

The third and final segment of the narrative, "The Trace of a Man on a Woman" (237), follows Eileen's love for Irish patriot and dancer Aidan Lanighan from Loughbreeze Beach farm on the shores of Lake Ontario, to Montreal's Griffintown in flood, to the Parliament in Ottawa, where Aidan's fate is intertwined with Irish leader and Fenian betrayer D'Arcy McGee's. But the last part of the Irish triad is belied, for a man can leave a trace on a woman in the form of a child. Deirdre, named for the Irish Deirdre of the Sorrows, is the eldest of Liam and wife Molly's five children. Only her daughter Esther learns that Deirdre's true mother is really her Aunt Eileen.

Thus, the narrative framework brings the saga full circle, as the aged Esther retells the story on her last night in the old house before the encroaching cement company destroys the fossilized past in the quarry and the ship *The New Dominion* appears on the horizon to fill its hold with rock. The narrative ends, all too soon, but, like the fossils embedded in rock, the image of a floating house, the memory of a man who charms skunks, and the relic of a bone hairpin twined with red-gold hair and the emblem of a single black feather remain imprinted in the reader's mind.

Lewis A. Lawson and Elzbieta H. Oleksy, eds.
Walker Percy's Feminine Characters
Troy, New York: Whitston. 1995. Pp. 141. \$18.50
Reviewed by Axel Knoenagel

Walker Percy is one of the most highly regarded authors the American South has produced. A central concern of the critical discussion surrounding his oeuvre has been his indebtedness to the literary and cultural traditions of his region. While Percy has repeatedly distanced himself from attempts to categorize him as a "Southern" writer—in the tradition of Faulkner—critics continue to demonstrate the presence of significant elements of the Southern cultural tradition in his writing.

In particular, Percy's descriptions of women seem to owe much to that male perspective which is so typical of that tradition. He has been criticized for creating female characters who never develop beyond the level of cliché and who only serve a function with regard to the male protagonists. *Walker Percy's Feminine Characters* is designed to provide a more coherent perspective on this issue than could be found so far: "The problem must be viewed in light of earlier issues that have been raised in the criticism of Percy's work, such as his 'southernness' or his cultural conservatism, even as it must be aligned with newer forms of scrutiny, such as gender studies, various forms of psychological analysis, and language studies" (4).

To this end, the editors, long-time Percy critic Lewis A. Lawson from the University of Maryland and Elzbieta Oleksy from the University of Lodz, Poland, have assembled nine essays by American and European critics. Six of the essays are original contributions, while Emory Elliott's "Gesture and Style in *The Moviegoer*" had so far been published only in Brazil. The contributions by the editors, Lawson's "The Dream Screen in *The Moviegoer*" and Oleksy's "From Silence and Madness to the Exchange that Multiplies," had been easily available.

The essays in the collection are concerned only with *The Moviegoer* and *The Second Coming*. Percy's other four novels do not even present female characters important enough to merit extended critical inquiry. Indeed, *The Moviegoer* only provides enough material for a single essay on Kate Cutrer. Timothy K. Nixon's "The Exclusionary Nature of *The Moviegoer*" demonstrates how the novel's sexist stereotypes make any identification with the female characters impossible.

The remaining essays focus on Percy's only female protagonist, Allison Huger. Shelley M. Jackson's "The Privilege of Maternity: Teaching Language and Love in *The Second Coming*" and Elinor Ann Walker's "Rereading Allison Huger: Making Silence Signify in *The Second Coming*" are examples of modern postmodern approaches to Percy's writing, as the Introduction announces. Both authors offer psycholinguistic readings and describe Allison Huger as moving beyond the role of helping men to self-understanding. Walker especially sees Allison as "spokesperson for Percy's language theories" (113) and the true meaning of the novel in its message about language: "What each character must discover is how to bridge the space between two individuals using language that, in the past, has only broadened that distance" (109). Even with different critical approaches, the issue of intersubjectivity, so frequently thematized by Percy and his critics, remains central.

Percy's failure to produce a larger number of interesting female characters apparently created some difficulties for the editors. Not only is this anthology rather slim, but in some of the essays the connection to its theme seems rather forced. Lawson's "The Dream Screen in *The Moviegoer*" has more to say about movies and word games than about the female characters. And in the most interesting essay in the collection, "Keeping Quentin Compson Alive: *The Last Gentleman*, *The Second Coming*, and the Problems of Masculinity," Susan V. Donaldson includes the female characters only as the necessary Other to Percy's and Faulkner's self-questioning males, who are the real interest of the inquiry.

Percy's writing has provided many interesting perceptions of life in contemporary America and especially in the modern South. The break with tradition is less dramatic than commonly claimed. In particular, the issue of male-female relationships is, as Dutch scholar Anneke Leenhouts argues, "not so much a case of new customs doing away with old traditions as of the old paternalistic attitude of male-female domination adapting to modern times"

(121). As the essays in *Walker Percy's Feminine Characters* show, not even a writer like Walker Percy who is keenly aware of these traditions and of the forces of modernization necessarily overcomes them in his work.

Fredric Jameson

The Seeds of Time

New York: Columbia UP, 1994. Pp. xviii + 215. \$22.95

Reviewed by Jerry A. Varsava

Fredric Jameson presented the 1991 Wellek Library Lectures in Critical Theory at the University of California, Irvine, and it is these three lectures that *The Seeds of Time* brings together. Certainly, students of literary theory and postmodernity require no introduction to Jameson, who has established himself over the last twenty-five years as the preeminent Marxist critic in the United States through the publication of such widely influential books as *The Political Unconscious* (1981) and *Postmodernism; Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), not to mention a myriad of essays, the most important of which are collected in the two volumes of *The Ideologies of Theory* (1988).

The essays of this collection manifest many of the features of Jameson's other scholarship, particularly that of the Eighties and Nineties. Extraordinary erudition, catholicity of reference, (directed) eclecticism, suggestive analogies—all of these support an insistent claim that we must strive and struggle to conceptualize an alternative to late capitalism. The ambit of the first chapter, "The Antinomies of Postmodernity," is the broadest, and this essay will presumably have the greatest appeal. The second, "Utopia, Modernism, and Death," attempts, against the historical odds, it seems to me, to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of *Chevengur*, a neglected novel written by the Russian poet Andrei Platonov in the late twenties that depicts the formation and ultimate destruction of a peasant utopia at the hands of "counter-revolutionary bandits" (82). The third essay, "The Constraints of Postmodernism," examines postmodern style, particularly with regard to architecture.

As Jameson sets out in his introduction, his primary concerns here remain, as elsewhere, a critique of capitalism and the postulation of a postcapitalist world. However, presumably in light of the dissolution of the Soviet empire, Jameson is altogether more tentative in these essays than in earlier works such as *The Political Unconscious*. What Jameson advances in *The Seeds of Time* is a chastened, subdued Marxism, one troubled by doubt, if not outright despair. "It seems to be easier for us today," he laments, "to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism; perhaps that is due to some weakness in our imaginations" (xii).