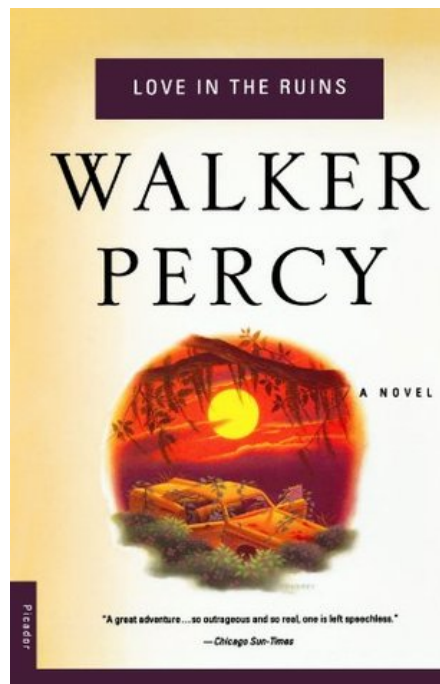




Love in the Ruins

Walker Percy

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Love in the Ruins Walker Percy

Dr. Tom More has created a stethoscope of the human spirit. With it, he embarks on an unforgettable odyssey to cure mankind's spiritual flu. This novel confronts both the value of life and its susceptibility to chance and ruin.

Love in the Ruins Details

Date : Published September 4th 1999 by St. Martin's Press (first published 1971)

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Author : Walker Percy

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From Reader Review Love in the Ruins for online ebook

K says

This is a great Catholic novel, and an excellent satire that still holds up. My favorite character: Father Kev Kevin, the ex priest who looks like Pat O'Brien and spends his working days at the Love Clinic sitting at the vaginal console reading Commonweal....if you get why this is funny, or even if you don't, but particularly if you do, read the book.

Jerod H says

A quirky, absurdest, medical comedy set against the backdrop of the real-life oddity that is south Louisiana culture . An African American uprising, a sex laboratory (with a "panic" room), college educated hippies living in the swamp, a sniper in the abandoned golf club house, polygamy, Early Times whiskey... ..these are just some of the events and devices that Dr. Tom More encounters during the 3 day period over which the novel takes place.

With sharp wit and sound wisdom, Percy explores the futile ways in which people search for healing and redemption in the "Christ-haunted" United States of America.

Peter Mcloughlin says

Walker Percy is a writer I read when I was attending a Jesuit University in the 1980s. I am a heathen these days but I am steeped in the traditions of the one true apostolic church. Percy writes from this familiar Catholic strain. I read his "lost in the Cosmos" and it struck a chord with me about the fallen condition and hope. Percy is writing a dystopian novel about a future a few decades after the time of writing from the vantage point of the early 1970s of an America which is extremely polarized left and right and religious life so degraded and intermixed with commercial capitalism and the country falling apart. He was reflecting onto his imagined future the tumult of the sixties. However, he was very perceptive the faultlines of his time he envisions metastasizing did, in fact, deliver their poisons to an America on the brink in his novel which does indeed resemble the decaying country of our own time. I no longer subscribe to metaphysics of Catholic doctrine but there is something to soul sickness of humans in the myth of the fall. We always seem exiles of some Eden.

Scott Hutchins says

I sometimes feel a little abashed to say how much I love this book, because if you're a serious literary person you can *only* like the Moviegoer. But Love in the Ruins is the first book I ever read by Percy, and I thought it was the smartest, funniest, oddest book--all dressed up in this hilarious country-club Southern accent. The world (the late 60s) is divided into Knotheads (conservatives in a delusional rage) and the Leftpapasanes (ineffective, muddled liberals). There's a great line: "The center did not hold. However, the Gross National Product continues to rise." Sounds familiar...

Jason Lewis says

Maybe the strangest book I've ever read.

this book is a perverse, pious, and odd angled look at the downfall of the American mind and American society. having just finished it, my head is spun with thoughts of the dislocated and disassociated nature of the prose and themes. I don't know if I should recommend it or bury it in the backyard for fear the children might stumble onto it. you'll have to decide for yourself.

Connie says

A couple of years ago I read a lot of Walker Percy and loved his books. Reading *Love in the Ruins - The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End of the World* now shows me again that there are times and conditions that are right or wrong for certain books. I've marked this book as "Read" though I stopped at 16%. (Thank you, Kindle.) I'd started it after a reference to it in somebody's essay somewhere. I didn't quite slot it in my "ugh" sub shelves because, after all, Walker Percy. But this is not a time for me to read dystopia and cartoonish characters. Oh, full disclosure, I read the last page too. Do not expect to take this book up again.

Eb Daniels says

At once philosophical study, religious treatise, and apocalyptic fiction, *Love in the Ruins* extrapolates modern society to its conclusion and envisions a hyperbolic United States on the eve of its own destruction. With constant wit, undeniable charm, and a pithy grasp of what constitutes the modern United States, Walker Percy lays bare the ills of society and intimates deftly at their solutions.

Love in the Ruins is fundamentally satirical, and is really less about the apocalypse than it is set in the apocalypse: this exaggerated setting affords Percy the distance needed to confront the loftiness and baseness of pedestrian daily life. The result is something that combines the presence of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* with the political insight of David Brin's *The Postman* and the verisimilitude of the first act of Stephen King's *The Stand*.

I would recommend *Love in the Ruins* to any fans of cerebral fiction. Fans of Percy will find a great deal to love, and those interested in an approach to this important Southern author might find *Love in the Ruins* more approachable than some of his more esoteric works.

booklady says

Robert Moynihan, reporting from Rome, "Inside the Vatican Magazine" Newsflash, Letter from Rome, #22: 'I studied the works of Walker Percy, the American Catholic novelist, when I was in college, at Harvard. I went to meet Percy in 1977. His most important book is a collection of philosophical essays entitled *The Message in the Bottle*.

The entire goal of his writing was to show how the historical events of Christian history constituted a "message" which brought life to people who were in the position of "castaways" on a desert island, waiting for a message that could help them in their plight to wash up on the beach...

And he did not write didactically, as if to say, "this is the message, here is part one, here is part two, you must believe this point, and this point, and also this other point..."

Rather, he described men and women finding the message, right in the middle of their loneliness -- all of us are shipwrecked; that is why we should be kind to one another -- and in finding the message, finding true life.'

Darwin8u says

"Jews wait for the Lord, Protestants sing hymns to him, Catholics say mass and eat him."

? Walker Percy, Love in the Ruins

Every time I read Walker Percy I fall in love. I seduce myself into thinking I'm actually just a bad Catholic and promise myself that next time I get a chance I will lose myself in the desert, the woods, or anywhere I can see the cold stars and the burning sand and live forever somewhere in between.

Reading another Percy novel is like discovering an unopened can of cashews in the cupboard. The amount of joy and delight I get from reading and laughing at Percy's absurd view of religion, life, love, the modern era, etc., is really only approached by a handful of lightly salted cashews and sex. 'Love in the Ruins' is messy and weird and probably could have been edited a bit, but it ALL still works perfectly for me. I laughed through every paragraph and each mark of punctuation. Percy's bad, crazy genius, almost polygamist, Catholic protagonists speak to me in ways that most philosophers (old and new), preachers (godly and godless), and politicians (left or right) fail to. He seems to occupy the ground of the fellow traveler who is just as lost and mistaken as you, but possesses a bit more wit and some extra whiskey.

So where does this novel stack up? It was like a friendly dystopian novel. It was like McCarthy decided to write a comic novel. The vines of his morality slide and creep through every page and his humor dances like a purple martin at dusk. The book might only be objectively a four star novel, but this is my review dammit and I own and carry my biases and I love Walker Percy because he makes me want to both believe AND misbehave.

Christopher Fulbright says

Hard to justify the time spent writing this review but I can't just give something one star and not explain. I thought this story was slow and meandered too long without direction. There was too much introspection, it lacked a feeling of cohesion, and there was too little meaning for everything that was happening (which wasn't much) in the first 150 pages for me to justify spending any more time with it. I just didn't care and was bored out of my mind. I had hoped for more since I'd heard great things about Walker Percy's writing, but this was a letdown. I'll try The Moviegoer instead.

Melody says

I slogged through this only making it because of an occasional witty descriptive phrase. The story is about the collapse of a fragmented society. Dr. Tom More has invented a device (a lapsometer) which he believes can cure people from their demons. He has his own demons too.

Some will find his writing and the plot clever and brilliantly written. I found both very tedious.

Charles says

Capsule Review: Don't Read Walker Percy. Ever.

Longer Review: If somebody recommends this book (or any other of his books) to you, rest assured that that he will one day soon try to convince you that the Eagles really are rock n' roll. Afterwards, he will probably inflict some of his "poetry" on you. You know the kind of stuff I mean: four-line stanzas in ABAB that will inevitably rhyme the words "pain" with "insane," "soul" with "hole," "heart" with "apart," and "feel" with "unreal." Luckily, though, you will see this coming, and as soon as your friend/lover/spouse/relative/coworker/mutual or new acquaintance/etc. recommends this author to you, you can immediately make the decision forever to exclude him (or her) from your literary life. That's right: whenever he mentions some book he read, change the subject. Talk about the weather; fake a seizure, if necessary. For example, say your boss, Mr. When-I'm-in-My-Car-I-Rock-Out-to-*The Best of Sting*, has previously recommended to you a novel written by one Walker Percy (thus alerting you that all of his taste is in his mouth). Your boss then approaches you one morning and says, "Hey, Suzy, how are you? You know, I was rereading Anne Rice this weekend, and I thought of you, because, you know, you can read, and I thought you might enjoy it." At this point, casually announce that the sun has given you cancer and you no longer have time to read before you die. Watch him shut up.

(And yes, I've posted the exact same review for all the Walker Percy books I've been unfortunate enough to read. Percy's works aren't worth more than one original review. Besides, if you've read one of his books, you've read them all.)

William Randolph says

This is certainly a strange book. I read this just after reading Peter Augustine Lawler's *Postmodernism Rightly Understood*, which cleared up the philosophy behind the book. My general impression is that in this book Percy is settling into a didactic mode, which I don't mind since I find the theory interesting. But it could be hard to just drop in if you don't know what Percy means by "angelism," or what he thinks of Descartes. Generally, it seems like the actions of Percy's protagonists are incomprehensible apart from some philosophical context, but if you've got that, then the books can be a great deal of fun—and edifying, too.

Christopher Jones says

This is my favorite novel. The protagonist, Dr. Tom More, explores the possibility of simultaneously loving three women for different reasons while living in a world that is falling apart. Perhaps Percy's "Ruins" is a metaphor for the decline of our society and for Dr. More's mental illness. It isn't always clear to how much of

More's paranoia is imagined, and how much is a product of his alcohol and allergy-induced visions. Percy's description of the decay of Southern Coastal society into armed camps divided along racial, ideological, and political lines is a delicious satire that still seems apropos in 2013, forty years after Love in the Ruins' first publication. Somehow, despite the expanding decay, both in general society around him, and in his person, Dr. More manages to show me reason to be hopeful about our future, especially about the endurance of love.

Rhonda says

Walker Percy writes one of the most gleefully enjoyable books I have read in quite a while and I do not say this lightly. There were few pages where I did not find myself either laughing to myself or, sometimes, pausing to laugh out loud and copy down a word or phrase. It was truly a gift to read this book at a time such as this. I do not mean to say this was only a funny book. The author is far too serious a writer to write sentimental drivel or humorous pap. Moreover, one either has to be reasonably well educated or, as I have discovered in leading book reviews locally, you can just read over the esoterica which is rather enjoyable. I always believed that education was far more enjoyable beyond any level of snob appeal, but I appear to be in the minority lately.

Nevertheless, I stop slightly short of calling it prophetic. Oh, what the hell? Let's go ahead and coin a phrase and call him a comical prophet. The more you understand the images intimately from classical literature, the better off one will be. One issue which I am ashamed to admit was that I had to research any number of medical issues mentioned in the book. It seems that the author actually graduated from medical school and, since the narrator is a psychiatrist, he often speaks of arcane medical terms and freely uses apparently accurate medical terminology. There are, of course, limitations, such as in the author's inventions, but it is nevertheless tongue-in-cheek medically plausible.

It is difficult to say just what this book is about. However, imagine a period of time in which the United States were catastrophically split into two contrasting political groups and they lived with a constantly uneasy truce, as such. Now imagine, further, that in the anger and hostility of both sides for the other, individuals had lost their real capacities to be and act like human beings. The narrator suggests that they have lost their souls...and I think this is, for the most part, an accurate description.

Now imagine that this is from a time period around 1970 and the United States has just undergone a tremendous upheaval, a great deal of the electric grid is not functioning, the population has become so factioned that one has to be careful where one lives and one gathers that the populations has been severely decreased. It is a veritable setting for the Twilight Zone and nature is attempting to take back what civilization had built for the last fifty years. You are also stuck somewhere in Louisiana with no real mention of the unbearable humidity.

This book was written in 1971, a time of political upheaval in the United States and elsewhere, the war in Viet Nam and a huge split beginning in political outlook beginning. Percy is not so much detailing these things as he is he making fun of a fictional world in which all of this has come to a head and caused a revolution of sorts in which the country is completely divided between the liberal PAPASANS and the conservative Knotheads. Each is a parody of itself, it goes without saying.

Both political parties had their triumphs. The Lefts succeeded in removing "In God We Trust" from pennies.

The Knotheads enacted a law requiring compulsory prayers in the black public schools and made funds available for birth control in Africa, Asia, and Alabama.

I found this hilarious, albeit the part about birth control in Alabama kind of hits home. If you have ever spent more than a few days there, you probably understand.

But what precipitates this civil war in which the world that was once the mighty United States now finds itself embattled and forlorn by political strife and enigma? Well, the narrator, whose name is Thomas More, no relation to the great saint, to whom is he often compares himself and his situation, only says that the outcome has resulted in this uneasy truce of polarization which has resulted in a ridiculousness beyond the capacity of this review to explain. Nevertheless, it is both silly, sad, painful and very very funny. The oddity, however, is that it is almost like holding up a mirror to the present day.

The author prophetically explains the origins in both a profound and irreverent paragraph.

Was it the nigger business from the beginning? What a bad joke: God saying, here it is, the new Eden, and it is yours because you're the apple of my eye; because you the lordly Westerners, the fierce, Caucasian-Gentile-Visigoths, believed in me and in the outlandish Jewish event even though you were nowhere near it and had to hear the news of it from strangers. But you believed and so I gave it all to you, gave you Israel and Greece and science and art and the lordship of the earth, and finally even gave you the new world that I blessed for you. And all you had to do was pass this one little test, which was surely child's play for you because you had already passed the big one. One little test: here's a helpless man in Africa, all you have to do is not violate him. That's all. One little test: you flunk!

But enough of the background theory. The story line which keeps the reader moving forward is simple enough although it includes any number of different side paths. It comes down to this. Convinced that some sort of cataclysmic event is going to happen on July 4, Dr. Thomas More has managed to stockpile 6 months of food, water, whiskey and literature. Our good doctor is like Noah, setting up an ark in an hotel room of a derelict Howard Johnsons. In this ark, he has planned to keep three women with whom he thinks he might be in love, (and they with him!) together in several hotel rooms. He has created relationships with each of them in separate ways and now plans to bring them together with the announcement of the great impending danger.

Naturally this situation takes a while to explain, but by the time one understands, one is either shaking his/her head piteously at this poor man or laughing hysterically. One can only imagine keeping three women in derelict hotel rooms, especially three with whom one was ...reasonably close. I thought this was all very funny. There are various parts of this which are intentionally ridiculous, even in terms of male fantasy. It was the way in which the author had so much fun that made one laugh. Sometimes it was Euripides and sometimes it was bordering on slapstick!

The narrator borders on being unreliable, partly because he is telling the reader about all of his bad habits, mostly drinking whiskey and chasing women, but also his history, watching his beloved child die of a disease no one could cure and then having his wife leave him because her heart was simply broken and she couldn't love him any more. He is, one finds, a rather tragic case, and yet in many ways stalwart about his ideals about life and, perhaps, his ruminations about God. Intertwined, of course, and there is no great magic about this, one supposes, is the great tedium of male fantasy worlds....but it is so amusing that one may not even object because one is disposed to allow him to succeed in some small way, after all.

Thomas More is, more than anything else, a doctor, a psychiatrist, one who wrestles with the keys to man's soul insofar as God will allow him the glimpses into it. He is considered quite brilliant in general but specifically for a device which he has invented, something which he hopes will revolutionize not only the psychiatric field of medicine, but essentially repair the damage that has been done to people by themselves.

He has great hopes that his brain stimulator will be able to one day stabilize mankind to the point where it can get along with itself. In the meantime, however, the good doctor is a severely damaged soul himself, usually in search of either Early Times bourbon or an attractive young lady. He says of himself:

I, for example, am a Roman Catholic, albeit a bad one.....I believe in God and the whole business but I love women best, music and science next, whiskey next, God fourth and my fellowman hardly at all. Generally I do as I please. A man, wrote John, who says he believes in God and does not keep the commandments is a liar. If John is right, then I am a liar. Nevertheless, I still believe.

I suppose I have a weak spot for people who readily admit their internal conflicts. Of course, everyone pretty much admits internal conflicts when he is drinking, some of which don't even exist, but you can't help but like the doctor. He is a psychiatrist who has spent time in the mental ward at the hospital, self-entered of course, but who should recognize poor mental health better than a psychiatrist? Of course as we read the book, that becomes part of the joke, but there are revelations, nonetheless.

The first night I ever spent in on the acute ward, a madman looked at to and said, not knowing to from Adam: "You want to know your trouble? You don't love God, you love pussy."
It might be true. Madmen like possessed men usually tell the truth.

He seems to have a grasp on this issue, (madmen, I mean, rather than feminine nether regions,) and repeats it on several occasions to great effect, **Madmen, like possessed souls in the Gospels, know when you are telling the truth.**

As for women, he has an odd view of them too, one which I find gleefully delightful. **Women are mythical creatures. They have no more connection with the ordinary run of things than do centaurs.**

I have to admit to being abnormally fond of this observation, even if I find it a bit overly poetic. At least he is fond of women, clearly an idealist but he wrestles with the idea of relationships. Since his wife has left him, his relations seem aberrational in that he is trying to have sex with most of the moderately interesting women he meets. Of course this is doubly funny because he is, after all a psychiatrist. The book is written as if all the jokes are played on the characters themselves and the reader has to be quick witted enough to be able to catch the scene as it passes through. Once again, being literate helps.

I would like to summarize so many great observations that I found in this book. Indeed, I had every intention to do so when I sat down to write this review. However, I realize now that I would be telling incoherent stories about episodes which would make little or no sense to the reader. It is best that the reader understand that although I don't think that Walker Percy can write an ending to any of his books that is truly magnificent, one worthy of his stories, this book is magnificent in itself, filled with issues to ponder for days as I did and worthy of laughter for hours. It is funny beyond measure, but more than anything, it makes one think deeply on the issues of the soul, I hope, and of man's relationship with his maker. Perhaps in that regard, it is all too satisfying.

Michael says

What was probably at one time a revolutionary, subversive and thought-provoking novel is now only a curiosity in the wake of better books by Vonnegut and Robbins and Wilson. I don't think that I will ever understand the tendency of stories from this era (the 1970s) to be so paranoid and winky. Then again, I wasn't alive at the time.

This is not to say that Percy is a bad writer, but I've come to expect more from my questionable narrators and post-apocalyptic scenarios.

Nathan says

This is Walker Percy at his misanthropic, self-hating Catholic best. The story centers around Thomas More, a self-professed "bad Catholic" who loves women and whiskey a lot more than God or his fellow man. (He basically could care less for his fellow man, and he'd probably choose his beloved Early Times over women as well). What makes him appealing is his grasp of the human condition that he is faced with, where people are continually estranged from themselves and their own swirling desires. So, he invents a device designed to reconcile opposites within the human psyche. Of course, he is no different as he is in love with three women at once. This is set against a backdrop of political unrest and revolution. It's definitely a satire but it has plenty of serious parts and elements as well. I liked it. Awesome.

Genevieve says

Well-written and it kept moving, but the story was too oddball for me and I couldn't enjoy it.

Parker says

This book reads like some dumpster baby of Kierkegaard and Clancy (Yes, Tom Clancy).

The existential inquiries into man in the face of a culture whose pace or direction cares little for its constituents is, as in *The Moviegoer*, a wonderful one.

Unfortunate for the fool who picks up this book to do more with it than crush a pill bug, that is about 2% of the book. The rest is a poorly edited barebones satire of autumn-century America, and as is the case with nearly all satire, difficult to keep engaged, even though it's couched in a thriller-esque mode.

I'm not sure what to make of Walker Percy anymore. Some paragraphs are gorgeous pinpricks of insight into what we all as modern Americans feel but have never been able to express, and the rest reads like a fifth-tier MFA dropout wrote it.

I guess that Percy attended UNC should absolve him of these follies, but I'm not sure even my love of the Tarheels can save this one.

Boo.

S says

Here is another slipstream/satire novel where the targets are The American South and America's political and religious troubles (at least as they were in the 70s, but it seems, at least to my own unschooled eye, to be the

same troubles as today, only today we have more TV and internet). My friend Grieg said that Percy was trying to do what O'Connor did successfully. I suspect this statement is true. But behind it is another statement: which genre is more effective in asserting a morality (or better, critiquing a vice): postmodern satire, or modernist-punch-you-in-the-throat literature? No doubt the latter is more effective, but I feel like the former is probably more fun.

My friend Nathan said he didn't see the point to this novel. I'm afraid it's true: there is no ultimate conclusion. Dr. Moore ends up in a similar predicament as he was in prior to the death of his daughter. The revolution/apocalypse does a *The Hobbit* on us and happens off stage. And the revolution/apocalypse ended up just being a general upset, not the big one. It is neat though when the government-big-business-liaison guy is banished with Dr. More's prayer to St. Thomas More, his namesake.

The smartest part of the novel, and the coolest sf-conceit presented in the text, is Dr. More's Lapsometer readings. Narratively speaking, it functions as a quick and deep characterization device. Philosophically, it is a striking assessment of contemporary psychological ills.

I'm ambivalent.
