



## Signposts in a Strange Land: Essays

By Walker Percy

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At his death in 1990, Walker Percy left a considerable legacy of uncollected nonfiction. Assembled in *Signposts in a Strange Land*, these essays on language, literature, philosophy, religion, psychiatry, morality, and life and letters in the South display the imaginative versatility of an author considered by many to be one the greatest modern American writers.

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

"Bourbon does for me what the piece of cake did for Proust," writes Percy in one of his sparkling, fluent essays on the South. Other pieces with Southern themes collected here deal with the Civil War, New Orleans, cemeteries, race relations and why this eminent novelist, who died last May, chose to live in a "nonplace"--Covington, La. The remainder of these previously uncollected essays range widely over literature, science, morality and religion. Arguing that modern science "cannot utter a single word" about what is distinctive in human behavior, art and thought, Percy turns to semiotics for the beginnings of "a coherent science of man." Modern fiction, he contends, serves a diagnostic and cognitive role in revealing us to ourselves in a century of spiritual disorientation. Other selections cover movie magazines, psychiatry, abortion (he opposes it), Eudora Welty and Moby Dick. Samway is literary editor of *America* and author of a book on Faulkner.

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From Library Journal

Eminent physician/novelist Percy ( *The Moviegoer* ) died in 1990. Accumulated here are many uncollected essays, several seeing publication for the first time, grouped under three headings conceptually central to Percy's thought: life in the South; the relationship of science, language, and literature; and morality/religion. Sometimes dense ("Is a Theory of Man Possible?"), sometimes light ("Bourbon"), his nonfiction is always entertaining and enlightening. Percy is justly famous for his efforts to detect meaning in a world growing more meaningless, and many of his "signposts" carry a lot of accessible semiotic significance. Lots of small gems, too: for instance, that Melville was trying to "out-Hawthorne Hawthorne." For all serious literature collections.

- *Robert E. Brown, Onondaga Cty. P.L., Syracuse, N.Y.*

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From Kirkus Reviews

A pungent, revealing collection of lectures, essays, and interviews--some previously published in *Harper's*, *The Georgia Review*, etc.--by the late novelist (d. 1990). Percy was a quintessentially American writer with a voice of his own that was never compromised. His observation that the purpose of the novel is to give pleasure can be applied to this work as well. The nonfiction has a droll, dry, carefully laid-back honesty that shares something important with such masters of American English as Russell Baker, James Thurber, and Mark Twain; but Percy can also be as intense as Graham Greene in the earnestness of his Catholicism. He wrote novels with plenty of thought-content, and his nonfiction has plenty of storytelling. He writes about science, linguistics, literature, and the South, in ascending order of success, and while he is no threat to Chomsky and his successors, his essay on bourbon puts him up there with Flann O'Brien on the subject of whiskey. The title of his 1957 essay "The Coming Crisis in Psychiatry" is prescient, as are his queries into a profession that has since splintered in all directions. This is diligent, unassuming writing, always as clear and simple as the subject will allow, and sometimes deadly. It does not have the brooding elegance of his best fiction, but it has a stubborn integrity and a sense of the future. Always, Percy strives to keep in balance a very real spiritual talent, the abstract theories of science in which he was trained (as a doctor), and the precise, forgiving sense of human frailty in which the best southern writing is grounded. Percy was that rarest of creatures, an educated gentleman, a true man of the humanities; like the bourbon he writes about, he has a complex, heady flavor all his own. A good book to travel with. -- *Copyright ©1991, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

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