
*A New Face for Postmodern Scholarship:
Announcing the Walker Percy Internet Project*

IN THE PAST TWO OR THREE YEARS, the rapid development of the Internet as a mode for information exchange has ushered in a radical new era for human communication. Through its guiding principle of "consensual information anarchy," whole new genres and forms of literature have been born and are daily created as swiftly as the human imagination can weave them. Indeed, the speed with which the Internet has grown to its present size of some thirty-five-plus million users is almost as if an entire new continent (perhaps "world" would be a more fitting metaphor) has burst forth from the oceans. And, yes, the shock waves are now being felt even in the field of literary studies.

Used primarily for scientific purposes during its technologically-cryptic beginnings in the past decade, the worldwide network of computers known as the Internet soon spread from larger, universal human concerns to the other end of the spectrum as well. For once the technology became accessible to the general public, individuals themselves discovered whole new arenas of personal freedom and self-expression through the multiplicity of communication channels they, too, now had at their disposal. And as info-culture itself expanded by leaps and bounds, so did the field of literature and literary studies begin to take on new faces. For one, new forms of literary narrative emerged, as is found, for example, in many of the fiction "hypertexts" freely available on the Internet. Aside from the novel way by which these literary works find their way to publication, many are nothing short of being functionally "postmodern" in and of themselves, because of the authority they give the reader in choosing what direction the narrative will go. In the more extreme cases, he or she is even able to append his or her own ending! That is, at least temporarily, as the case may be.¹

From another angle, though, outside of the interactive, fluid nature of the Internet's contents, perhaps its most defining characteristic as a process can be understood by referring to the new physics' concept of "non-locality" (used here somewhat broadly, but not wholly inappropriately). At the mere click of a button, the reader can vault from one corner of the world to the other in a matter of seconds, the massive network of computers seamlessly interweaving billions of packets of data in an ever-changing quantum-like stream of information, even as millions of other users simultaneously access the network's endless stores of information from countless other places around the planet. And out of it comes, as already described, all manner of strange things as befits our own postmodern landscape.

Despite the Internet's distinctly postmodernistic qualities—in terms of form, content and fluidity—it also creates, in the spirit of its original scientific design, new opportunities for meaningful scholarly exchange in the humanities that are of an

unprecedented if not radically progressive, nature. The capacity to link disparately-scattered resources enables researchers to develop entire new platforms of information that integrate (however loosely in one virtual "place") an endless number of materials about a particular subject, or, in the case of literary studies, about a given figure—all with the added benefit of being able to use multiple levels of media. It is in this context, therefore, that this essay has the pleasure of announcing the formation of such a world-accessible resource on the novelist and philosopher Walker Percy.

As others have noted before, Percy was something of a pioneer himself in terms of his interest in the distinctive nature of human communication, so it seems appropriate that he be an early literary and philosophical presence on the Internet at a time when the humanities, as a larger field, is just beginning to appreciate the Internet as a research and communication tool. What follows below will present a description of the *Walker Percy Internet Project*, its scope and goals, and directions for how one may access the multimedia literary project.²

The *Walker Percy Internet Project* (WPPProject) was established in March 1995 with the primary goal of raising appreciation for the contributions to modern thought and fiction that Walker Percy, MD, left as a formidable, compelling legacy to humanity. Accessible on that part of the Internet known as the WorldWideWeb (WWW), not only does the project strive to provide the Internet browser/researcher with an introduction to and overview of Percy's fiction and philosophy, it also has the long-term objective of becoming the most comprehensive and up-to-date scholastic database available for professional researchers of Percy.

The WWW is currently the most sophisticated method for storing and retrieving information on the Internet and, as the fastest-growing segment of the network, it allows users to access documents, images, sound clips and video jointly at any time from remote information resources anywhere in the world. Designed on the principle of "hypertext," the WWW format allows for the creation of "websites" that weave together an intricate, multi-leveled "document" through which screens of text and multimedia components are seamlessly "linked" together. The reader, in turn, may pursue whatever angle or link toward the hypertext he or she wishes and is thus able to spring from one "page" to another at whim or interest by simply clicking on a given highlighted word or phrase. One never knows what link is yet over the virtual horizon. In short, nonlinear reading is the WWW's founding premise.

The *Walker Percy Internet Project* aims to provide such a multifaceted resource for detailed inquiry into the thought of the late novelist and philosopher. Aside from the scholarly essays and bibliographic materials it will contain, the WPPProject itself, with any good fortune, will also eventually grow into an ongoing forum for discussion about Percy, as more and more scholars discover new "links" to one another through the project. Of course, in the interest of reaching nonspecialists, development of the WPPProject as a kind of online "museum," featuring photographs, recordings and excerpts from Percy's writings and life, remains a primary design goal as well.

The WPPProject is pleased to announce its host as the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where the archive of the Walker Percy Papers is located. A complete in-

ventory of the Walker Percy Papers is but one of the several scholastic tools now available on the website. Though other universities were considered (location in no way affects WWW accessibility), it nevertheless seemed appropriate that Chapel Hill should be the central station for the *WPPProject*. The publisher gratefully wishes to acknowledge the generous assistance provided by the UNC General Libraries and Office of Information Technology toward the creation of the website.

Description of the *WPPProject*'s intent and design aside, the reader may be curious as to how he or she may access the project. To access the *WPPProject* you need an Internet-connected computer that possesses a Web-browser software application (Netscape 1.1N is recommended). The Internet address to enter is: <<http://sunsite.unc.edu/wpercy/>>. At most universities Internet and WWW access is provided to faculty and staff at little or no cost, and public access channels are often present in the reference section of larger university libraries. In turn, the reference library staff should be able to answer any questions about locating resources on the Internet.

Once you have arrived online at UNC-Chapel Hill, what will you see? On page 163 is a very close representation of how Stage I of the Walker Percy "homepage" appears (excluding images). As described above, you need only "point-and-click" on a given subject (where underlined) to access its page.

Complementing the Percy homepage are specially selected graphics to accompany each major heading, including an original montage inspired by Percy's nonfiction work, *Lost in the Cosmos*. The reader will note that the further one progresses down the homepage, the more specialized the material becomes. Each of the essays accompanying the section entitled "The Work of Walker Percy: Fiction and Philosophy" are being written with the nonspecialist in mind. A following section (to be included in Stage II) will be dedicated to special topics on Percy as written on a more advanced level. Ideally, therefore, the resource as a whole will serve the interests of the novice or the advanced Percy reader, as well as be useful as a tool for teaching Percy's literature.

Stage II will strive to round out the project with more color, resonance and depth. Scheduled items include a "Photograph Gallery" of the novelist and his hometown of Covington, Louisiana; "Sound Recordings" of Percy interviews; "Fiction Excerpts" from Percy's novels; and original art by Covington native Paul Ryan. Further, given the appropriate permission, additional scholarly resources in the form of Modern Language Association and Dissertation Abstracts International bibliographies and summaries will be made available, alongside the inclusion of the "Special Topics" section mentioned above. The latter will feature more technical essays considering Percy and such subjects as science, psychiatry and semiotics. Persons with interests in similar, comprehensive topics are invited to contact the publisher. Of equal possibility in the future is the early announcement and description of, if not also partial publication of, forthcoming books on Percy. Four books are scheduled for 1995 release alone, details of which are present in the *WPPProject*.

Long-term possibilities for the *WPPProject* are even richer as the full power of the Internet is brought into line with the project. For example, given sufficient interest by

a large enough population of Percy enthusiasts, a "Percy Electronic Bulletin Board" (i.e., newsgroup) could be established where any and all topics related to Percy could be discussed and commented upon by persons all over the world. Similarly, the establishment of "A Walker Percy [Electronic] Quarterly" could follow, with editorial board members at different universities being separated from one another only by the distance they are from their keyboards. The addition of further archives of essays and dissertations is likewise readily feasible.

Support for the *WPPProject* has come from many quarters. Rhoda K. Faust, owner of Maple Street Book Store in New Orleans and Percy's longtime friend, published a number of Percy's monographs through Faust Publishing Company and has graciously provided numerous materials to the project. Likewise, Elizabeth Roundtree of St. Tammany Parish Libraries has given support by providing transportation costs for the publisher to attend the recent 1995 Walker Percy Symposium (held each spring in Covington), where the premiere announcement of the project was made, along with a demonstration. Further thanks are also due to the editors of *The Southern Quarterly* for their supportive interest in the *WPPProject* and the publication of this announcement essay.

The publisher welcomes any similar assistance that potential supporters might care to provide in the future. In particular, further publicity and travel expenses are two primary needs, while any materials related to Percy are equally desired.

Please mail all correspondence or inquiries to: Henry P. Mills, The Walker Percy Project, 2510 Thornton Road, No. 17, Austin, TX 78704. Alternatively, the publisher's e-mail address is: <henm@mail.utexas.edu>. As a final note, if you have trouble accessing the WWW or finding the *WPPProject*—if you find yourself "Lost in the [Internet] Cosmos"—the publisher would be more than happy to provide more detailed instructions.

Notes

¹Consider, for instance, Douglas Davis's project, "The World's First Collaborative Sentence," an ongoing multimedia "sentence" that allows its viewers to contribute anything they want (as long as it's not a period!) to what has now become an endless run-on succession of photos, video clips and multilingual expressions. Personal amendments can be made at the following Internet address: <<http://math240.lehman.cuny.edu/art/>>. See: *Newsweek* 17 Apr. 1995: 16. For more on "hypertext fiction," see Gareth Rees's hypertext article, "Tree Fiction on the World Wide Web," at: <<http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk:80/users/gdr11/tree-fiction.html>>. Rees's article contains a bibliography of other hypertext fiction resources.

Likewise, for a general literature directory, see: <<http://galaxy.einet.net/galaxy/Arts-and-Humanities/Language-and-Literature.html>>. (Rees's article can be found here, under the heading "Prose Fiction and Non Fiction.") For a more scholarly listing, see Louisiana State University's "Literature Webliography" at <<http://www.lib.lsu.edu/hum/lit.html>>.

²For a basic, readable introduction to the Internet, as well as information for going "online," see Adam C. Engst, "Making the Internet Connection," *MacUser* May 1995: 66-73.

The Walker Percy Internet Project
World Wide Web Homepage
<http://sunsite.unc.edu/wpercy/>

WALKER PERCY: ARTIST, PHILOSOPHER, SCIENTIST

[short essays and chart]

Who is Walker Percy?

A Brief Biography

Important Dates

A Portrait of Walker Percy (image)

THE WORK OF WALKER PERCY: FICTION AND PHILOSOPHY

[introductory essays]

The Novels

essay by John R. May, Department of English, Louisiana State University

Philosophy (General)

essay by Charles P. Bigger, Department of Philosophy, Louisiana State University

Philosophy of Language

essay by Henry P. Mills

SPECIAL TOPICS ESSAYS

[Stage II, forthcoming]

SCHOLARLY RESOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHIES

"An Essential Walker Percy Bibliography" (Mills)

Forthcoming in a 1995 issue of *Southern Quarterly*

Inventory of the Walker Percy Papers (UNC-Chapel Hill)

General Percy holdings in UNC-Chapel Hill Libraries

Other Important Percy Research Centers:

Louisiana State University

University of Mississippi

New Books (1995)

OF INTEREST

1995 Walker Percy Symposium (Covington, LA)

The Walker Percy Society (Whitman College, WA)

Upcoming Conference Sessions

Calls for Papers

Locating Percy Collector's Items:

Special Collections and Bookstores

Ellen Douglas: Articles and Interviews

Ellen Douglas—I Have Found It **Christine Wilson**—Interview with Ellen Douglas **Betty Tardieu**—"I'm in That Secular World, Even Though I Keep Looking for Someplace Else To Be": Interview with Ellen Douglas **Rhonda Watts**—Ellen Douglas's Greenville **Susan V. Donaldson**—Ellen Douglas's *Black Cloud, White Cloud* and the Fragmentation of Narrative **Deborah Wilson**—"Re-inventing the Record": Ellen Douglas's *A Lifetime Burning* as An/"Other" Southern Narrative **Jan Shoemaker**—Ellen Douglas: Reconstructing the Subject in "Hold On" and *Can't Quit You, Baby* **Charles Fister**—Not Just Whistlin' Dixie: Music, Functional Silence and the Arbitrary Semiotics of Oppression in Ellen Douglas's *Can't Quit You, Baby* **Leslie Petty**—"She has some buried connection with these lives": Autobiographical Acts in *Can't Quit You, Baby*

Ellen Douglas: Sources

Sharron Eve Sarthou and Thomas M. Verich—The Ellen Douglas Manuscript Collection at The University of Mississippi **Lee Hunter and LeAnne Benfield**—Selective Checklist of Ellen Douglas Materials

Review Essay

Roger West—Reconjuring Charles Chesnutt: A Review Essay

Special Report

Henry P. Mills—A New Face for Postmodern Scholarship: Announcing the Walker Percy Internet Project

Books reviewed in this issue

Michael McFee, ed.—The Language They Speak Is Things to Eat: Poems by Fifteen Contemporary North Carolina Poets **David E. E. Sloane, ed.**—Mark Twain's Humor: Critical Essays **Alan Cheuse**—The Grandmothers' Club **Paula Glover**—White Boys and River Girls **Catherine Clinton, ed.** Half Sisters of History: Southern Women and the American Past **Diane Roberts**—The Myth of Aunt Jemima: Representations of Race and Region **Hugh Ruppersburg, ed.**—Georgia Voices, Volume Two: Nonfiction

Film reviewed in this issue

Mira Nair—The Perez Family

Index to Volume XXXIII