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# Louisiana Gothic: *Dark Waters*, *The Fugitive Kind* and Walker Percy's Imaginary World<sup>1</sup>

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Movies are the lingua franca of the twentieth century. The Tenth Muse, as they call the movies in Italy, has driven the other nine right off Olympus – or off the peak, anyway.

Gore Vidal, *Screening History*, 2.

Our neighborhood theater in Gentilly has permanent lettering on the front of the marquee reading: Where Happiness Costs So Little.

Walker Percy, *The Moviegoer*, 14.

In *Screening History*, his study of the influence of movies on people, Gore Vidal explains: "Today, where literature was movies are. Whether or not the Tenth Muse does her act on a theater screen or within the cathode tube, there can be no other reality for us since reality does not begin to *mean* until it has been made art of" (5). In the realm of Southern fiction, the movie industry has had the strongest influence on Walker Percy. Of course, other writers do refer to movies at times but they seldom use them as intertexts; movies are generally nothing more than hypotexts.<sup>2</sup> Percy's novels, *The Moviegoer* (MG) and *Lancelot* (L), were written not for the screen but from the screen: they include references to a number of movies and, at times, scenes from movies are embedded in the novels. *Lancelot* is clearly a criticism of the movie world and was written after Percy had understood that *The Moviegoer* would never be adapted for the screen (Samway 265, 280): although the rights had been sold and some scenes had been shot, the film was never completed. Ironically, Avon even advertised the forthcoming film on the back cover of a reprint of the novel.<sup>3</sup>

From the outset of Percy's first published novel, *The Moviegoer*, the reader understands that the narrator's memories are closely linked to movies. What may not be so obvious for the contemporary reader—who is not familiar with the movies whose titles appear here and there in the novel—is that Percy also uses a number of facts and situations from these movies, thus blending various forms of fiction. The same goes for *Lancelot*, which parodies

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<sup>1</sup> I want to thank Patrick Maillard for his useful comments and suggestions on this article.

<sup>2</sup> I am borrowing Gérard Genette's terminology in *Seuils* (1987).

<sup>3</sup> The edition I refer to is the third Avon printing which has a blue cover and golden type.

Tennessee Williams's *Orpheus Descending* and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*: a dark atmosphere, a house burning, a secret buried under the ashes of the house; all these elements participate in the creation of a Gothic atmosphere and plunge the reader into an apocalyptic clamor. The aim of this contribution is to show how movies such as Andre De Toth's *Dark Waters* (1944) and Sidney Lumet's *The Fugitive Kind* (1959), which Percy used as obvious intertexts, help to define Southern Gothic. In addition to the specificity of the region, the settings of the two movies bring to mind the castles and ancient mansions used in Gothic fiction.

Rebecca C. McIntyre traces the Southern Gothic back to travel writers who, "in linking the ruined plantations with medieval manors gone forever (...), satiated their audience's demand for a mysterious Old World atmosphere close to home" (34). In *Dark Waters*, De Toth chose to emphasize the characters' inner drama instead of the Louisiana setting; he therefore found it easier to shoot the film in a studio:

To shoot it as real as Louisiana, it wasn't necessary to shoot in Louisiana; my aim was to focus the attention on the people living in that mansion. (...) In Louisiana, the people felt it was shot there because the characters in *Dark Waters* didn't think, but felt they were in Louisiana. (Slide 12)

The Gothic atmosphere he created in the movie adds to its fictional dimension for, as the viewer later finds out, everything has been carefully orchestrated for the main character to feel trapped and threatened by some outer force.

*Dark Waters* is not a famous movie but it does present the Gothic aspect of the Southern imagination. Dark waters are also very present in Louisiana, a region that is famous for its swamps and the secrets surrounding them, another feature McIntyre associates with the Southern Gothic. Director De Toth states that "it was a story of a Gothic prison" (Slide 12) and he "wanted to make it Gothic" (Slide 13). Shot in 1944, the black and white movie certainly conveys the various aspects germane to the Gothic as a genre. Maurice Lévy explains that "Gothic is (...) an adequate metaphor for the dark side of life, for the world of cruelty, of horror, lust, perversion, and crime, that is reflected in certain forms of contemporary fiction or films" (2004, 30). The use of the black and white, though not calculated in that period of experimentation with color, is a particularly efficient artistic medium to reinforce the dark atmosphere of the plot and emphasize the Southern setting. The process of identification to the setting and the characters seems to have worked insofar as Walker Percy's narrator in *The Moviegoer*, Binx

Bolling, is concerned. The movies mentioned in the novel give a visual frame to the narrator's life and to the reader's perception of the events. Of all the films referred to in the course of the narrative, *Dark Waters* stands out for it foreshadows a scene where the waters of life say more than the words of the text itself. *The Fugitive Kind*, though it was shot fifteen years later and released in 1960, is also in black and white, thus stressing the darkness of the situation it depicts. A study of the two movies through Gothic lenses will shed light on Percy's cinematographic fiction.

### **Translating the Gothic Vision into the Text**

Percy's protagonists are all afflicted with what I would call a 'cinematographic syndrome': they are the actors of a life that is not really the one they wish to lead; and, in addition, they are spectators, for they watch themselves from the outside and describe their lives with such detachment that they might as well be someone else's. Walker Percy played the same game when he answered the questions of his biographer, Robert Coles, in the 1970s:

I'd go all the time to movies up at Washington Heights. I think at the movies I was getting to know how people looked at the world, what they thought – just as a doctor does. The movies are not just fantasies; for a lot of people they provide important moments, maybe the only point in the day, or even the week, when someone (...) is heard asking what life is all about, asking what is worth fighting for – or asking if anything is worth fighting for. (63)

This explanation aptly describes the motivations behind Binx Bolling's moviegoing in Percy's first novel. He, too, wonders about his place in the world and about the meaning of it all. Movies end up being more significant than real-life events. Binx goes to the movies, records the scenes that reproduce his life in a better light or, paradoxically, tell his story better than he could, and simply swaps facts for fiction. Binx's search is a quest for coherence and thus he resorts to what John Dos Passos refers to as "the camera eye" and which Wright Morris sees as "the process of displacing [the] world with its own more available, coherent image. When we think of the 'world,' do we not think of a photograph?" (8). Binx would certainly answer that he thinks of a movie capture for he is so much of a moviegoer that he sees life in terms of movies, echoing Morris's comment that,

[I]ike the writer to writing, the painter to painting, the composer to music, the movie addict to movies, the photographer is incurably vulnerable to photographs. He can no longer avoid seeing the world in the manner photographers have seen it. In many ways photographs appear to have displaced it, and the visible world must be rediscovered. (11)

One cannot but acknowledge that Binx tries to make sense of his life, to give meaning to what Percy calls his "pilgrimage on earth." Binx and Lancelot (but it would work for any of Percy's major characters) do not belong to the world, they are watchers and they think that 'All the world's a stage,' to borrow Shakespeare's expression. Yet, they cannot enjoy what they see because it takes them unawares. The Gothic undertones are palpable if we bear in mind Maurice Lévy's comments that "the Gothic is loaded with meaning in that it indicates the direction of the gaping abyss that threatens to widen under the pressure of our feet" (1992, 163). The menace looms over Percy's world and the scenes he portrays overflow with Gothic features. His protagonists are the witnesses of a decaying world to such an extent that they also witness their own lives passing by. The aim of their searches is to recover their lives and escape this sense of impending doom.

Moviegoing offers a mirror of reality. The characters only become aware of themselves when they realize that their malaise has a face. The movies provide answers to the protagonists' existential questions and have a mimetic influence. This is especially noticeable when Binx recalls the aftermath of his older brother's death at the beginning of the novel. Instead of displaying emotions, Binx uses a movie to tell the reader about his feelings: like the man who lost everything when he lost his memory, Binx had to make 'a fresh start.' And, although the situation might sound like a tragedy, Binx believes that "things were not so bad after all" (MG 12), because the man was given a second chance, which Binx wishes he will be given too. Simone Vauthier observes that "the intrusion of the movie (...) alerts us to both its relevance to the hero's subconscious life and the importance of moviegoing in his experience" (1975, 222). In Binx's case, the movie is to be seen as a metaphor for the return of the repressed and for the character's desire to tone down his painful experience by acting like the man in the movie whose life script has already been written. In the film, it is the proximity of death and the man's subsequent amnesia that give him a chance to start a new life, something Binx means to achieve by picturing himself as a persona deprived of emotions—though the reader soon finds out about the void separating the picture and the frame.

Lancelot is also a movie person and he needs to see his wife's adultery on a screen to make sure that his suspicions are justified, thus exemplifying another of Wright Morris's assertions: "The image provides the confirmation that is lacking in the sight itself. Seeing is still believing, if what we see is a photograph" (12). Seeing the actual act of betrayal on a screen would make it stand away from reality and make its uncanny quality more obvious if we bear in mind that Freud's theory has to do with defamiliarization. In Lance's home-made film, "Lights and darks were reversed like a negative" (L 198), which reinforces the consequences of his discovery concerning the nature of his marriage. For Percy's protagonist, there is a hidden truth to be found in the movies, since truth can only be displayed through an external lens; moreover, a screen makes a perfect recipient as it renders life more bearable by depicting it in a better light.

### **The Dark Waters of Life**

James Agee describes De Toth's movie as "a thriller about a young woman, convalescent from shock, who suffers among cryptic surroundings and ambiguous people on a swampy Louisiana sugar plantation" (154). For Binx, *Dark Waters* embodies two of the concepts he cherishes: repetition and rotation (MG 117). These two notions, borrowed from Kierkegaard's philosophy, he defines in the following terms:

A repetition is the re-enactment of the past experience towards the end of isolating the time segment which has lapsed in order that it, the lapsed time, can be savoured of itself and without the usual adulteration of events that clog time like peanuts in brittle. (MG 68)

A rotation I define as the experiencing of the new beyond the expectation of the experiencing of the new. (MG 117)

After watching De Toth's movie, Binx declares: "I was nearly beside myself with rotatory emotion" (MG 117). As for Leslie Calvin in the movie, the events have a completely different meaning: she is constantly reminded of the accident in which her parents were killed. Whereas Binx's life-story begins with a letter, the movie includes a useful prologue that sets the tone and the gothic mood of the plot. After the display of credits, Miklos Rozsa's music accelerates while the newspapers describing Leslie's misfortunes are being printed: "Philip Calvin, Noted Batavian Oil Operator, and Wife Lost in Tragedy; Leslie Calvin, their Daughter, Among those Rescued." Then, when the front page appears on the screen, the woman's picture becomes alive and she

tells the viewer about her fears, addressing him directly. Two pictures are blended, reinforcing the confusion in Leslie's mind while providing clues about its origins. This scene fades to black although we find Leslie at the very same place after a second: she is on her hospital bed, in full light, with a doctor by her side. The dark intermission raises the viewer's concern for Leslie and offers a pause before allowing him to go deeper into her world. Having a dark screen also seems to suggest that Leslie's downfall has started and foreshadows her growing uncertainty.

Another early scene, which takes place during supper at her aunt and uncle's mansion, gives life to Leslie's fears: Cleeve, a man who lives on the plantation with the family, asks the young woman about the context of her arrival in the States. After the question has been asked, the camera tracks sideways around Leslie and then Sydney, an intriguing figure who seems to direct everything that is going on in the house, forces Leslie to give more details about her trips. After a few seconds of silence, Cleeve asks another question and the camera initiates a back and forth movement between the inquirers and Leslie: things accelerate and Leslie ends up leaving the table because she has reached the painful moment when the boat sank. As the conversation gets closer to Leslie's heart of darkness, the music begins, becoming louder until it reaches a climax that corresponds to the moment when Leslie actually leaves the room and thus gives the scene more dramatic proportions. The audience understands later that the whole story is a masquerade planned out by Sydney, who paid someone to kill Leslie's aunt and uncle and who replaced them with two accomplices in order to drive Leslie insane and sell the house without too much trouble. *Dark Waters* is not the only movie Binx mentions but it is undoubtedly the one that gave Percy's novel a lot of its substance.

The most significant instance of such borrowings occurs in the opening line: "This morning I got a note from my aunt" (MG 11), Binx says, echoing the situation in *Dark Waters*; interestingly, both aunts share the same first name, Emily.<sup>4</sup> The letter, in both cases, is an invitation: Binx is expected to pay a visit to his aunt "to have one of her serious talks" (MG 11); Leslie is invited to stay at her aunt's after the tragic accident that has left her an orphan. The letter is also a starting point for the two protagonists' search for the meaning of their lives in the ruins of the past.

In the foreword to *The Moviegoer*, Percy states that

what follows is a work of the imagination. Every character, except movie stars, and event without exception are fictitious. No

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<sup>4</sup> In the first drafts of the novel, Percy had chosen to make Emily Binx's grandmother. The change might have been made in reference to *Dark Waters*.

resemblance to real persons is intended or should be inferred. When movie stars are mentioned, it is not the person of the actor which is meant but the character he projects upon the screen... (MG 9)

By warning the reader, Percy also gives us an essential clue concerning the book for he exposes the importance of role-playing in the experience of his moviegoer. Simone Vauthier explains that, when he describes himself as a model, early in the novel, "Binx is not drawing an authentic self-portrait but is fondly describing a role" (1978, 73); for him, "reality turns out to be stranger than Hollywood fiction, precisely because it is apprehended in terms of screenplay. (...) Binx is in fact screening himself off from experience" (74). Binx's life undoubtedly depends on what he sees in the movies, so much so that images acquire a greater value than earthly experiences: "Other people, so have I read, treasure memorable moments in their lives. (...) What I remember is the time John Wayne killed three men with a carbine as he was falling to the dusty street in *Stagecoach*, and the time the kitten found Orson Welles in the doorway in *The Third Man*" (MG 14). Memorable moments are closely related to movie scenes and Binx pinpoints key scenes in the two aforementioned films—in both cases, they involve violence, death and mystery, and he does try, throughout the novel, to understand these issues and their repercussions on his life.

The reader of Percy's novel quickly understands that there is something at stake for Binx. The opening words of the novel, "This morning," make that day a particular one: it is not "One morning" but "*This* morning." Later on, "this" morning becomes a central moment in Binx's narrative because "This morning, for the first time in years, there occurred to me the possibility of a search" (MG 16). The association of Emily's note and of the search is even clearer when Binx takes the bus to go to his aunt's place: "The idea of a search comes to me again as I am on my way to my aunt's house..." (MG 17). What makes Binx Bolling akin to Leslie Calvin is one of his comments on the change that occurred to him: "This morning, for example, I felt as if I had come to myself on a strange island. And what does such a castaway do? Why, he pokes around the neighborhood and he doesn't miss a trick" (MG 18). Leslie Calvin is also a castaway who comes to herself on a strange island: she does not know her Aunt Emily and she has never been to her place. She has to start a new life, much like the movie castaway to whom Binx refers in the first page of the novel.

The metaphor of the castaway so dear to Walker Percy is particularly useful when considering *Dark Waters* since as the title suggests, the movie is all about the darkness of water and the secrets it may hide. In an interview, De

Toth justifies the predominance of the swamp in his movie: “*Dark Waters* was Gothic. Louisiana was just the right background to suggest that the house in the bayous was a Gothic prison” (Silver). Noticeably, the swamp is what Binx remembers from *Dark Waters* when he refers to the movie (MG 117), confirming that the location has a peculiar effect on both the protagonists and the viewers. The revelatory process begins when, after hearing voices calling her name, Leslie rushes to the balcony: the reflection of the guardrail on the walls gives the impression that she is trying to get out of a prison. Then she goes down the stairs to get out of the house and starts wandering in the swamps around the mansion. When she reaches the swamp, a Gothic locus *par excellence*, Leslie is met by the black help who tells her that he too heard those voices.

The scene is worth lingering on, for the viewer first becomes aware of the black man's presence thanks to his reflection in the water of the swamp. The darkness and the abundant vegetation add to the character's bewilderment. The choice of showing the black man through his reflection in the water prefigures his coming death: Leslie later finds his body floating in the swamp. Interestingly, the black man is the only person whose murdered body appears on screen, as if he were a dark spot in the whole plan orchestrated by the fake aunt and uncle to swindle Leslie. McIntyre notes that “both in and out of the swamp, twisted trees and melancholy moss, with or without plantation ruins, came to symbolize the tragic, medieval, and grotesque traits of the gothic landscape of the Reconstruction South” (58). While adding to the Gothic dimension of the movie, the swamp also introduces the notion of “Gothic Other” that, in the words of Ruth Bienstock Anolik, “replaces the supernatural ghost or grotesque monsters as the code for mystery and danger” (2). The Gothic Other is a valuable presence for Leslie since he illuminates her darkness. Tellingly, at the end of the movie, when the truth has been discovered, the action returns to the swamp: the manipulators try to get rid of the witnesses of their treachery by drowning them.

### **Lancelot Lamar's Gothic Stage**

Like *Dark Waters*, Percy's *Lancelot* describes a Gothic prison and uses headlines to introduce the tragedy that took place in Belle Isle, the eponymous narrator's estate: “BELLE ISLE BURNS. BODIES OF FILM STARS CHARRED BEYOND RECOGNITION. SCION OF OLD FAMILY CRAZED BY GRIEF AND RAGE. SUFFERS BURNS TRYING TO SAVE HIS WIFE” (L 11-12). The plot of the novel takes up elements from Tennessee Williams's play *Orpheus Descending*, adapted as *The Fugitive Kind* for the screen. As opposed to Williams, who does not show much interest in Jabe Torrance, the deceived husband, Percy gives him a voice through Lance: just

like Jabe, Lance discovers that his wife, Margot, is having an affair, and he ends up killing her and setting the house on fire.

Lisa Hopkins notes that one of the “principal characteristics [of the Gothic is] a concern with the fragmented and often doubled nature of the self” (xi). The idea of doubles is more specifically presented in Chapter Eight of Percy’s novel, when Lance introduces his own film. He refers to it as a “double feature” (L 197), bearing in mind that he is spying on two rooms. Ironically, his project is not easy to carry out because the tape presents a distorted image of reality, especially as far as colors are concerned:

The figures, tiny figurines, were reddish, like people in a film darkroom, and seemed to meet, merge, and flow through each other. Lights and darks were reversed like a negative, mouths opened on light, eyes were white sockets. The actors looked naked clothed, clothed naked. (L 198)

Noticeably, the actors are reduced to ‘figurines,’ and their mouths look like pits waiting to be filled by words. Their color is also telling since the novel can be seen as Walker Percy’s version of *The Scarlet Letter*. The quality of the soundtrack is so poor that Lance will have to imagine the actual dialogue later on, and thus provide the script for his puppets: the actors appear as dummies deprived of feelings and good sense, who can be manipulated as desired. That is what Lance wants to check when he launches his “cinéma-vérité,” for if we trust his actress of a wife, Margot, “Cinema is the medium *par excellence* for our times” (L 184). Like any director, Lance is able to visualize the scene he wants reproduced on the screen and as he watches one of his actors moving around, he provides a definition of what he thinks a good actor is all about:

He was an idiot but he had grace. He was a blank space filled in by somebody else’s idea. He was a good actor. [...] But look at him, isn’t he something? We can create him from the beginning like a doll. I created Dana—Dana himself is nothing, a perfect cipher. (L 155)

In other words, an actor is a shadow of himself, a mere body that follows orders. But, if Lance is able to judge the actor, it is because his discovery has opened his eyes while imposing an irreversible split on his life: “my life is divided into two parts, Before and After, before and after the moment I discovered that my wife had been rendered ecstatic beside herself, by a man on top of her” (L 18). Thus, as Simone Vauthier explains, “through the

temporal splitting of his self, Lance can retain a partial but strong sense of his identity, and shakily maintain his pride and the illusion that he is different from the imitative others" (1981, 93). Lance has taken on the role of a director so he can judge the actors. He has also become aware of the part he was playing in his own life so that he can now use people as puppets without, so he believes, risking exposure.

Lance wants to see his wife's sin on a screen; he explains, "I want sight not sound" (L 150), which implies that, like Binx Bolling, he is looking for the certification of something he knows is true. Lance's *cinéma-réalité* is the best means he has found to get society to drop its mask. If a sin cannot be put into words, it can be shown; and although Lance and Elgin, his black help, are the only ones to see the actual movie, the narrative gives us a glimpse of this missing part. Even the movie that was being shot at Belle Isle is metaphorically released since the "thunder machine" that Lance mentioned in the course of his confession is replaced by the forces of Nature: "Goodbye movie hurricane, hello the real thing" (L 219). Reality, however, wins once again and paves the way for the intrusion of the Gothic, as the scene derived from *The Fugitive Kind* suggests.

In a later version of Williams's play entitled *Fugitive Kind*, Leo declares, "death's like a river. It's dark and running away" (129), which brings back the image of the dark waters and of the menace pertaining to life. At the end of *The Fugitive Kind*, Lady, the main female protagonist, has found out about her pregnancy and tells her lover Val: "I'm celebrating. My life beginning again." Unfortunately the discovery goes hand in hand with her husband's growing anger and he sets the house on fire. Jabe's face can be seen through the hole made by the fire in the roof of the gallery before an explosion occurs; the fire has robbed Lady and Val of the peaceful moment they had allowed themselves. The camera keeps moving back and forth from the husband to the lovers, implying a cause and effect relation. The profusion of sounds almost makes the scene unbearable to the ear. As Lady rushes into the store she and her husband own, the staircase functions like the guardrail in *Dark Waters* and suggests that she cannot escape the prison of her life. Jabe shoots her in the belly, killing the baby she had always wanted. The fire has taken over the whole gallery outside and Lady's lover is pushed back into the fire by the firemen's hoses: the firemen stand for the community that is trying to get rid of the intruder. Symbolically, the corridor Val is trying to enter represents the straight life the community wants to embody, and he is unable to reach it. By disturbing the order of things, Val has, like the narrator in Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," plunged "into the irrational, to descend to the most primordial strata of the Self where the logic which presides over the elaboration of our conscious thoughts holds no sway" (Lévy 1972, 22). The

bells toll the lovers' death as a punishment for the unbearable situation they have created. The play on light and darkness stresses the presence of an abnormality that must be gotten rid of.

When he decides to explain his personal story, Lance reproduces a situation similar to that of the southern writer who must, more than any other writer, justify his choices and those of his region (see Hobson 3-4). As a Southerner, Lance feels he has no right to make a mistake and, in order to prove that he was right, he questions every element that helped him shape his final decision:

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? (L 94)

Lance keeps asking questions of Percival, his priest friend, without letting him answer. The use of 'see' invites Percival to tell Lance what he feels about the situation but his answer never filters through. Lance's last interrogation offers two levels of interpretation since the verb 'act' means both 'take action' and 'pretend.' Lance has done both. His question thus introduces the notion of play-acting and takes us back to the movies, exposing the futility of life. Later on, reality and fiction become so intermingled that it is impossible to separate the two:

The actors, I noticed, took a light passing interest in everything, current events, scientology, politics. They were hardly here at all, in Louisiana that is, but were blown about this way and that, like puffballs, in and out of their roles... (L 118)

The actors are turned into ghosts, beings deprived of their identity, forever in transit between the characters they personify and their real selves. Robert Bresson proposes an explanation for this phenomenon of the loss of the self: "The actor: 'It is not me that you see, that you hear, it is the *other*.' But since he cannot fully be that *other*, he is not that other" (55). The actor can never be the other he means to be and that is why he fails to be the one he wishes to be. There are too many roles to be played and, in the end, there is not one at all. Too many things happen to him and he cannot find the unity of his self.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> As Emmanuel Lévinas has it, "The self is not a being that remains always the same but the being whose existence consists in identifying itself, in recovering its identity thanks to all that happens to it" (25).

To certify the truth of his discovery of his wife's betrayal, Lance uses the movies. In a way, it is logical that he should use fiction to recover reality since reality has replaced the fiction of the life he thought he had. It is a game of inverted mirrors. Everything is reversed and Lance believes that "In times like these when everyone is wonderful, what is needed is a quest for evil" (L 144). When he understands that Siobhan is not his daughter, Lance discovers his "real" life or rather the theatre of his life. Thus Lance is reminiscent of the man Roland Barthes describes in his study of 'cinematographic hypnosis': "I need to be part of the story (this reality requires my participation), but I also need to be *elsewhere*: a world a little loose, that is what, as any scrupulous fetishist, conscious, organized, in a word *difficult*, I ask of the film or the situation where I'm taking it from" (410). Lance will go and get the film in order to grab that world elsewhere but also the world at hand.

From the moment Lance met Margot, their life together seems to have been sealed in fiction. In the course of their first exchange, Margot compares Lance to movie actors: "'A rumpled Sid Blackmer or maybe a whining Hank Jones'" (L 76). As for Lance, he compares Margot to Scarlett O'Hara, the Southern Belle *par excellence*, metaphorically brought to life in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*, published in 1936 and shot three years later by Victor Fleming. In retrospect, the association of Margot to Scarlett already holds the promise of a tragic fate. Lance's comments that "She wasn't pretty and she wasn't Scarlett..." (L 76) echoes the first line of Mitchell's novel, "Scarlett O'Hara was not beautiful..." (5); the paradox may be accounted for by the suggestion that Lance is actually referring to Vivien Leigh, who impersonated Mitchell's character in such a way that people ended up identifying the two, just like Percy's character. Yet the comparison does not stop there, for Lance later exclaims: "Belle Isle is gone and I couldn't care less. If it were intact it would be the last place on earth I'd choose to live. I'd rather live in Brooklyn. As gone with the wind as Tara and as good riddance" (L 110). Despite his contempt for the past, Lance remains rooted in his southern experience: the southern past haunts him and his discovery keeps coming back to his mind.

Moviegoing and movies provide a means to explain the world outside even if the spectator knows that what he sees is only an illusion of life. The Gothic in *Dark Waters*, *The Fugitive Kind* and *Lancelot* is a manufactured feature: in *Dark Waters*, Sydney uses every possible means to make Leslie believe that she is going insane; in *Lancelot* and *The Fugitive Kind*, the betrayed husbands resort to fire to punish those who have ruined their lives. The Gothic functions, like the movies themselves, as an illusion-maker. Talking about movies, Etienne Souriau observes that "Through our mind, through our

senses, we enter this universe as we contemplate it. We are invited to do so, we live there for hours; later we remember, almost in spite of ourselves that we have lived there and we remain impregnated with it" (11). *Dark Waters* and *The Fugitive Kind* are invitations to discover the specific features of the Louisiana Gothic; in both films, the viewer is led to understand that "to enter a residence is not only to enter someone else's home, but partly to enter *into* someone else" (Lévy 1972, 22). This is undoubtedly what sets the Gothic atmosphere in motion as the intruders are eventually forced out: Leslie is allowed to escape the world that had been carefully gothicized to drive her mad, Val dies because he has stepped into a world that had no room for him.

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