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February 2, 2010: Walker Percy on Non-Believers and Believers

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Title: Walker Percy on Non-Believers and Believers

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2/2/2010—In his 1980 novel, *The Second Coming*, Walker Percy creates the character Will Barrett, a successful widower, whom one observer aptly described as “trapped in...a sort of living death” at the beginning of the novel. At one point in the novel he writes a strange pseudo-suicide note in which he writes about religious believers and nonbelievers. He does not care at all for believers: “if the good news is true, why [is] the proclamation itself such a weary used-up thing?” 219. But unbelievers are even worse. The unbeliever is “crazy because he finds himself born into a world of endless wonder, having no notion how he got here.... Not once in his entire life does it cross his mind to say to himself that his situation is preposterous, that an explanation is due him... .” For such a person it is all “boredom and... farce”. 220. Percy was one who felt the weight of religious doubt and of belief for that matter. Barrett concludes on this note: “I am surrounded by two classes of maniacs. The first are believers, who think they know the reason why we find ourselves in this ludicrous predicament yet act for all the world as if they don’t. The second are the unbelievers, who don’t know the reason and don’t care if they don’t.” Secularism in America just does not think about such matters, which are the perennial matters that have occupied humankind. I can hear the response to Percy: You just live and then you die. What is the big deal? The answer is, we are the big deal. Our lives are the big deal. Even though we don’t believe in God, we still must ask what all this is about.