

Walker Percy's *Lancelot* and the Critic's Original Sin

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Yarbrough, Stephen R. (1988) "Walker Percy's *Lancelot* and the Critic's Original Sin." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 30 (Summer): 272-94.

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Article:

There is one story and one story only that is worth your telling.

—Robert Graves, "To Juan at the Winter Solstice"

And the Lord God said, Behold, the In WI is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever. . .

—Genesis 3:22

Stanley Fish in *Surprised by Sin* (1987) claimed that Milton's method in *Paradise Lost* "is to re-create in the mind of the reader (which is, finally, the poem's scene) the drama of the Fall, to make him fall again exactly as Adam did and with Adam's troubled clarity."¹ Three years later in the preface to the paperback edition, Fish said he no longer believes it is necessary to "construct a special argument" for specifying "the peculiarly circular nature of the reader's relationship" to *Paradise Lost*, since such a relation holds between the reader and any text (ix).

In 1975 James M. Cox made a similar claim about the relationship between the reader and the text of *The Scarlet Letter*. On the one hand, Hawthorne's book is "about the consequences of an original sin of adultery" to a Puritan community: each time the community "fixes the blame" upon Hester and her child, its acts of judgment increase the society's own guilt. On the other hand, the book "makes the reader re-enact the scapegoating process he condemns in the Puritan community."² Like Fish, Cox describes a circular and reflective relationship between the story of the text and the story of the reader's reading:

To act out these indictments in the form of interpretation is to recommit the sin—or at least half the sin—of "The Scarlet Letter," which is scapegoating one person or institution in defense of another.

Having recommitted the sin, the fortunate reader call, in an act of self-judgment, begin to release himself from re-enacting the repression *in* the past to which he previously felt superior. (445)

Cox's most startling claim is that, even for the critic who has become aware of this circular relationship, there is no escaping it. As readers, we may experience the novel "in the form of a new interpretation—an *original* interpretation," yet "fall] we do is move from interpretation to interpretation in transcendent acts of pride" (446).

Fish's and Cox's analyses suggest that to experience these stories properly is to reexperience the same experience that we enacted in the stories being interpreted. More than that, however, Fish suggests that the experience of reading is *necessarily* a reenactment of the experience enacted by the story. This implies that the story being read and the story of the reader's reading are in some sense the same story—always and necessarily. Logically, we are led to the apparently absurd claim that all stories are in fact versions of the same story. But is the claim so very absurd?

First, let us consider the problem from the side of the reader's story. In *On Deconstruction* Jonathan Culler makes the following observation:

To discuss an experience of reading one must adduce a reader and a text. For every story of reading there must be something for the reader to encounter, to be surprised by, to learn from. Interpretation is always interpretation of something, and that something functions as the object in a subject-object relation, even though it can be regarded as the product of prior interpretations.³

The dualism that is required to tell a story about a story sets up a possible conflict between the first story and the second. The second storyteller (the critic) has a choice: either simply to repeat the first story, that is, retell the story the way he or she believes it has traditionally been told, or to tell a new story by interpreting it in a way that conflicts with what he or she believes is its traditional interpretation. Thus the intent to interpret produces a difference, one rendered insignificant by the choice to repeat the original by "doubling" it, or one made significant by the decision to promote the second over the first. However, for the second story to be a story of "experience," "discovery," or "surprise," it must be told as a negation of the first story, in terms of the first story, therefore preserving the first story within itself. In either case, the first story is recapitulated.

Edward W. Said's differentiation between origins and beginnings in *Beginnings* describes this same process. In Said's terms, "whereas an origin *centrally* dominates what derives from it, the beginning (especially the modern beginning) encourages nonlinear development, a logic giving rise to [a] sort of multileveled coherence of dispersion."⁴ Originations continually return to the same origin or center, elaborating it but repeating it nevertheless. Beginnings, however, oppose the origin, dispersing the continuity in favor of contiguous development. To Said, there is a real difference between these two; nevertheless, he recognizes that successful opposition tends to be successive, that is, that critical opposition tends to reestablish the same hierarchical structures it formerly opposed, and therefore criticism must ultimately become self-critical (378).

The point here is that authors can anticipate this difference between interpretations that repeat or elaborate prior, conventional readings of texts and those interpretations that depart radically from the past. Imitative fictions, whether they imitate "life" or fictional precursors, must have their characters depart from conventional, expected courses of action at some point if they are to produce experience, discovery, or surprise. They must, in short, transgress an authorized expectation and thus commit a kind of "original sin," thus producing an originating difference which serves as a normative value for interpreting the text.

Certainly, there are innumerable ways in which such an originating difference can be articulated. As the Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards says of the story of Genesis, when "man sinned, and broke God's covenant," certain consequences were inevitable. "It were easy to show," he says in the *Doctrine of Original Sin Defended*, "how every lust, and depraved disposition of man's heart would naturally arise from this *privative* original."⁵ Authors who know the disposition of their audiences can anticipate their weakness whether, as in the case of Milton's audience, it is a predisposition toward an overreliance upon Ramist logical rhetoric, or whether, as in the case of Hawthorne's Victorian audience, a tendency to violate the "sympathy of sin" and assign moral blame to some scapegoat. Given such an anticipation, authors can deprive readers of what they would need to know in order to confirm their predisposed interpretation, and so produce a story that, if readers interpret radically from the normal expectation (e.g., read Satan as a noble figure or the Boston community as the sinners), they will reenact the same "sins" that enact the stories.

Such stories deserve to be called "original" stories because they are radically aware of an originating differentiation, a normative center, whose attempted violation they anticipate. For such stories, every interpretation is understandable only as a differing response to the same fundamental situation. The story of the reader's reading will be the "same" story as the story the reader has read—the story of the Fall. These stories, I would claim, reestablish the Western tradition with their each retelling. Our tradition is a tradition and not a discontinuous series of literary events because such stories refer to the original one, the first story—Genesis—not specifically to the biblical story of the Fall necessarily, but to the structure of falling, as such.

In fact, I would assert that in the West, entire "world views" have differentiated themselves from one another according to a primary normative standard—by their varying interpretations of the first story.

Whether one believes one is born innocent and falls into the "habitual categories of standard adult perception"⁶ (the scheme of romantic thought as it has been traced by M. H. Abrams); whether one believes that one is born depraved and fragmented and can return to original unity only through a redirection of one's perception through grace (the scheme of Pietist thought);⁷ or whether one accepts the nihilistic position that there has never been an original unity and (like J. Hillis Miller) thinks that the "situation of dispersal, separation, and unappeasable desire is the 'original' and perpetual human predicament,"⁸ the position one takes and the understanding of one's difference from the opposing positions is articulated *as* a position toward the story of the Fall.

The case is the same whether, like Nietzsche, one finds the Fall in a specific historical occurrence (in *his* case, in the "greatest error that has ever been committed, the essential fatality of error on earth,"⁹ Aristotle's positing of the law of noncontradiction), or whether, like Heidegger, one finds that falling "reveals an *essential* ontological structure of Dasein itself"¹⁰ and that falling cannot be transcended at all but only encountered authentically or inauthentically. And whether, like Sartre, one believes that "original sin" is to act in "bad faith" by accepting the authority of others when confronted with a moral choice;¹¹ or whether, like the literal fundamentalist Christian, it is to disobey revealed authority in moral matters; or whether, like the humanist Irving Babbitt, original sin is the "moral indolence" of following one's impulses and not mediating between traditional authority and the unique emergency of a present situation,¹² each position is a differing response to the same fundamental situation.

I
Walker Percy's *Lancelot* (1977)¹³ also enters the Western tradition as an original story in the sense that I have tried to describe above, and in a distinctly postmodern way. Written at the very height of the popularity of formalist and structuralist reading, Percy anticipates that the conventional reader will find it to seem unfinished and therefore flawed and that the radical reader will seek an absolute closure, a "solution" to the story's apparently unsatisfactory ending.

Lancelot has been interpreted several times as a story about a reenactment of original sin, understood as the sin of pride in the certainty of knowledge. Lance's pride is the theme of Robert Coles's 1978 analysis,¹⁴ and according to William J. Dowie, Lance's decision "to play God and divide mankind into the sheep and the goats" renders him "guilty of supreme hubris."¹⁵ Mark Johnson, too, has quite persuasively explicated Lance's particular form of pride as the book's main theme: "The ostensible subject is infidelity, but the real focus is epistemology, the need to know."¹⁶

Each of these critics arrives at his thesis through traditional procedures of interpretation. In each the plot is constructed as follows: Lancelot Andrewes Lamar narrates the events leading up to his incarceration in a "Center for Aberrant Behavior" to an old friend who remains silent until the very end of the story. Lance has been suffering from amnesia, but as he speaks he gradually remembers what happened, so that intertwined among his reflections upon his life, society, and religious beliefs the reader gets a fairly clear picture of what happened. Lance accidentally had run across evidence that his wife had been unfaithful. Wanting to be certain of this before confronting her, he conducted a series of investigations that eventually convinced him that what he believed was true. On the last fateful night, Lance rigged his home, Belle Isle, to explode and sent his daughter and servants away for the night. As a hurricane raged outside, he found his wife in bed with her lover and murdered him. He and his wife then talked in bed, choking on *gas*. He lit a lamp. The house exploded; his wife and some actors who were making a movie at his plantation died in the explosion. Lance was blown to safety outside, but his memory was obliterated.

The construction of a plot such as this requires the critic to "close" the text, to presume that, in some form, the story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Within such closure, the critic can satisfactorily explain what

happens, what the story "means." Moreover, closure allows the critic to objectify the text, to distance himself from the text in order to evaluate it.

And *Lancelot's* ending has often been negatively evaluated. For example, Johnson concludes that the book ends unsatisfactorily in Lance's "final failure of insight" (29), while Bill Oliver, perhaps unable to accept the early reviewers' assumption that Lance speaks in Percy's voice,¹⁷ claims that the ending's "dangling question implies that the dialogue continues even as the novel leaves off."¹⁸

Of course, such evaluations require some certainty as to the meaning of the beginning and middle of a narrative that ends so unsatisfactorily. Deconstruction, as most modern critics are aware, is quite merciless with assumptions of interpretive certainty such as these. What is deconstruction if not the undermining of every ground for interpretive certainty? Still, deconstruction is just as distanced—if not more distanced—from the object of its manipulations than constructive criticism. It *sets out* to deconstruct; its technique is designed to uproot the grounds of meaning. Thus there can be no surprise, no shock of a reality contrary to expectations, in short, no *experience* to be gained from deconstruction as such.

It is true that *Lancelot* was written in the years immediately after Jacques Derrida's essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" began to exert its influence on American reading practices. And, of course, in that essay Derrida makes his famous distinction between "two interpretations of interpretation":

The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering, a truth or an origin which is free from freeplay and from the order of the sign. . . . The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms freeplay and tries to pass beyond man and humanism.¹⁹

Nevertheless, deconstruction was hardly a normative reading practice even in 1977.

Thus I believe that Percy's intention for the reader of *Lancelot* (and it is perfectly legitimate to speak of intention if there *is* an originating center, however arbitrary and historically constituted it may be) is not that there should be an initial intention on the reader's part to deconstruct it, but to discover its structure. A deconstructive reading, as such, is inappropriate for *Lancelot* because Lance seeks certainty, not uncertainty. The reader will not recapitulate Lance's experience if he or she sets out to deconstruct the novel. Deconstructed, *Lancelot* is just another pile of words. But as I hope to show, the reader's quest to discover with certainty the structural significance of *Lancelot's* ending propels the reader on a quest which, in a real sense, is the same quest as Lance Lamar's, and one incurring the same consequences—"deconstructive" consequences, experienced as an interpretative calamity. For Percy, I believe, such calamitous experience is the requisite preparation for the *mea culpa*—in this case, an acknowledgment of the insufficiency of reason—which must precede faith. *Lancelot*, like the legend it strangely recreates, is a book about faith and about the interpretative center necessary for there to be faith, or indeed any meaningful world at all.

II

Early in *Lancelot*, Lance tells Harry his purpose for telling him his story: "I've discovered that I can talk to you and get closer to *it*, the secret I know yet don't know" (62). By the end of the story, what *it* is has still not been revealed. Thus the critic's "fall" begins on the last page in the final questions Lance asks Harry:

One last question—and somehow I know you know the answer. Do you know Anna?

Yes.

Do you know her well?

Yes.

Will she join me in Virginia and will she and I and Siobhan begin a new life there?

Yes.

Very well. I've finished. Is there anything you wish to tell me before I leave?

Yes. (257)

The critic is tempted to know something about the text's message that the text does not explicitly reveal. Clearly, Harry's last *Yes* indicates there is something, the secret *it* for which Lance has been searching his memory throughout the novel, something Lance needs to know but that Harry has withheld through his silence. Something, perhaps, that Harry believes Lance might now be ready to hear. Whatever *it* is probably has something to do with Anna.

Anna is the woman in the cell next to Lance's. In the second chapter, Lance tells Harry he is falling in love with this woman, though he has not yet seen her. We hear about Anna often throughout the book. She will be, Lance says, the "New Woman" who will help him start his "New World" in Virginia.

It is odd that Harry says he knows Anna well. Earlier, when Lance first mentions her, apparently Harry has never heard the name, for Lance has to say, "Who is Anna? The woman next door" (108). How does Harry get to know Anna well in the length of time it takes Lance to tell the rest of his story—unless Harry already knew Anna, but knew her by another name?

Once Anna's identity comes into question, the reader of *Lancelot* begins to notice some unusual associations. First, Anna often reminds Lance of Lucy, his first wife. In this same scene, for exam. pie, "her thin brown face reminded me of Lucy, except she didn't have Lucy's funny quirky expression and the tiny scar on her lip" (109).²⁰ Othertimes Lance associates "Anna with Margot, as when Belle Isle explodes, arid he says, "For a tenth of a second I could see her in the flaring, lying on her side like Anna, knees drawn up, cheek against her hands pressed palms together, dark eyes gazing at me" (245-46).²¹ More intriguing, however, is the girl Lance hears singing outside his window every day, Perhaps foreshadowing his "one last question," Lance tells Harry, "I observed that you know her well" (20), The girl sings "Bobby McGee," a song, we find out much later, that Margot had sung along with Kris Kristofferson on the radio when she and Lance took a drive into the country early in their marriage. A literary allusion underscores the association—Chris Christopherson is Anna's father in Eugene O'Neill's *Anna Christie*.

Such associations lead to a startling hypothesis: what if Margot and Lucy *are* the same person—Anna. The name Anna, after all, is a palindrome, suggesting that two opposite personalities, mirrored in-versions, are nevertheless the same. The hypothesis helps to explain some strange occurrences; for example, Anna, who should have known nothing about Lance's past, "seemed to know all about Siobhan" (218), Margot's daughter. Furthermore, Anna's duality would fittingly symbolize Lance's married life. Lucy, the virgin, "dies" and is replaced by Margot, the sensual sex kitten. More important, however, Lance's belief that he has had two wives would fit with what happens to him psychologically upon his discovery of his wife's infidelity. On that day, he says, "Things were split, I was physically in Louisiana [La.] but spiritually in Los Angeles [L.A.I. The day was split too. One window let onto this kind of October day, blue sky, sun shining. . . . The other window let onto a thunderstorm" (25). Perhaps, suffering from a kind of schizophrenia,²² Lance split his world and the people in it. It is an explosive shattering, like the explosion of Belle Isle itself, the most obvious symptom of which is Lance's inability to remember anything properly.

The critic has already reached the point where the constructed plot is no longer being elaborated but deconstructed. The new hypothesis could not have been formulated except upon the basis of the originally constructed plot, yet the new hypothesis completely transforms the premises upon which the original plot was built. A story about a man who has had two wives and is considering a third is quite different from the story of a man who has struggled with two opposing aspects of his wife's personality and, suffering from amnesia,

projects those aspects into a false memory of two dead wives even as he falls in love again with his wife, thinking she is another woman.

Lance's peculiar madness is described almost perfectly by Arthur Schopenhauer in *The World as Will and Representation*. The mad-man's selective memory produces an unbearable discontinuity which he rectifies, primarily through imaginative associations, by composing a new continuous order from the fragments of his past. It is, of course, "a false past that exists for him alone, and that either all the time or for the moment."²³ Interestingly, Daniel T. O'Hara has recently argued that radical critics tend to look upon the texts they are interpreting—or rather the prior interpretations of those texts—as the products of a similar madness:

each would-be revisionist structures his reading of a particular precursor or of an entire tradition of precursors in such a way as to suggest that at a certain point in the precursor's writing career or in the development of a tradition, he or the tradition went wrong and started to resemble Schopenhauer's madman.²⁴

In the present case, our radical critic detects a failure in his precursors' memory (to him, clear associations among Anna, Lucy, and Margot), and the restoration of that memory produces a new plot narrated by a character suffering from the same mildness that our critic is implicitly attributing to his precursors. Just as our critic reveals the old (i.e., the "original") plot hidden by the precursors' "insane" construction of their plot from incomplete fragments of the original, the new (to our critic the author's original) plot that he reveals is about a madman who has constructed a false past out of bits and pieces of memory through imaginative associations. In short, the story of our reader's reading is the same as the story he is reading.

In both cases the new plots *hide* the old plots. The old plots with their characters are there, yet they are not there. The old plots are "true" (after all they are the bases upon which the new are being built), yet they are not true. In a twinkling, evidence for the old plots transforms into evidence for the new. As our critic reads on, evidence for his interpretation accumulates.

For Lance, "There are three worlds, the old dead past world, the hopeless screwed-up now world, and the unknown world of the future" (63). Lucy is his wife of the ideal, romantic world of his youth, flawless and virginal, Margot is his wife of the actual world, one whose own reality will not conform to Lance's idealized vision. Anna he hopes will be the wife of his future, in a world he will force to conform to his dreams of clearcut distinctions. In Lance's New World, the "New Woman will have perfect freedom. She will be free to be a lady or a whore" (179). These phrases echo one earlier episode. As Lance and Margot were talking, choking on the gas before Belle Isle blew up, Margot told Lance, "With you I had to be either—or—but never a—uh—woman. It was good for a while" (245). But, of course, only for a while. Lance's fatal mistake with Margot lies in his using sex to distinguish acceptable from unacceptable behavior. Ultimately, Margot, a real person who can-not be contained by such categories, rebels. "Sex," she exclaims when Lance asks if Merlin is her lover, "You men set so much store by it. Well, you flatter yourselves. It's not all that important" (174). Toward the narrative's end, "Anna" will reject Lance's offer to join him in Virginia for the same reason. When Lance suggests that Anna "had suffered the ultimate indignity, the worst violation a woman can suffer, rape at the hands of several men," Anna flies into a rage: "Are you suggesting .. that I, myself, me, my person, can be violated by a *man*? You goddamn men. Don't you know that there are more important things in this world?" (251).

Lance does not know this, In fact, he believes that "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" (224). *Lancelot* probably follows Jessie L. Weston's interpretation of the grail legend's symbology—"the Lance, or Spear, representing the Male, the Cup or Vase, the Female, reproductive energy?"²⁵ Lance thinks he knows the secret of womanhood, and reveals it. But as Weston says:

There is a secret connected with [the grail], the revelation of which will entail dire misfortune on the betrayer. If spoken at all it must be with scrupulous accuracy. It is so secret a thing that no woman, be

she wife or maid, may venture to speak it. A priest, or a man of holy life, might indeed tell the marvel of the Grail, but none can hearken to the recital without shuddering, trembling, and changing color for very fear. (137)

Margot chokes when she tries to tell Lance her secret. Father John (Harry, Percival) seems ready to tell Lance the secret at the end of the novel, since he answers "Yes" when Lance says, "You know something you think I don't know, and you want to tell me but you hesitate" (256). Before Lance has finished his tale, however, he is unready to comprehend what the wiser Merlin has told him about his own wife: "Can. you believe it? She's a good girl, a comrade. She's a comrade, brother, daughter, lover to me" (203).

Once the reader has accepted the hypothesis that Lucy, Margot, and Anna are all the same woman, the associations among the three characters seem to proliferate. The reader, now swelling with pride, cannot but wonder why no critic has mentioned them before. But if the modern narrative is like an onion, with layer upon layer but no center, once a critical cut has been made, once the layer of Anna's character has been sliced, all the layers slice. The whole onion becomes minced. It is the critic's original sin; accepting Anna's split into Lucy and Margot is like eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The temptation, once yielded to, the knowledge, once gained, can no longer be resisted. As Lance himself puts it, speaking of the delight children find in Belle Isle's secret passageway, "Children believe that a wall is a wall, that a word says what is and what is not, and that if there is something else there the word doesn't say, reality itself is tricked and a new magic and un-named world opens" (46). For Lance, this word that says more than itself is "wife," and upon discovering that his wife may be more than his own narrow definition of the term allows, a new, confusing, and terrifying world opens up. For the critic, the knowledge that Anna is more than she at first appears produces the same confusion and a kind of interpretive awe. Now none of the characters are who they seem.

The reader returns to chapter 8, in which Lance views the video tapes that Elgin secretly has made in Margot's and Raine's (originally daughter Lucy's) rooms. Since the tapes cannot record throughout the entire night, Elgin has used a special device so that the camera records only when there is sound or movement in the rooms. In other words, to the viewer, time becomes thoroughly distorted. Lance does not realize that he cannot tell when the events he views take place. Moreover, something went wrong with Elgin's camera: "Lights and darks were reversed like a negative,, . The actors looked naked clothed, clothed naked. The figures seemed to be blown in an electronic wind" (185). On the first tape, Lance sees who he believes is Margot and Merlin having a conversation, which he cannot entirely understand. The words are unclear, yet Lance reports what he takes to be Margot and Merlin's final parting, the end of their relationship. Then follows a scene with Margot and Jacoby. There is no conversation but apparently they make love. In the second tape, the one made in Raine's room, Lance sees who he believes is Lucy, Raine, and Troy all naked on the bed, forming a rather suggestive triangular figure. All he hears on this tape is "*Oh Christ dear sweet Jesus oh oh—*" (192); whereas at the end of the first tape he had heard "*Oh oh oh ah ah aaah, oh my Jesus oh ah ah sh—sh—sh—*" (190).

But who are these people, really? Of the first tape, Lance says, "Margot I knew instantly from the bright earmuff fluffs of hair at her ears and her mannish yet womanish way of setting her fiat on her hip" (186). Of the second tape, Lance says Lucy "is recogni4able by the flame of hair under her ears" (192). Moreover, on the first tape Merlin says, "What a lousy trucking fire engine" and Lance comments: "I am reasonably sure of this reading: that it was not Elgin's equipment but Merlin himself who scrambled 'fucking triangle' to 'trucking fiangle' (fire engine). A joke. Yes, I am 99 per. cent sure" (188). But of all the characters in *Lancelot* only one ever scrambles his words like that—Tex, Margot's father (see 53). Right after this, Lance tries to decipher another of "Merlin's" sentences: "I wish y'all happiness? I wish you all happiness? The latter? Merlin wouldn't say 'y'all' " (189). Of course, only Tex would say "y'all." Finally, speaking of the second tape, Lance says, "Lucy is like a patient. Certain operations are being performed on her. The other two figures handle her as efficiently as nurses" (192). With this last allusion to Anna, the reader is tempted to identify with Anna not only Lance's two wives but also his daughter, through her identification with Margot. Furthermore, we now have a suggestion of incest. Yet because of the distortions of sound, vision, and especially time, neither Lance nor the critic can know what actually happened.

Still, these associations can be quickly "confirmed" elsewhere. For example, Lance regains his potency before penetrating Raine only after noticing that she is wearing his daughter's sorority ring. The ring "was loose on Raine's middle finger. Raine wore it the way a girl wears a boy's ring. Lucy had a big callow teen girl's hand" (235). The reference to Lucy's large hand reminds the reader of Margot, since Lance's description of his first meeting with her includes the observation, "Her hands were big" (174), one repeated several times throughout the novel. Also, when Margot explains why she stayed at the inn the night Elgin spied on them, she says, "I got sick as a dog so I stayed on at the Inn, barged in on Raine and just said, Sister, move over" (88).²⁶

This suggestion of a sibling relationship where there should not be one is echoed in Lance's description of a photo of Raine's house that Raine had given to Lucy. It had an inscription. Lance says, "I could only read *To my little—Little* what? I couldn't make it out" (137). Another photo showed "an English beam-in-plaster mansion" which reminds Lance of "the sort of place where Philip Marlowe called on a rich client and insulted the butler" (137). Marlowe does just that in Chandler's novel *The Big Sleep*, the novel Lance was carrying in his hip pocket when he first met Margot (72), the story of two sisters, one sane, one an insane nymphomaniac. And of course the reader is reminded of Chandler's *The Little Sister*.

Thus the reader's confusion from suggestions that Anna, Margot, and wife Lucy are the same woman is compounded by suggestions that Margot, Raine, and daughter Lucy are all sisters. It does not help to notice that with Lance and Raine, when they are in public, "It was as if we pretended to be married and jealous of each other" (16). Such allusions, and there are many more, indicate at the *very* least that Lance cannot distinguish clearly the individual women in his life; at the most, they support the hypothesis that *all* of the women are one woman.

Ironically, Lance's apparent incapacity to distinguish the women clearly is in fact an overdistinguishing, the product of his quest to know the one woman in his life. Lance loses his innocence with Raine; he finds her category, puts her in a pigeonhole: "For what comes of being an adult was this probing her for her secret. . . . The Jews called it knowing and now I knew why. Everytime I went deeper I knew her better... . It was a contest. She lost" (236). For Lance, sex becomes epistemological, an act of categorization, the putting of an unknown into place. But the fall into original sin generates confusion in more areas than one's relations with the opposite sex.

Harry, for example, the old friend to whom Lance tells his story, is equally an enigma. At the beginning of chapter 2, Lance remembers that Harry has been known by several names. Now that he is a priest, he is Father John. In the rest of the novel, Lance usually calls him Percival, but sometimes Harry and sometimes Father.

The book has another father and another Harry. Lance discovers two things about his father that affect his later life. The first is that his father was a crook, that he had accepted political kickbacks. When the boy Lance finds the ten thousand dollars in his father's sock drawer, "The old world fell to pieces" (42), just as it will when Lance discovers Margot's infidelity. The second thing he finds out is that just as he had been cuckolded by Margot and Merlin,²⁷ his father had been cuckolded by his mother, Lily, and his Uncle Harry.²⁸

In fact, there is much evidence that the events of Lancelot are a reenactment of an old crime. Whereas Lance destroys the new wing of Belle Isle, the old wing "had burned mysteriously a hundred years earlier" (18). On the night Lance destroys the house, "Everyone acted as if [he] were an ancestor who had wandered out of his portrait and begun giving orders" (205). And at one point Lance says to Harry, "Do you know what happened to me during the past twenty years? A gradual, ever so gradual, slipping away of my life into a kind of dream state in which finally I could not be sure that anything was happening at all. Perhaps nothing happened" (57).

Is Lance another Rip Van Winkle? Lance says he has not seen Harry for twenty years. If Lance has been a sleeping Rip, perhaps it was actually forty years before that Harry disappeared. After all, Lance first sees Harry on All Soul's Day, in the cemetery below his cell. Harry never speaks until the very end,²⁹ and Lance often says

that Harry is "pale as a ghost" (160). Maybe Harry is a ghost; maybe the events Lance relates to him are a collage of the events of last year and of events that happened forty years before, when Lance was a child.

This possibility suggests that Lance may be suffering from a severe Oedipal trauma. Lance describes himself, that night a year ago when Belle Isle exploded and he is standing over the sleeping Raine and Dana, as "watching her, thumbnail against tooth, gazing at nothing in particular" (235). The image is of a little boy, sucking his thumb, the "adult description masking his childish action."³⁰ The same image recurs a few pages later when Lance watches Margot and Janos, making "the strangest of all beasts" (239).

It seems, indeed, that "jealousy is an alteration in the very shape of time itself. Time loses its structure. Time stretches out" (122- 23).³¹ Apparently, the violent shock Lance receives that night at Belle Isle shatters his life, his memory, even his own identity. Past and present intermingle. Connections between events dissolve. And the critic, having nothing more reliable to hang onto than Lance's own thoroughly suspect testimony, must necessarily share in his confusion. Once the critic's sense of the story's wholeness is broken, he can never again find the secret passageway. Once the onion is minced, it stays minced. As in the Garden of Eden, once faith is lost and the knowledge of division is gained, nothing remains but wilderness and the endless struggle to return it to the Garden's order.

The critic may seek some key to the puzzle, just as Lance looked for a "clue buried somewhere in the rubble of Belle Isle" (106). But the keys never work, except the one that Margot fondles in the pigeonier, the key to her identity, a Pandora's box (80). The reader may be certain, for example, that the key to order lay in one of the many literary allusions. Just before Lance makes his fateful discovery of Siobhan's blood type, he is reading a novel by Raymond Chandler. Here may be found the pattern. After all, Marlowe always finds his man. He is the questing knight of the twentieth century;³² he wades through false identities and misleading clues amid the sordid and sexually perverse disorder of our society. But the passage Lance remembers that he was reading describes Marlowe finding a man named Goodwin, Lancelot Goodwin, dead on the floor of an English bungalow in a canyon between Glendale and Pasadena. The critic, wanting to be certain, reads all of Chandler's novels. There is no character named Goodwin; and although Marlowe does find a body in such a bungalow in *The Big Sleep*, that character's name is Geiger.³³

Perhaps this is the sort of dead-end street the critic-detective should expect of a novel narrated by a madman. Still, *The Big Sleep* is not without its temptations, especially since Marlowe sees this portrait of the questing knight when he first enters the Sternwood mansion: "The knight had pushed the vizor of his helmet back to be sociable, and he was fiddling with the knots on the ropes that tied the lady to the tree and not getting anywhere."

What a Gorgon's knot it is! Who is Margot? Who are Anna, Lucy, and Lucy? Who is Harry-Percival-John? What happened that night at Belle Isle? When was that night? What horrible sin was committed, and who committed—or is committing—it? The critic feels the falling, falling. Nothing certain is left to grasp. Even the source of all that is said in the novel, the teller of the title, has no certain configuration.

Who is Lance? The critic may presume that a clue lies in Lance's identification with Geiger, a pornographer who (like Lance) takes dirty pictures of the nymphomaniac sister without her knowledge. Arthur Gwynn Geiger's androgynous name fits his character; Marlowe describes him as "a husband to women and a wife to men" (92). Not surprisingly, in *Lancelot* we find something similar. With Margot, Lance felt that "it was almost as if she were the man, I the woman" (167); "like a man she was" on their early dates, "a droll man-woman creature" (168, 169). Such hints lead to speculations about Lance's regret that he and Harry had "never once touch[ed] each other" (94) when they were young, the fact that Harry was always "reading Verlaine" (15), a poet well known for his homosexuality, and Lance's "several cheerful obscene nicknames in the D. K. E. [Deke, or dike] fraternity of which the least objectionable was Pussy" (10).

The damned critic wades into very muddy waters once Lance's sexual identity comes into question. In *The Big Sleep*, when Marlowe speaks to Carmen, the nymphomaniac Sternwood sister, the questing knight often uses a

pseudonym—Doghouse Reilly. Reilly, the critic recalls, is Margot's (who put Lance in the pigeon house) maiden name. Still, Carmen is the one who sucks her thumb when she is randy, and Carmen suffers amnesia everytime she kills someone for rejecting her.

Lance's, and the critic's, confusion about his identity are no doubt the root cause of all of the novel's other confusions. In *Lost in the Cosmos* Percy speaks of the cosmos as being "an Eden which harbors its own semiotic snake in the grass."³⁴ The "fateful" flaw of human semiotics is that "of all the objects in the entire Cosmos" that man can apprehend through language, "there is one which forever escapes his comprehension—and that is the sign-user him-self" (107). Language and its differentiating processes generate a subject-object dichotomy so that "the self locates itself at the dead center of its world," but as a consequence the "self has no sign of itself. No signifier applies. All signifiers apply equally" (107). Thus, "For me, all signifiers fit me, one as well as another. I am rascal, hero, craven, brave, treacherous, loyal, at once the secret hero and asshole of the Cosmos" (107-08).

Clearly, Lance is a sufferer from such a fall, "a creature which is ashamed of itself and which seeks cover in myriad disguises" (109). If the "exile from Eden is, semiotically, the banishment of the self-conscious self from its own world of signs" (109), Lance's destruction of his ancestral home Belle Isle and his isolation in the Center for Aberrant Behavior is, metaphorically, such a banishment. Lance's problem is, though to an extreme degree, the problem of humanity in general after the Fall:

The semiotic history of this creature thereafter could be writ-ten in terms of the successive attempts, both heroic and absurd, of the signifying creature to escape its nakedness and to find a permanent semiotic habiliment for itself—often by identifying itself with other creatures in its world. (109)

Lance moves rapidly among numerous definitions of his self—roles as father, son, patient, aristocrat, liberal humanist, woman, homo-sexual, injured party, revengeful husband, detective, pornographer —modeling his roles on other characters and redefining their roles to accommodate his presently assumed identity. But each proves in-adequate, until Lance finally arrives at assuming a godlike role as the creator of a new world.

The critic finds that attempts to determine a definitive identity for the text take on a similar pattern. Through its allusions to other texts, *Lancelot* tempts the reader into assuming that it is structurally identical to various novels, plays, and movies. And time after time the critic is frustrated, The literary allusions are only partly illuminating; they provide only partial patterns for interpretation, They are literary *illusions*.

Given *Lancelot's* title and the main character's name, the critic assumes that the King Arthur legends would provide the master text. But the allusions to these legends are the most frustrating. In Malory's version of the legend, there is a Queen Margause (Mar-got?), sister to Elaine and Morgan le Fay as well as to Arthur, with whom she unknowingly has an incestuous affair that produces a child, Mordred, who will eventually kill his father. Margause is beheaded, however, by her son Gaheris, for sleeping with Sir Lamerok (Lamar?), Percival's brother, while Sir Lamerok is killed by Sir Gawain, Mordred's and Gaheris's brother.

This seems somehow to fit vaguely in with Lance's story about "Our Lady of the Camillias," the woman who apparently visits him in the pigeonier the evening Belle Isle explodes. Just before she gives him the knife (which at one point he confuses with "an un-sheathed sword"), she "looked less like an obscure relative, a voluptuous middle-aged aunt who has survived some forgotten disgrace, than—my mother!" (225). Of course, Mordred's mother is also his aunt. It is tempting to claim that Lance only wishes he were a Lancelot, but that he is in fact a Mordred.

But the Arthurian paradigm is, to say the least, imperfect. And what is our critic to make of all this once he remembers that in Geoffrey of Monmouth's version—one certainly with a stronger claim to being the "original" story—the Margause of Malory's story is named Arma, and she has no incestuous affair?³⁵

In the end, our critic who wants a coherent interpretation of this tale realizes that he or she must force one upon it, just like his or her precursors, in the same way that Lance, upon his release from the asylum, would force his vision upon the world. For Lance, the moral chaos he encounters in a world without clear distinctions between right and wrong is the result of the absence of God, and it is intolerable: "If God does not exist, then it will be I not God who will not tolerate it. I, one person. I will start a new world single-handedly" (255-56).

Lance is not a failed romantic turned cynical. He is a failed humanist turned extremist romantic. Before discovering his wife's infidelity, the event that would catapult him into his evil quest, Lance's life had exemplified humanist moderation: "I was ... a moderate reader, moderate liberal, moderate drinker (I thought), moderate music lover, moderate hunter and fisherman. ... I moderately opposed segregation. I was moderately happy" (204). "After all," Irving Babbitt, the founder of American New Humanism, said in *Rousseau and Romanticism*, "to be a good humanist is merely to be moderate and sensible and decent."³⁶ But upon discovering that Siobhan's blood type makes it impossible for him to be her father, Lance becomes extreme and begins his quest for absolute evil, which he hopes to find in the certainty of his wife's infidelity. He thus goes against one of the central tenets of humanistic philosophy; as Babbitt put it, "The Truth (with a capital T) is of necessity infinite and so is not for any poor finite creature like man."³⁷

A hint as to a way to remake sense of this book, therefore, lies in the protagonist's name, Lancelot Andrewes Lamar. T. S. Eliot, author of the first significant twentieth-century version of the grail legend, wrote a collection of essays entitled *For Lancelot Andrewes*. In the title essay, Eliot depicts the famous theologian and translator as exemplifying the "*via media* which is the spirit of Anglicanism" and the "mean between Papacy and Presbytery."³⁸ The final essay in the same collection is "The Humanism of Irving Babbitt," where Eliot charged humanism with being parasitical because it could exist only in a society with a strong religious heritage, and then only for a short time, because only the grace of God can provide adequate symbols for human aspiration. Apparently, Lance Lamar fails as a humanist and enters the Center for Aberrant Behavior because his society no longer provides the religious center, the interpretative pattern and the sense of ultimate purpose, the humanist mediator needs. Lance Lamar is, metaphorically, a broken lance, and as Emma Jung says, "The characteristic of this weapon can be understood metaphorically as perception of a goal or awareness of one's intention" (82). Without faith in a center or even trust in his wife, Lance's lust for knowledge drives him in his unholy quest.

The critic is similarly driven by his refusal to trust the author's judgment. The critic's task necessarily begins in a lack of faith, a question about meaning which propels him into a quest for certainty. Walker Percy's *Lancelot* tells us, revealing the Roman Catholic's love of mystery, that such a quest is an "evil" one, an endless one destined to destroy the very object of our search. As Tom More, the protagonist of *Love in the Ruins*, says, there is "one sin for which there is no forgiveness": "The sin against grace. If God gives you the grace to believe in him and love him and you refuse, the sin will not be forgiven you."³⁹ The unpardonable critical sin is perfectly analogous.

After months of wrestling with this story, searching for the one clue that would put it all together again, the critic may finally find an answer to Lance's most profound question, which becomes the critic's question: "Why did I have to know the truth about Margot and know it with absolute certainty? Or rather why, knowing the truth, did I have to know more, prove more, *see*? Does one need to know more, ever more and more, in order that one put off acting on it or maybe even not act at all?" (89).

Lance's search for the unholy grail was precipitated by his discrimination between what a text said about his daughter's blood type—type O, probably a "typo," a typographical error—and what he thought it should have said. With respect to the human decision that Lance has to make, does the certainty of the knowledge that creates the choice matter at all? Lance's choice is whether to allow the difference that has insinuated itself between him and his wife and him and his daughter make a difference. This decision is of the same structure as the critic's decision to allow an uncertainty about the novel's ending and Anna's identity to make a difference about the meaning of the story. The cause of the two choices is the same, as well, Both result from a conception of how things ought to be. A wife should be this way, a story end that way. And the effect of the choices are the

same—the utter destruction of a unity in favor of a disunity that negates it and yet makes sense itself only as that negation. Margot and the story's original plot may both be illusions, but what they "really" are makes sense only in terms of the illusion.

III

The answer to Lance's and the critic's question is therefore simple: they may want to know more, but the certainty they desire cannot be gained on their own. Lance's question about Margot's infidelity can only be answered by Margot, but if Lance does not trust she who answers, he may as well not ask. And just as we know that Lance's only hope for recovering his world is for him to *believe* what Percival tells him, the critic should know that he cannot know the full story of *Lancelot* unless Percy tells him. Percival is silent until the very end of the story and, in a sense, so is *Percy*. Percy is saying, then, that what we need to know to understand the story is that we do not know the whole story. As we might expect from a dedicated, converted Roman Catholic retelling one of the greatest Christian legends, for *Lancelot*, as for all his tales, Percy provides a Christian ending to the story of Original Sin, one that contrasts sharply with the ending that Lance the humanist would give his life. For what does the Incarnation offer except an assurance that there is more to the human drama than what we can know, and that we must have faith and wait in humility for the time when all things will be revealed?

Walker Percy's *Lancelot* is accordingly a strongly original text, radically aware that its originating differentiation is a restructuring of the story of the Fall and whose every reading, radical or conventional, repeats that structure, reestablishing its authority as a normative center. Like all texts, it is historically situated but, by anticipating its readers' interpretive disposition, it seduces those readers who would violate its authority into recapitulating the experience it depicts, thus binding them in their historical difference to its tradition and, in effect, giving them art identity in that tradition.

Notes

1. Stanley Eugene Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (rpt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 1.
2. James M. Cox, "The Scarlet Letter; Through the Old Manse and the Custom House," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 51 (Summer 1975): 432-47.
3. Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 74.
4. Edward O. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 373.
5. Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson, eds., *Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections*, rev. ed. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1962), 327.
6. M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), 382.
7. See Stephen R. Yarbrough, "Jonathan Edwards on Rhetorical Authority," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47 (July-Sept, 1986): 355-408.
8. J. Hillis Miller, "Tradition and Difference," *Diacritics* 2 (Winter 1972): 13.
9. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufman and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), 315.
10. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1962), 224.
11. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism Is a Humanism," in *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre*. ed. and trans. Walter Kaufman (Cleveland and New York: World, 1956), 287-311.
12. See Stephen C. Brennan and Stephen R. Yarbrough, *Irving Babbitt* (New York: Twayne, 1987), esp. chap. 2.
13. Walker Percy, *Lancelot* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977); all citations are to this edition.
14. Robert Coles, *Walker Percy: An American Search* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978), 221-24.

15. William J. Dowie, "Lancelot and the Search for Sin," in *The Art of Walker Percy: Stratagems for Being*, ed. Panthea Reid Broughton (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 256.
16. Mark Johnson, "Lancelot: Percy's Romance," *Southern Literary Journal* 2 (Spring 1983): 21.
17. Some of these reviews and early essays are collected in Dedria Bryfonski and Phyllis Carmel Mendelson, eds., *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, vol. 7 (Detroit: Gale Research, 1978). Most later evaluations are closer to Mark Johnson's contention that *Lancelot* is not "an inept novel" but still it, is "not Percy's best book" (19). "At the last," says Johnson, "I must confess some disappointment with *Lancelot* myself" (29).
18. Bill Oliver, "A Manner of Speaking: Percy's *Lancelot*." *Southern Literary Journal* 2 (Spring 1983): 7-20.
19. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Science of Man*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 264-65.
20. Lance associates Anna with Lucy as early as the second chapter, before he has even seen her (12), and in chapter 3, after Lance has seen Anna's legs as she lay curled up on her bed, he says, "Her calves were slim but well developed and still surprisingly suntanned. Had she been a dancer? a tennis player? She reminded me of Lucy" (62). In chapter 4, Lance learns from Anna's chart that "she is twenty-nine and comes, like Lucy from Georgia," and again he repeats that "in some strange way *she* is like Lucy" (85).
21. In the last chapter, Lance reports Anna's offer for him to live at an old farm her family owns in Virginia. She told him that the farmhouse is useless, but that he could fix up the barn. This reminds him of the pigeon house that Margot had converted into his study: "Christ," he exclaims, "do you think this is another woman trying to fix me up in a pigeonhouse" (252).
22. Oliver suggests, "Perhaps Lance is schizophrenic yet his anger and irony seem not the expression of two discrete personalities but the modulations of one personality" (7).
23. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols. (New York: Dover, 1966), 1:193.
24. Daniel T. O'Hara, "Revisionary Madness: The Prospects of American Literary Theory at the Present Time," in *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 35.
25. Jessie L. Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (1920; rpt. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957), 21.
26. Lance's incestuous feelings toward his daughter (as wife Lucy's daughter Lucy) may have induced his invention of Raine, which in Creole slang means "cunt," but the homonym suggests an association with Margot, since Reine (French for "queen") is the name given to the queen of Mardi Gras (and thus suggests Queen Margause, King Arthur's sister and lover).
27. If he *was* cuckolded by Merlin, or if Merlin is not Harry, Father John. It seems logical that the clue to the true identity of a love-child's father, when in question, would be the child's name. As William James O'Brien has pointed out in a different context, "Siobhan is Gaelic for Joan, feminine of John, usually rendered 'love'" ("Walker Percy's *Lancelot*: A Beatrician Visit to the Region of the Dead," *Southern Humanities Review* 15 [Spring 1981]: 158).
28. The "Our Lady of the Camillias" section of chapter 8 (210-12), in which a woman with a "certain reputation from the past" (210) tells Lance that his mother and Uncle Harry "were like Camille and Robert Taylor" (212), reinforces the theme of a woman's rebellion toward sexual extremes. The movie *Camille* is based on Alexandre Dumas *fil's* play *The Lady of the Camillias*. Here the main character's name is Marguerite, who, according to Roland Barthes, "was first touched to feel herself *recognized* by Armand, and passion, to her, was thereafter nothing but the permanent demand for this recognition" ("The Lady of the Camillias," in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag [New York: Hill & Wang 1982], 90). Since "Armand's passion, which is bourgeois in type, and appropriate, is by definition a murder of the other" (90), Marguerite "lives in the awareness of her alienation" (91). But unlike Margot (Mary Margaret), Marguerite cannot reject the man who masters her identity. She accepts a false dilemma: "either she plays the part which the masters expect from her [that of a courtesan], or she tries to reach a *value* which is in fact a part of this same world of the masters" (91).
29. Moreover, everything Harry says is in italics, just like Lance's transcripts of Elgin's tapes.
30. Lewis A. Lawson, "The Fall of the House of Lamar," in *The Art of Walker Percy*, 239 (see n. 15, above).

31. Confusions of past and present can be found everywhere, especially once the reader accepts the possibility that, for Lance's insane mind, past and present are not clearly distinguishable. Consider the ambiguity of this portion of Margot and Lance's first conversation:

"You're not married?"

"No. I was. My wife's dead. I have a son and daughter, but they're off at school."

"I thought Mr. and Mrs. Lamar were husband and wife."

"No, son and mother. But my mother died last year." (77)

The critic may find further reason to notice the conjunction of husband and wife, son and mother in "Mr. and Mrs. Lamar," For one thing, Lance says he was "obsessed" with the thought of "Uncle Harry and [Lance's mother] Lily in the linoleum-cold gas-heat-hot tourist cabin" (216) that Lance supposes they went to on their joyrides to False River. Can it be more than a coincidence that the second time Margot and Lance make love, when Margot asks, "Do you know a place," Lance responds: "Happily. I did, in Asphodel, a little tourist cottage in a glen of the Trace" (170)? Can it be a coincidence that an asphodel is a lily?

Is it a coincidence as well that Lance suspects that Harry, his uncle, is his biological father (214), while Harry, his friend, is now a priest, another father? But why, then, in the first chapter when Lance first sees his friend, was it, as he tells Harry, "like seeing myself. I had the sense of being overtaken by something, by the past, by myself" (5).

32. This is the main theme of Philip Durham's book on Marlowe, *Down These Mean Streets a Man Must Go: Raymond Chandler's Knight* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963).

33. Perhaps Lance's reference to Lancelot Goodwin is a mistaken allusion to Lee Goodwin (in Faulkner's *Sanctuary*), who had a common-law wife named Ruby Lamar. Lance Lamar at one point thinks he hears Troy Dana refer to him as "Rudy" (50-51), or something similar. But there are so many parallels between *Lancelot* and Faulkner's novel of sexual violence and guilt that another essay would be necessary to tease them out, For now it is sufficient to note the convergence of *Lancelot's* main theme and *Sanctuary's*, as expressed by Olga Vickery: "Horace's sanctuary, his imaginative world of moral and aesthetic perfection, has been violated and destroyed by his one excursion into the world of concrete experience. For it is only in the verbal universe, whether philosophic, legal, or poetic, that evil can be isolated as the antithesis of good. In experience evil cannot be destroyed without destroying life itself" (see Vickery, *The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959], rpt. as "Crime and Punishment: *Sanctuary*," in *Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Penn Warren [Englewood Cliffs, N.Y.: Prentice-Hall, 1966], 127-36).

94. Walker Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (New York: Washington Square, 1984), 107.

35. Lance's identification with Percival also offers some interesting interpretive possibilities. According to Emma Jung, Percival's sword represents discrimination: "Discrimination, which means judgment with thought, is exactly what has so far been lacking in Percival [*sic*]. He has followed his mother's advice in a naively literal manner, without reflecting on it" (Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Grail Legend*, trans. Andrea Dykes [New York: Putnam, 1970], BO). When Lance receives the once rusted and dull knife from his aunt/mother, it is restored, clean and sharp (227), Lance loses the knife during the explosion, and presumably it is now destroyed. Jung says the sword in the legend is broken "through treacherous misuse, indicating a false application of the intellectual faculties which are no longer capable of functioning in the interests of life. This is similar to the thinking of the Fathers of the Christian Church... . The broken sword of the Grail story could refer to a failure in the thinking of that age, which proved unequal to the paradox . that high virtue leads to pride and through this is perverted into some-thing evil" (90),

36. Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), xx-xxi.

37. Irving Babbitt, *The New Laocoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910), 189.

38. T. S. Eliot, *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1929), 4.

39. Walker Percy, *Love in the Ruins: The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End of the World* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1971), 373-74.