo's transcorporeal and post-humanist theories to the novel. Defining the human body as "part of a series of open-ended systems—environmental, biological, economic, and political—that it cannot master" (389), Messick explores how the presence of external forces surrounding Binx affects his self-consciousness, questioning the idea of total independence or detachment from the outside world. But her analysis tacitly underestimates the importance of Binx's masculine voice, which is shaped more by his inner conflict as a grown, nearly 30-year-old man than by his environment.

The regionalist-existentialist trajectory of Percy scholarship is unsurprising, given the novelist's cultural and philosophical inheritances. Percy begins the book with a simple dedication of gratitude to "W.A.P.," the author's uncle and foster parent William Alexander Percy. The elder Percy, a prominent figure in Greenville, Mississippi, was known for his best-selling memoir *Lanterns on the Levee* (1941). The memoir vividly portrays the author's life in the Mississippi Delta and beyond, expressing his "distress over the decline of old values and the emergence of a starkly materialistic ethic" (Bartley 5). In *The Moviegoer*, this regionalist acknowledgement is followed by an epigraph—a quotation from *The Sickness unto Death* (1849) by Danish Christian existentialist Søren Kierkegaard: "… the specific character of despair is precisely this: it is unaware of being despair" (Percy, *The Moviegoer*).

But the novel's publisher Alfred A. Knopf also seems to have clearly understood the novel's relevance to issues of male identity arising contemporaneously in the United States. An October 14, 1960 in-house document described the target readership of *The Moviegoer* as "[t]hose who respond to Buechner, Updike, Styron, and other explorers of the basic spiritual troubles of our time. A book for young people and those not too old to be concerned about the young" (Kauffman). A review of the novel, part of which the publisher used for advertising the book, added another name, J. D. Salinger, to the literary associations with Percy: "What a nice writer! A 'Catcher in the Rye' for adults only" (Miller). The use of these rising male novelists' names in the book's marketing suggests that Binx's ontological predicament as an adult male reflects questions about masculinity with

which the broader society was struggling at the time.

With its protagonist's anxiety over his masculine identity, *The Moviegoer* deserves its due recognition in the discourse of the study of men and masculinities. In his 2022 review essay in the journal *American Literary History*, Christopher Breu writes: "The idea of the 1950s representing a crisis moment in US masculinity is a common trope" (590). The established scholarly approach to understanding the predicaments men faced during this decade focuses on William H. Whyte's book *The Organization Man* (1956) and a 1958 *Esquire* magazine essay "The Crisis of American Masculinity," written by Harvard historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., who was staunchly anti-totalitarian and anti-communist during the Cold War.

This approach embraces Whyte's argument that contemporary men were relinquishing their individuality to conform to the organizational logic of mass culture, in which "[a]djustment rather than achievement becomes the social ideal" (Schlesinger 299). This idea mirrors Cold War binarism, wherein being strongly anti-communist, individualistic, and masculine contrasted starkly with being accommodating toward the political enemy, group-oriented, and feminine. According to K. A. Cuordileone, Schlesinger's polarized logic, typified by his *Esquire* essay as well as his best-selling work *The Vital Center* (1949), constitute an integral part of "[t]he inflated manly bravado, the hard/soft dualisms, the excessive scorn for the feminine, and the language of perversion and penetration" (522) in early Cold War American political culture. The solution to male anxiety Schlesinger proposes in his *Esquire* essay focuses on adopting an individualistic and therefore anti-totalitarian identity: "The key to the recovery of masculinity lies rather in the problem of identity. When a person begins to find out *who* he is, he is likely to find out rather soon what sex he is" (301). Schlesinger's cold war vision thus turns issues of masculinity into individual existential matters, consistent with evaluating Percy's narrator's self-searching masculine voice through a political, de-regionalized framework as well.

Among the books discussed in Breu's *American Literary History* essay is Clive Baldwin's 2020 study that revisits the Whyte-Schlesinger link to argue that "an idealized individualism, embodied in the White, male body, is being eroded along with a consequent feminization of American culture" (34) during the post-war years. Through this lens, the first chapter of Baldwin's book adeptly reinterprets works by Sloan Wilson, J. D. Salinger, Jack Kerouac, and Edna Ferber, all published during the 1950s, as reactions to the conformist feminizing forces influencing men's individualistic

identity. Although Baldwin does not discuss *The Moviegoer* in his study, Percy's 1961 novel can be seen as a very similar type of reaction to the forces affecting the "organization man" as the books Baldwin identifies from the previous decade. As noted above, *The Moviegoer*'s marketing likened Percy to Salinger, and Percy's literary critique, "The Man on the Train: Three Existential Modes" (1956), discusses Sloan Wilson's best-selling novel *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, albeit from a different approach than Baldwin's.

In this paper, I endeavor to bring a new dimension to Baldwin's argument that emphasizes the central role that the "White, male body" plays in expression of masculinity and its erosion in mid-twentieth century America. As suggested by the title of her influential book, *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Judith Butler famously considers the material "body" not merely as a fixed entity, but as the site of gender performativity where various social norms and power dynamics function to form gender identities. But what about the importance of not just male bodies, but male *voices* in the construction and expression of masculinity?

While Baldwin takes it for granted that "[m]asculinity is commonly expressed through the body" (21), this presupposition itself derives from voices that serve as a medium through which the physical and the linguistic, the material and the discursive, and the biological and the social, intersect to shape masculine identity. This essay sets forth how Percy's anxious and uncertain self-fashioning masculine voice is in constant negotiation with the contemporaneous national discourse, characterized by intensified images of life and death—that is, the baby boom and the fear of a nuclear annihilation. Coming to understand how Percy constructs his distressed masculine literary voices as a locus for these intersections illuminates the importance of rebalancing body-oriented academic approaches to American masculinity with those that focus on voice. This essay argues that not just bodies, but "*voices* that matter" are crucial to understanding the expression of masculinity in mid-twentieth century America.

*The Moviegoer*, published during the baby-boom era marked by a crisis of masculinity, acknowledges societal pressures upon the male body, especially its fertility, through its portrayal of an overtly heterosexual male narrator who is hesitant to have his own family due to his anxiety over his future. Yet, the novel also offers pathways for alleviating that burden by emphasizing the importance of voices of both male and female bodies, based on philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic concept, which will be discussed in detail below. Ultimately, I contend that the voices that

matter in *The Moviegoer* are those that imbued with Peircean semiotic significance, symbolize Percy's vision of pathways for the proliferation of human life and connection to counter the forces of hegemonic power and oppression within the sociopolitical context of masculinity of the novel's contemporary setting.

## 2.   The Hegemonic Voice

In *The Moviegoer*, the connection between Binx's voice and his uncertain and evolving concept of masculinity is apparent from the very first chapter, when the protagonist visits his foster mother Aunt Emily. En route to her house, Binx recalls the pressure-filled remark she made to him following the death of his older brother Scott when Binx was just eight years old. At the time, Aunt Emily urged the young Binx to grow up fast: "It's going to be difficult for you but I know you're going to act like a soldier" (4). Binx then narrates to the reader his routine of going to the movies, detailing his sexual experiences and his job as a stock and bond broker in Gentilly, a middle-class suburb of New Orleans. He has had sexual relationships with successive female secretaries—first Marcia, then Linda—and now he is attempting to approach his new secretary Sharon (7–8).

Percy incorporates not only masculinity but at times homophobic undertones into Binx's self-searching voice. Binx explains that two years before settling in the suburbs, he left the French Quarter, where he could no longer tolerate "Birmingham businessmen smirking around Bourbon Street and the homosexuals and patio connoisseurs on Royal Street" (6). Shortly thereafter, Binx reports: "This morning for the first time in years, there occurred to me the possibility of a search. I dreamed of the war, no, not quite dreamed but woke with the taste of it in my mouth, the queasy-quince taste of 1951 and the Orient" (10). This self-conscious statement about the discomfort of his "mouth" and "taste," blurring the boundary between his body and voice, speaks of his bitter memory of his Korean War experience, while implicitly restating his homophobia.

According to *Green's Dictionary of Slang* (2008), the word "quince" by 1966 could refer both in the US and Australia to "a homosexual, esp. one who can be both active and passive" (421). The word "queasy," is also phonetically similar to the slang terms "queanie" or "queany," which by 1941 could mean "effeminate" (402), thus also suggesting that Binx's recollection of Korea is mixed with his aversion to homosexuality. Further supporting this possible interpretation is the fact that Binx as narrator

devotes much greater attention to his sexual interests than to his war experience throughout the novel.

Percy's conception of heterosexist masculinity is also interconnected with his regional identity and existentialist philosophical perspective. In Percy's 1975 article for *Esquire* entitled "Bourbon," the author links the ideas of the nineteenth-century existentialist Kierkegaard with bourbon, a well-known Southern whisky. Percy suggests that drinking bourbon is synonymous with self-recognition, comparable to "a kind of aestheticized religious mode of existence" (104). Percy's linking drink, aesthetics, the South, and existentialism in this 1975 essay could shed light on why Binx had such antagonism toward businessmen on "Bourbon Street," who exemplified the incompatibility of organization-man conformism and an artistic, religious self-searching journey. Illustrating this aesthetic more clearly, Percy's *Esquire* essay evokes an image of William Faulkner upon his completion of *Absalom, Absalom!* (105). Percy's depiction of the distinguished novelist from the American South, wearied by the completion of his literary masterpiece, swiftly consuming bourbon during a chilly winter hunting expedition in the wilderness, stands as an embodiment of the essence of the bourbon aesthetic.

Percy also inserts homophobia into his 1975 essay to buttress his hypermasculine existentialist image of Faulkner, published in the same magazine that published Schlesinger's essay about masculinity two decades before. In stark contrast to the image of Faulkner's masculine bourbon drinking in the Southern wilderness, Percy rather derisively encourages his readers to imagine the connoisseur-like figure of the famed film and stage star Clifton Webb "savoring a 1959 Mouton Rothschild" (104) at a tourist destination in southern France. Throughout Webb's acting career on Broadway and in Hollywood from the 1940s onward, the actor's queerness was, if not an open secret to moviegoers, an expected role that he played with efficiency. A film study by Leonard Leff recounts the consistency of Webb's performances, including the peculiar ways he pronounced his lines in an overtly gay manner: "Webb was important in classical Hollywood not solely because he made queerness *mean*, but because—even after Fox [Twentieth Century-Fox film studio] put him on the straight and narrow—he reconciled the contradiction of *queer* and *star*" (23).

What unfolds in the episode in *The Moviegoer* I began describing at the beginning of this essay in which Binx and the newlywed couple encounter the actor and Hollywood heartthrob William Holden also underscores Percy's understanding of masculinity in ontological terms. This time, he

does not use bourbon as his aesthetic device, but cigarettes. According to Richard Klein, the existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre considered cigarettes, characterized by their indistinctive, useless, and consumable nature, to "belong to Nothing" (28), thereby undermining the modern bourgeois sense of self "based on the premise that I am what I have" (31). In Percy's novel, on the other hand, cigarettes function as an object that bestows an inauthentic individual with a sense of masculine identity by creating homosocial relationships among men while alleviating existential concerns. Holden tries to light a cigarette on the street but realizes he does not have a match. The actor attempts to borrow one from some nearby women, who appear to narrator Binx to be housewives visiting from Hattiesburg, Mississippi, but they only create a fuss upon recognizing him. It is at this moment that that unfortunate young groom regains his confidence:

> The boy holds out a light, nods briefly to Holden's thanks, then passes on without a flicker of recognition. Holden walks along between them [the newlywed couple] for a second; he and the boy talk briefly, look up at the sky, and shake their heads. Holden gives them a pat on the shoulder and moves on ahead.
> The boy has done it! He has won title to his own existence, as plenary an existence now as Holden's by refusing to be stampeded like the ladies from Hattiesburg. He is a citizen like Holden; two men of the world they are. (Percy, *The Moviegoer* 16)

The image of the masculine heterosexual Holden clearly differs from that of the queer Webb and neatly fits the category of what sociologist R. W. Connell calls hegemonic masculinity. "Indeed the winning of hegemony," Connell claims, "often involves the creation of models of masculinity which are quite specifically fantasy figures" (*Gender and Power* 184).

While Connell's concrete examples of these "models" are "Humphrey Bogart, John Wayne, and Sylvester Stallone" (184–85), Holden, especially in the 1950s, belonged to this group of masculine actors. In contrast, the anonymous newlywed groom plays his role in reinforcing masculine hegemony. He succeeds in accessing Holden's "plenary" existence when he wins the honor to give the actor a light, creating a bond between himself and the movie star. In this male-dominant scene, where female characters, such as the bride and the shoppers do no more than play backseat roles, the young man, in Connell's terms, "benefit[s] from the patriarchal dividend,

the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women" (*Masculinities* 79). Like Connell, Binx highlights hegemonic masculinity in his illustrations of male and female characters, imbuing his male characters with masculine significance that distinguishes them from females. Binx in this scene employs what Connell would describe a quarter century later as a trope of hegemonic masculinity as part of his search for his unadulterated masculine self.

### 3.   Symbols and Bodies

Perhaps implicitly paying homage to Judith Butler's 1993 book, Connell conceptualizes gendered bodies as physical phenomena located in social processes and practices, asserting that "[b]odies, in their own right as bodies, do matter" (*Masculinities* 51). Furthermore, the sociologist underscores the importance of the materiality of bodies firmly embedded in history and society, and cautions that these bodies "do not turn into symbols, signs or positions in discourse" (64).

However, symbol-laden voices are no less crucial than bodies in fully understanding how Percy's narrator expresses his and others' masculinity. In *The Moviegoer*, Percy creates voices for his characters that negotiate with their gendered bodies and serve as conduits for a wide array of cultural symbols, both reinforcing and challenging hegemonic masculinity. In *Walker Percy's Voices* (2000), Michael Kobre explains how semiotic and dialogical concepts derived from Charles Sanders Peirce and Mikhail Bakhtin pervade Percy's literary oeuvre, that is "an echo chamber filled with the voices of parents, counselors, friends, lovers, and even distant icons of American history and popular culture" (16).

Percy became familiar with Peirce's semiotic model or structure after he and his wife Mary Bernice (known as Bunt) relocated to New Orleans in 1947. During this time, they crossed paths with Julius Friend, an editor of the literary journal *The Double Dealer*, who initiated Percy into the world of Peircean semiotics (Samway, Introduction x). According to biographer Patrick Samway, Percy considers the Peircean structure to consist of three elements: "a sign, its object (or *designatum*), and interpretant in an interpreter" (xiv), who through the process of semiosis finds meaning in the coupling of the sign and its object.

For Percy, this triad is irreducible in human communication. Throughout his long career as a writer of novels and philosophical essays, he uses the word "Delta" to refer to Peirce's semiotic structure. In his essay "Delta

Factor" (1975), Percy asserts the distinctiveness of human beings as "symbol-monger[s]" (17) through the triangular Greek letter Δ, with each corner representing a word, a thing, and a person. The crux of this "Delta phenomenon" (40), as Percy describes it, is the interconnected nature of the three elements which cannot be differentiated or separated from each other by cause and effect processes. According to Percy, "there must be a coupler" (44)—that is, an almost religious affirmation that something mysterious in human nature, and not present in other animals, enables a person to connect a word and the thing it signifies.

An episode in *The Moviegoer* provides a perfect example of how Percy incorporates his interpretation of Peirce's semiotic structure in his work. Early in the novel, Binx recounts the words his old college friend Walter used to invite Binx to join his fraternity. Percy even cleverly names the fictional fraternity Delta, which would seem natural to the reader because fraternity names use the Greek alphabet. Walter, a leader of Delta, describes his fraternity to Binx as follows (first referring to members of several other fraternities):

> "They're all good boys, Binx. I've got friends in all of them. 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 lapel to show the pin, and I wondered if it was true that Deltas held their pins in their mouths when they took a shower—"there's not much I can say, Binx." (37)

Percy is clearly demonstrating how masculinity is a product of not just bodies, but symbols as well. The Peircean triad conveys a particular type of masculinity with Walter's description of the Delta fraternity, established upon the foundation of homosocial mutual trust. Sharing a sense of "a unique something" (37) in the ineffably distinctive atmosphere of the male-only Delta House residence is the singular requirement that Walter imposes on Binx to become a member.

What is necessary in the men's social contractual relationship is that they share a bond as "good boys," whatever it may mean, as represented by the symbol of the Delta pin. Binx recalls before being invited to join Delta, he and other freshman candidates waited for their admission interviews "while the brothers stood around courting us like virgins and at the same time eyeing us like heifers" (36). But he and others were able to join Delta only upon declaring that they share the special male bond that the Delta pin

represents. In this thoroughly symbolic treatment of masculinity, Walter's ritualistic announcement to Delta members that "I believe he'll make us a good man" (38) is sufficient in itself to mean that Binx is "a good man."

From Judith Butler's psychoanalytical view, this conception of masculinity derives from a melancholic constitution of a heterosexual, masculine ego and its preconditioned act of repudiating what is not masculine or heterosexual. Binx "wonders," but never asks Walter whether the implicitly homoerotic rumor about Deltas holding their symbolic fraternity pins in their mouths when they showered is true. This reticence, lingering long after their college years, speaks volumes about gender performativity that "produced retroactively the illusion that there was an inner gender core" (Butler 31). With his narrator's voice and silence, Percy renders his concept of masculinity as part of the semiotic relationship among men, based on their mutual trust.

In other words, the symbolic structure itself means nothing without intersubjective connections between people. Approaching his thirtieth birthday, Binx recalls the ritualistic speech given by Walter, observing: "As it turned out, I did not make them a good man at all" (38). Percy goes further by having Binx, along with this expression of alienation, also narrate his own inability to acquire a consensus regarding his masculinity from women. For instance, when Binx and his secretary, Sharon, experience a car accident during an after-work drive to the Gulf of Mexico, she notices a shoulder wound that he sustained in combat during the Korean War. Binx personally regards his wound to be "as decent as any ever inflicted on Rory Calhoun and Tony Curtis" (126). He summons these actors' images as a means to view his own injured masculine body both theatrically and self-consciously. However, his female secretary physically resists comprehending the significance of the wound as "decently" masculine:

> "All right, you watch here." She balls up her fist like a man's and smacks me hard on the arm.
> "That hurts."
> "Then quit messing with me."
> "All right. I won't mess with you."
> "Hit me."
> "What?"
> "You heard me. Hit me." She holds her elbow tight against her body.
> "Come on boy." (133)

Demanding that Binx hit her with genuine force, Sharon, upon receiving a blow from Binx, feigns strength by retorting, "That didn't hurt. I got a good mind to hit you right in the mouth, you jackass" (133). Sharon's boyish actions "against her body," to induce Binx to hit her exemplify "masculinity produced by, for, and within women" (15), as displayed by iconic butch figures in visual culture that Jack Halberstam discusses in *Female Masculinity* (1998). The secretary's self-inflicted wound is a source of her masculinity and offsets any possible masculine meaning that the mark on Binx's body might imply.

Percy underscores this point when later in the novel he creates another scene in which female masculinity dominates, and he evokes the image of a damaged shoulder again to symbolize the weakness and inadequacy of Binx's performance of masculinity. This time, elderly Aunt Emily's voice, and not her body, articulates the traditional regionalist ideal of masculinity that respectable White Southern men should exhibit. After Binx takes her mentally unstable stepdaughter Kate on a short trip to Chicago without notifying her family members, Aunt Emily denounces Binx's irresponsibility in a lengthy and reprimanding speech. In that speech, she likens Binx's lack of reliability to "leaning on what seems to be a good stalwart shoulder and feeling it go all mushy and queer" (221). By doing so, she implicitly repudiates out loud any manner in which Binx's combat injury to his shoulder could attest to the strength of his masculinity, in a way reminiscent of how Sharon does. Binx's male body does not matter to his aunt, but the residual ideal of Southern men does:

> "More than anything I wanted to pass on to you the one heritage of the men of our family, a certain quality of spirit, a gaiety, a sense of duty, a nobility worn lightly, a sweetness, a gentleness with women—the only good things the South ever had and the only things that really matter in this life." (224)

Aunt Emily's eloquent representation of regionalist masculinity, similarly to Sharon's physical confrontation with Binx, prevents Binx from showcasing his masculine identity as a war veteran and exploiting what Sally Robinson terms "identity politics of the dominant" (3), i.e., heterosexist strategies of White males to counter the identity politics of racial and sexual minorities through the visualization of their mental or physical wounds. This politics, rooted in "the logics of victimization" (12), was a salient feature among White male writers' literary works, especially from the late 1960s to the

late 1980s, when the privileged positionality of White men "*outside* the struggles over gender, race, and identity" (24–25) began to erode, and White maleness became just one of many identity categories. However, in Binx's case, his mark of victimization fails to restore his central position in his community because the female characters around him, either physically or rhetorically, depreciate his wound by asserting their own masculinity that appears to be stronger than his. *The Moviegoer* engages in this form of self-pitying White men's identity politics, but simultaneously predicts its limit by employing strong and masculine female characters.

Percy's protagonist Binx neither confronts the conformist society represented by the image of the "organization man" nor attempts to reestablish an individualist masculine identity for himself. Instead, Percy transposes masculinity from male bodies to female ones and vice versa, thereby destabilizing a gendered version of the semiotic triad consisting of the signified (masculinity), the symbols signifying it (pins and the wound), and the couplers of the first two (Binx, Walter, Sharon, and Aunt Emily). The triad does not function well among them because these male and female characters do not share any fixed understanding of masculinity.

## 4. The Voice as a Critic, Thinker, and Father

With this personal search for masculinity based on hegemonic gender ideals proving unsuccessful, Percy, as well as his character Binx, turn instead toward understanding masculinity as part of a communal, civilizational challenge concerning proliferation of human life. Percy does this both through the novel and through participating in the discourse of mid-1950s American print culture in which fear of nuclear apocalypse loomed large.

In the novel, Binx becomes preoccupied with how his sense of masculinity is part of a grandiose idea about humanity right after Aunt Emily rebukes him for taking her stepdaughter Kate to Chicago. He says: "… men are dead, dead, dead; and the malaise has settled like a fall-out and what people really fear is not that the bomb will fall but that the bomb will not fall—on this my thirtieth birthday, I know nothing and there is nothing to do but fall prey to desire" (228). With this seemingly incoherent monologue, Percy locates his narrator Binx within the concerns of American nuclear-age culture. By the novel's publication, Percy, like that young groom lighting Holden's cigarette, strove to find his own masculine position, but not at a tourist spot and instead in the nation's print culture

by participating in conversations about the fear of nuclear war. Exploring Percy's voice as a critic, thinker, and father reveals other key aspects of his concept of masculinity beyond the surface hegemonic and heterosexist one he gives voice to in *The Moviegoer*.

After the US monopoly on nuclear weapons ended and the Cold War nuclear arms race began, some dominant cultural figures, whose primary concerns were issues other than nuclear war (which they considered a very significant secondary issue) endeavored to link their primary concerns to fear of nuclear war, in order to magnify the seriousness of their primary concerns. In "America the Beautiful" (1947), Mary McCarthy, a novelist and one of the most influential social critics during the early Cold War era, criticizes the passivity of Americans in the nuclear age whom she characterizes as adrift in consumerist society with no idea about the meaning of what they possess: "It must be admitted that there is a great similarity between the nation with its new bomb and the consumer with his new Buick" (18).

Philosopher William Barrett in *The Irrational Man* (1958) also uses atomic imagery to explain to his contemporary readers the importance of digesting the long tradition of existentialism: "There is by this time widespread anxiety and even panic over the dangers of the atomic age; but the public soul-searching and stocktaking rarely, if ever, go to the heart of the matter" (3). The link between existentialist anxiety and fear of nuclear annihilation is also shared by Lewis Mumford in *The City in History* (1961), winner of the National Book Award for Nonfiction in 1962 (the same year *The Moviegoer* won the National Book Award for Fiction). Mumford refers to the global threat of overabundant nuclear bombs and excessively bloated "Nuclear Powers" (635), claiming that what is imperative for modern civilization is "creating a visible regional and civic structure, designed to make man at home with his deeper self and his larger world, attached to images of human nurture and love" (652).

*The Moviegoer* set in New Orleans was never thematically unrelated to these New York intellectuals' arguments; however, the novel is noteworthy for its somewhat detached perspective on the then-contemporary culture of nuclear fear mongering. Dedicated readers of Percy would quickly recognize that Binx's assessment that "what people really fear is not that the bomb will fall but that the bomb will not fall" derives nearly verbatim from a passage in Percy's 1956 *Partisan Review* essay "The Man on the Train":

The contingency "what if the Bomb should fall?" is not only not a

cause of anxiety in the alienated man but is one of his few remaining refuges from it. When everything else fails, we may always turn to our good friend just back from Washington or Geneva who obliges us with his sober second-thoughts—"I can tell you this much, I am profoundly disturbed …"—and each of us has what he came for, the old authentic thrill of the Bomb and the Coming of the Last Days. Like Ortega's romantic, the heart's desire of the alienated man is to see vines sprouting through the masonry. The real anxiety question, the question no one asks because no one wants to, is the reverse: What if the Bomb should *not* fall? What then? (479)

By incorporating the "romantic" imagery borrowed from Spanish thinker José Ortega y Gasset into American nuclear-age culture, Percy delves into what lies beneath the surface of contemporary nuclear fear, as the New York intellectuals do—that is, human beings who are part of a civilization that use language cannot completely become alienated from one another. The first lines of Percy's essay assert, "There is no such thing, strictly speaking, as a literature of alienation. In the re-presenting of alienation the category is reversed and becomes something entirely different" (478). In other words, insofar as readers can perceive a sense of alienation in writings, both readers and writers are not alienated subjects; on the contrary, they affirm their mutual existence within the language community in which they communicate.

   The fact that Percy published his existentialist essay in a highly influential postwar liberalist magazine, in which Barrett is credited as an associate editor until the fall 1955 issue, demonstrates the acceptance of an independent New Orleans writer's voice into the community of those who participated in US print culture at the time, irrespective of his personal, regional, or racial identity. The New York-based magazine also published ideas that many of Percy's fellow White Southerners might not fully appreciate. Alongside other established writers such as Robert Lowell and Irving Howe, the same 1956 issue of *Partisan Review* that published Percy's essay included "Faulkner and Desegregation," James Baldwin's critical response to Faulkner's polemical *Life* magazine essay of the same year entitled "Letter to the North." In Faulkner's essay, the prominent Southern author expressed hesitancy toward the idea of rapidly dismantling the segregated social structure of the Jim Crow South following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The African American Baldwin strongly criticizes the White Faulkner: "After more than two hundred years

in slavery and ninety years of quasi-freedom, it is hard to think very highly of William Faulkner's advice to 'go slow'" (568).

Baldwin's image of a regressive Faulkner has the potential to conflict with Percy's—not just because of Percy's different racial and regional identity, but because of Percy's regard for Faulkner as an exemplar of his masculine, existentialist bourbon aesthetic as discussed above. Despite the stark disparity between Baldwin and Percy's perspectives, Percy's existentialist essay imagining nuclear holocaust had its position alongside Baldwin's essay excoriating Faulkner's "go slow" attitude toward racial change in the South in the same edition of the same magazine. From Percy's perspective, the inclusion of the two articles together would provide another example of how there can truly be no literature of complete alienation.

Percy's primary interest lies in the conception of White American masculinity and the ideal of family in the nuclear age, rather than racial identity in the South. In "The Man on the Train," Percy criticizes author Sloan Wilson's rendering of the protagonist in *The Man in the Gray Funnel Suit* (1955), Tom Rath. Percy contends that Rath is no more than "a dismal impersonation" (494) of the role American men were expected to play both in the 1940s and 1950s. By contrast, Clive Baldwin discusses Rath in relation to the concept of the "organization man," pointing out the author's masculinist tactics of "fusing Rath's heterosexuality with a display of patriarchal integrity that is intended to bolster male individualism against the threats of conformity" (39). Additionally, this character fits into the broader cultural and political atmosphere of the 1950s. Historian Elaine Tyler May observes that "[a]s the cold war began, young postwar Americans were homeward bound" (1). Wilson's rendering of Rath aligns with this trend surrounding the image of the family as a safe haven from threats such as nuclear war and communism. The protagonist in Wilson's novel is a war veteran and an employee of a big media company who succeeds in establishing himself as a reliable, fertile breadwinner for his numerous family members. Indeed, Rath supports not only his wife, Katy, and their three children in a suburban area of the Northeast but also his Italian lover Maria and their son outside marriage in Europe.

Despite Percy's criticism of Wilson's novel, the desolate but "romantic" vision that Percy articulates earlier in his essay also appears in Wilson's novel. The already-married Rath as an officer in the European theatre in World War II meets teenage Maria in Italy. He has an affair with her and goes on a drive in the countryside to have a picnic. During the drive, Maria

recounts how she saw the bodies of her parents outside their family home minutes after they had been killed in a bomb attack. Rath stops the jeep to console Maria, and after 10 minutes of crying uncontrollably she asks Rath whether he thinks she is beautiful. He responds, "Very beautiful" (177), and when she alludes to the fact that in addition to losing her parents, she will also lose him after the war, he simply kisses her instead of responding verbally.

Soon thereafter, they stumble upon an abandoned villa where he drove "the jeep slowly around the driveway which encircled the building, past a swimming pool choked with fallen masonry" (178). For the male Rath, the ruined masonry symbolizes an opportunity to be coupled with the sexual other, the teenage Maria, like Ortega's romantic image of masonry to which Percy refers in his essay. Quoting the words of his uncle's friend and psychologist, Percy's essay concludes his critique of Wilson's novel: "In Harry Stack Sullivan's words, the mark of success in the culture is how much one can do to another's genitals without risking one's self-esteem unduly. But when the Bomb falls, the risk is at a minimum" (494). Percy's concluding words, which suggest a degree of envy for the fictional Rath's masculine success, perhaps reflect Percy's feelings about his own life during the mid-1950s, residing unemployed in Covington, Louisiana with his wife Bunt and their two daughters, and still contending with the effects of tuberculosis, which he had contracted in 1942 when working as an intern at Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan (Samway, *Walker Percy* 118–22).

After Percy and Bunt settled in Covington, a town that was relatively conducive to his health, they decided to adopt their first child, named Mary Pratt after his paternal grandmother, from St. Vincent's Infant Asylum. In 1954, Bunt gave birth to their second daughter, Ann Boyd, who was found to be deaf. Percy and Bunt rejected the idea of enrolling Ann at St. Joseph's School for the Deaf in New York and looked for a way to homeschool her, with the help of Doris Mirrielees, a pioneering teacher and advocate for deaf children (Samway, *Walker Percy* 171–78). In *Walker Percy* (1997), Patrick Samway describes Percy as both a writer and a paternal figure, who while striving to publish his first novel "[w]henever the weather was agreeable … wrote in the open air as Ann played nearby" (188).

The biographer also wonders whether Percy's interest in Peircean semiotics in fact derived primarily from his relationship with his deaf child because Percy's academic writings on the link between language and human existence, such as "Symbol as Hermeneutic in Existentialism" (1956), include repeated references to Helen Keller and Ann Sullivan.

Samway asks: "Was Ann Boyd the one who forced Walker to reflect on the irreducibility of self and symbol?" (180). If true, then it is plausible to argue that Percy's interest in the semiotic Peircean triad—those irreducible three elements in the delta phenomenon—is associated with his own personal idealistic heterosexual family image, where one plus one equals more than three—i.e., a husband and wife beget children. Percy in "The Delta Factor" even wonders whether the triad could be called "the Helen Keller phenomenon" (41), referring to when people experience sudden awareness of finding themselves within the language network. In departing from conventional ways of thinking, he asks, "What did I have to lose?" (41). Percy faces minimal risk in this philosophical adventure because he and his family are not alienated individuals themselves, but constituents of the semiotic phenomenon rooted in language—voiced interactions that need not be auditory.

   All of this suggests that life itself matters to Percy, and not just his philosophical concepts of the contemporary masculine ideal or the fundamentally communal function of linguistic communication. In a 1986 interview, first published in the conservative *National Catholic Register*, Percy discusses a variety of social issues, such as the decline of American religious devotion, apathy toward the once feared prospect of nuclear war, and the feminist pro-choice movement since the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, legalizing abortion nationwide. Moderate is his defense of Catholic pro-life, anti-abortion beliefs. Percy remarks in the interview: "I notice that a lot of people who are extremely opposed to abortion don't want to do anything to preserve life in other areas" ("Walker Percy on the Church" 120). He also describes himself as a writer who consistently confronts images of death: "One of the things that runs through all of my novels is that we live in the century of death. If the 20th century is characterized by anything, it's death" (120–21).

   In *The Moviegoer*, Percy's notions of sex and gender circle around the topic of biological reproduction as both a communal and a personal matter. Late in the novel, Aunt Emily conversing with Binx points to an African American chimney cleaner she sees on a nearby street and laments the decline of the racist social structure of the American South: "If he out yonder is your prize exhibit for the progress of the human race in the past three thousand years, then all I can say is that I am content to be fading out of the picture. Perhaps we are a biological sort" (224). Emily's racist voice is, on the one hand, a product of what she knows about the White Southern masculine ideal that she demands that Binx embody; on the other

hand, it indirectly shows her wish to see her stepdaughter Kate and nephew Binx coupling with each other to sustain their family tree. Earlier in the conversation Aunt Emily asks Binx directly about his sexual relationship with her stepdaughter, "Were you intimate with Kate?" (222).

In essence, Aunt Emily hopes that Binx's heterosexual masculinity will lead to her having grandchildren, but both she and Binx refrain from articulating this wish. Instead, they communicate indirectly about the matter through discussing grand secondary issues of Southern racial social structure and the White masculine ideal, akin to the way writers of their time stoked fear of nuclear war as a secondary issue to magnify their primary concerns. When Binx states, "Whenever I take leave of my aunt after one of her serious talks, I have to find a girl" (228), he does not explicitly agree with Aunt Emily's masculine ideal itself but clearly understands what else she means by invoking the ideal. Binx as narrator thus constructs Aunt Emily's voice from a shared linguistic community of Southern Whites and feels an obligation to contribute to maintaining or increasing the number of White human bodies within their cultural milieu.

## 5.   Voices for Life

Shortly after his conversation with Emily, Binx, driven by sexual desire, visits his secretary Sharon's apartment, but she is absent because she is meeting with her mother and her fiancé Stan. Sharon's roommate Joyce, who "sounds like Pepper Young's sister" (229), attends Binx instead, and Binx then directs his attention to her. He begins to seduce her, hearing his own voice, like "[o]ld confederate Marlon Brando—a reedy insinuating voice, full of winks and leers and above all pleased with itself" (230). When this voice becomes intolerable even to himself, Binx spots through the window the figure of Kate, the only person in his community with whom he can share a sense of alienation. He muses to himself about his connection to Kate, and the previously deadly vision of the "masonry" turns to a positive, post-apocalyptic one:

> Is it possible that—For a long time I have secretly hoped for the end of the world and believed with Kate and my aunt and Sam Yerger and many other people that only after the end could the few who survive creep out of their holes and discover themselves to be themselves and live as merrily as children among the viny ruins. (231)

Binx's voice transitions from one of Brando's hegemonic masculinity to one that imagines merry innocent children, and simultaneously from the grip of fear of nuclear annihilation to imagining an opportunity for a small number of nuclear war survivors to construct a new civilization. Aunt Emily's White supremacist apocalypse could disappear for good if she herself were one of the lucky survivors "who lived merrily as children."

Binx's fantasy about returning to such a version of youthfulness also speaks of his profound uncertainty about the future. Shortly after he sees Kate that afternoon, the two of them talk on Ash Wednesday in Kate's car parked on the street outside a school, located next door to a church. Binx reveals to Kate not only his intention to attend medical school, per Aunt Emily's wishes, but his intention to marry Kate. The two discuss their future together caringly as an anxious Kate expresses her tremendous fear. Then, Binx suddenly sees in the rear view mirror a new Mercury model car pull up and what he describes as a very respectable looking middle class African American man sporting an "Archie Moore mustache" (233) get out and go to the church to attend Ash Wednesday services. Benjamin Mangrum argues that Percy's portrayal of Aunt Emily's African American butler Mercer earlier in the novel reveals a profound limit to Percy's existentialism because Binx views Mercer, not as a "who, "but as a "what" (133). Percy thus renders the racial other as "a measure, a means, a route for authentic consciousness" (133) to be achieved by the narrator.

However, the symbolic masculine significance of the African American churchgoer's "Archie Moore mustache" is unignorable. Archie Moore was the great African American light heavyweight boxing champion of the time, who had an exceptionally long career, winning the light heavyweight title for the first time at age 39, sixteen years after he began competing. Indeed, Moore retired at age 49 in 1963 (after the events of the novel took place), not long after losing a fight to the up and coming boxer Cassius Clay (Muhammad Ali). The unnamed African American character with the "Archie Moore mustache" embodies the hopes of both thirty-year-old fictional Binx, who is notably mature for a first-year medical student, and the author himself, who was in his mid-forties when he published his first novel. Percy's somewhat understated symbolic representation of racial integration could be likened to Faulkner's "go slow" approach articulated in his regressive 1956 *Life Magazine* essay. However, instead of narrating the tragic consequences of miscegenation as Faulkner did in *Absalom*, Percy's "mustache" symbolization represents at least a positive, if not fully articulated, vision of the vitality of an emergent post-Jim Crow South.

Percy ends the novel with an innocent affirmation of the uniting function of symbols as a coupler that imbues a word or thing with a significance beyond itself. At Aunt Emily's request, Binx had recently for a period of time been doing a number of tasks for her downtown. But when Binx's fourteen-year-old half-brother Lonnie lay dying in the hospital from a severe viral infection, he wanted to be with Lonnie and other family members and asks Kate, who was not only Aunt Emily's stepdaughter and his own stepcousin, but now his new wife, to retrieve a government bond certificate for her Aunt Emily in his stead. To make things easy for the anxious Kate, he figures out exactly what she needs to do, instructing her: "Here's what you do: take the streetcar, get off at Common, walk right into the office. Mr Klostermann will give you an envelope—you won't have to say a word …" (241). Still sensing Kate's unease, Binx picks a cape jasmine flower that he noticed Kate had spotted as they were talking and gives it to her. At the very end of the novel, Kate receives it, then reaffirms Binx's instructions, while he responds to her by simply confirming or repeating her words:

> "I'm going to sit next to the window on the Lake side and put the cape jasmine in my lap?"
> "That's right."
> "And you'll be thinking of me just that way?"
> "That's right."
> "Good by."
> "Good by."
> Twenty feet away she turns around.
> "Mr Klostermann?"
> "Mr Klostermann."
> I watch her walk toward St Charles, cape jasmine held against her cheek, until my brothers and sisters call out behind me. (242)

In this final scene in the novel, Binx does not directly express his love for Kate because part of him remains uncertain about it. Accordingly, Kate must infer a metaphorical connection, a coupler linking the cape jasmine to Binx's love. Her feeling that Binx is expressing love for her is contingent upon her interpretation of the flower.

In this scene in which Binx is reticent about his masculine love for Kate because his future holds no guarantee, Percy adds one more element to underscore the communal nature of their coming together. Percy gives the

name "Klostermann" to the man from whom Kate will pick up the envelope downtown. The name Klostermann derives from the medieval German word for a lay man in a "cloister," or a monastic community ("Cloister (n.)"), thus reinforcing the communal function of the words and symbols employed in the scene. After Binx watches Kate walk toward St. Charles Street, he then describes his own departure from the scene not in his own voice alone, but through the communal voices of family members. Many of Binx's family members are still alive, including his mother, maternal half-brothers, and half-sisters (Jean-Paul, Mathilde, Clare, Donice, and Thérèse), even though some of them—his father; his brother Scott; his half-brother Duval have already died, and his half-brother Lonnie's death is imminent. By concluding his own story as a response to the voices of his younger brothers and sisters, Binx speaks in an emerging but still not fully formed masculine voice, paving a different path from Tom Rath's very fertile one, but similarly driven by life rather than death.

## 6.   CONCLUSION

Percy's debut novel offers an alternative perspective on the Cold War discourse surrounding American masculinity in crisis. It voices his anxieties and hopes regarding the ability of masculinity to reproduce and safeguard life in the baby boom society of the nuclear age marked by a high birth rate and omnipresent images of death. Percy does not pretend to know what the future will bring. When his protagonist Binx speculates to himself why the African American man with the "Archie Moore mustache" is present at the church streetcorner, his ultimate response is: "It is impossible to say" (235). With these words, Percy through his narrative protagonist also seems to be speaking more generally of the future and how the concept of masculinity will shape it. Percy's perception of masculinity is no doubt limited due to the social values he holds as a person born into a White, heterosexual, cisgender male body; however, he does not revert to meeting the hegemonic gender expectations of his gendered surroundings, which include the presence of movie stars like William Holden, as a solution to his anxiety over masculinity in mid-twentieth century America.

In coming to understand the mid-twentieth century crisis of masculinity and its implications in their full context and complexity, do the type of bodies people have alone matter so much as to obviate the importance of life-affirming voices of a century, which was marked by numerous conflicts and wars? Do voices matter unless they can link words, things, and persons

across differences to foster human connection and create, sustain, and grow communities? How important are our answers to these questions? It *is* possible to say.

## WORKS CITED

Baldwin, C. *Anxious Men: Masculinity in American Fiction of the Mid-Twentieth Century*. Edinburgh UP, 2020.

Baldwin, J. (1956). Faulkner and Desegregation. *Partisan Review (New York, N.Y.)*, (Fall), 568–573.

Barrett, W. *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy*. 1958. Anchor, 1962.

Bartley, Numan V. *The New South 1945-1980*. Louisiana State UP, 1995.

Breu, C. (2022). Rethinking Masculinities Studies. *American Literary History*, *34*(2), 586–595.

Butler, J. "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification." *Constructing Masculinity*, edited by Maurice Berger et al., Routledge, 1995, pp. 21-36.

"Cloister (n.)." *Online Etymology Dictionary*. https://www.etymonline.com/word/cloister. Accessed 1 April 2024.

Connell, R. W. *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics*. Stanford UP, 1987.

Connell, R. W. *Masculinities*. 2nd ed., U of California P, 2005.

Cuordileone, K. A. (2000). 'Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960. *The Journal of American History*, *87*(2), 515–545.

Halberstam, J. *Female Masculinity*. 20th anniversary ed., Duke UP, 2018.

Kauffman, Stanley. Editorial Fact Sheet on *The Moviegoer*, Oct. 14, 1960. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Records 1873-1996 (bulk 1945-1980). Box 1252, Folder 6. Harry Ransom Center. The University of Texas at Austin.

Klein, R. *Cigarettes Are Sublime*. Duke UP, 1993.

Kobre, M. *Walker Percy's Voices*. U of Georgia P, 2000.

Leff, L. (2008). Becoming Clifton Webb: A Queer Star in Mid-Century Hollywood. *Cinema Journal*, *43*(3), 3–28.

McCarthy, M. (1953). "America the Beautiful: The Humanist in the Bathtub." 1947. *Perspectives USA*, (2), 11–22.

Mangrum, B. *Land of Tomorrow: Postwar Fiction and the Crisis of American Liberalism Postwar Fiction and the Crisis of American Liberalism*. Oxford UP, 2018.

May, E. T. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. Rev. ed., Basic, 2017.

Messick, T. (2019). Walker Percy's Netflixer: Transcorporeal Epistemologist. *The Mississippi Quarterly*, *72*(3), 377–406.

Miller, Warren. "From A Letter from Warren Miller about 'The Moviegoer' by Walker Percy" Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Records 1873-1996 (bulk 1945-1980). Box 1252, Folder 6. Harry Ransom Center. The University of Texas at Austin.

Mumford, L. *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations and Its Prospects*. Penguin, 1961.

Percy, W. "Bourbon." *Signposts in a Strange Land*, edited by Patrick Samway, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975, 102-07.

Percy, W. "The Delta Factor: How I Discovered the Delta Factor Sitting at My Desk One

Summer Day in Louisiana in the 1950's Thinking about an Event in the Life of Helen Keller on Another Summer Day in Alabama in 1887." *The Message in the Bottle; How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with the Other*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975, pp. 3-45.

Percy, W. (1956). The Man on the Train: Three Existential Modes. *Partisan Review (New York, N.Y.)*, (Fall), 478–494.

Percy, W. *The Moviegoer*. 1961. Methuen, 2004.

Percy, W. "Walker Percy on the Church, Abortion, Faith, and Nuclear War." 1986. *More Conversations with Walker Percy*, edited by Lewis A. Lawson and Victor A. Kramer, UP of Mississippi, 1993, pp. 113-26.

"Queanie." *Green's Dictionary of Slang*. Vol. 3, 2010.

"Quince." *Green's Dictionary of Slang*. Vol. 3, 2010.

Robinson, S. *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis*. Columbia UP, 2000.

Samway, P. *Walker Percy: A Life*. Loyola P, 1997.

Samway, P. H. Introduction. *A Thief of Peirce: The Letters of Kenneth Laine Ketner and Walkner Percy*, edited by Patrick H. Samway, UP of Mississippi, pp. ix-xix.

Schlesinger, Jr, Arthur M. "The Crisis of American Masculinity." 1958. *The Politics of Hope and the Bitter Heritage: American Liberalism in the 1960s*, Princeton UP, 2008, pp. 292-303.

Wilson, S. *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. 1955. Penguin, 1983.