

# Austin American-Statesman article on The Project

## "Rethreading an Author's Web"

Austinite's devotion keeps Southern writer Walker Percy on the Internet

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Henry Mills offers no apologies for the countless hours he spends working on the Walker Percy World Wide Web site on the Internet.



At 29, he's fascinated with the thought of Percy, a Southern writer whose first novel *The Moviegoer* won the National Book Award in 1962, and who went on to write many more before his death in 1990. Mills features a Percy quote of the month, an updated list of scholarly resources, notes on symposia and requests for papers on Percy, photos of his home in Covington, La., memories of him by a bookstore owner and longtime friend, and essays on his philosophy of language. That's just for starters. There's much, much more. Last month, there were almost 1,000 visits to the site.

Best-known for his fiction about the search for faith and love in the New South, a place transformed by technology and industry, Percy also wrote essays on philosophy and language. He was a physician who contracted tuberculosis while working at Bellevue Hospital in New York City. During his recuperation, he decided on a career in writing.

Mills, who lives in Austin and describes himself as "an independent scholar," established the Walker Percy Internet Project in March 1995 "with the primary goal of raising appreciation for the contributions to modern thought and fiction that Walker Percy, M.D., left as a formidable, compelling legacy to humanity." The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, an archive for many of Percy's papers, provides the Internet connection.

Ask Mills about himself, and he soon turns the conversation back to Percy, whom he regards as infinitely more interesting. He corresponds with Percy scholars around the country, and he's filled several notebooks with information on the writer. Diligent and highly organized, the soft-spoken scholar always is adding to his store of material.

Mills divulged that, as a graduate student at Louisiana State University, where he earned a master's degree in 1992, he studied Percy and worked on scholarly journals. In Austin, he works half of the time coordinating an English as a Second Language program for El Buen Samaritano Episcopal Center at 1919 S. First St.

On his own time and largely with his own money, Mills works the Web site. He's also been active in a Walker Percy discussion table at Flipnotics Coffeespace, 1601 Barton Springs Road. "I'm on the cutting edge of literary activity though I'm not at the university," Mills says.

In an essay he wrote for *The Southern Quarterly* last summer describing the project, Mills said: "Percy was something of a pioneer in terms of his interest in the distinctive nature of human communication, so it seems appropriate that he be an early literary and philosophical presence on the Internet."

If you'd like to see what Mills has been doing, check out the Web site at <https://www.ibiblio.org/wpercy>.

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