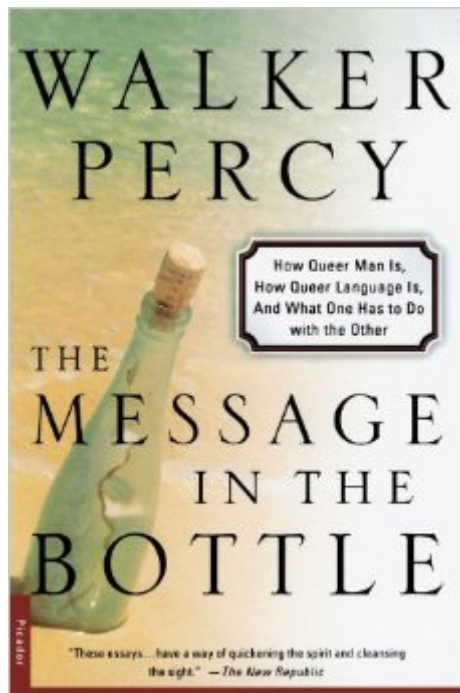


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The Message In The Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, And What One Has To Do With The Other



Synopsis

In *Message in the Bottle*, Walker Percy offers insights on such varied yet interconnected subjects as symbolic reasoning, the origins of mankind, Helen Keller, Semioticism, and the incredible Delta Factor. Confronting difficult philosophical questions with a novelist's eye, Percy rewards us again and again with his keen insights into the way that language possesses all of us.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This dense, well-written and extraordinary book is an excellent introduction to the works of a great 20th century thinker. In this collection of essays, Percy manages to confront some difficult philosophical questions in an exciting and readable context. Percy was first a novelist, and his writing is seldom inaccessible. He deals in everything from religion to science, from literary theory to travel. His best writing relates to theories of language and the human being. Yet like some of the greatest X-Files episodes, Percy leaves many things unresolved, liminal, only suggested. *Message in a Bottle* is designed to stimulate the reader rather than fill them with useless information. I finished reading this book with the desire to read it again, and whenever I see it on the bookshelf I am comforted by the thought that there are people in the world who think for themselves, and who have the courage to print what they think.

A few of the essays in this collection make for somewhat dry reading (Percy even says so himself), but if wonder and enlightenment are your goals, then this is an extremely rewarding book. His

insights on symbolic reasoning, the origins of mankind, Hellen Keller, Semioticism, and the incredible Delta Factor are invariably fresh and thought-provoking. Percy is really onto something here; he may have only scratched the surface, but what he has revealed has powerful implications for all of us.

The precursor to the, in comparison, pithy 'Lost in the Cosmos,' Message in a Bottle is less accessible than his later, more famous, book. However, Message... provides all of the necessary academic rigor that 'Lost in the Cosmos' lacks (not that LC is not a great book, it is). Percy claims that he is, in fact, not philosopher or scientist. Rather, he wishes to be thought of as mere novelist writing as he perceives scientists and philosophers. In fact, this is a sort of claim of superiority in the sense that Percy thinks he knows more about philosophers and scientists than they know about themselves (which may be true). Even so, Percy's methods are quite scientific and philosophic. Message in a Bottle deals with the most important question of all: What is Man? Percy contends, as any good Heideggerian would, that we are essentially castaways on an island. We aren't quite sure how we got here and we don't quite know what we're supposed to do now that we are here. But Percy is a Thomist, not an existentialist (although the two are connected). While Percy finds the greatest evidence for our essential 'lostness' in the altogether baffling phenomenon of language, Percy is nevertheless concerned with what we are to do about our anxiety about existence. Percy is interested in pursuing the Thomistic project; 'completing' reason with revelation.

In a sea of charlatans, hucksters, half-truths and snake-oil salesmen, we find this island of wisdom. Percy, a psychiatrist turned novelist, was ever a scientist. He takes his aim at a very difficult scientific issue-the study of man. It is very hard for many to study himself, but Percy believes the answer to understand man lies in the study of language. As Percy himself said, just because a primate can be taught sign-language words doesn't mean we are anywhere close to understanding human language. It is a shame this author isn't more well-known.

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