A Whisper
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Compare Walker Percy’s discussion to your own situation by comparing what he says to your own travels or to your experiences in a course, or both. This assignment was completed for Dr. Keith Lloyd’s College Writing II.

There is a subtle whisper in creation. Its essence entails beauty, mystery, and complexity. It is often unheard, and the object in which it speaks of is often not seen by those who do not stop to embrace it. We are often perplexed, busy, and preoccupied with mundane, trivial affairs that constantly call for our attention. We are too busy rushing around on the beaten path to see the beauty in it, and even to begin to see outside of it. And for beings that have an innate nature to appreciate beauty, we do not allow the opportunity to see it in our lives. Once this beauty is grasped, looked upon, and appreciated, life finds meaning and peace.

Walker Percy in his work entitled, Loss of the Creature, unfolds the argument that we have lost our sovereignty to truly appreciate the “creature” (468-486). This creature is the beauty, complexity, and essence of the object at hand. It is the whisper that softly speaks of the value of the object before us. Our sad estate is due to the fact that we did not discover the object ourselves, but rather the object was explained to us based on another’s observation and study. As a result, there is no longer a mystery in the object before us because it has already been defined for us. Where there is no mystery, there is no curiosity to explore.

After the object is explained, shown, defined, and answered for us, we develop an image of the object in our minds. Percy calls this preconceived image the symbolic complex (469). We form an idea or image in our minds based on the observances, advice, pictures, or studies of other people without actually having seen, experienced, touched, or discovered the object ourselves. As a result, when we are actually confronted with the object, we no longer can see it for what it is and appreciate it. Instead, we compare it with the image we have formed in our minds. He extends this argument further and writes, “Why is it almost impossible to gaze directly at the Grand Canyon under these circumstances and see it for what it is—as one picks up a strange object from one’s back yard and gazes directly at it? It is almost impossible because the Grand Canyon, the thing as it is, has been appropriated by the symbolic complex which has already been formed in the sightseer’s mind” (469). When the actual sight before us does not perfectly align with the image in our imagination, a subtle discontentment or disappointment creeps into our hearts. Percy states, “Where the wonder and delight of the Spaniard arose from his penetration of
the thing itself, from a progressive discovery of depths, patterns, colors, shadows, etc., now the sightseer measures his satisfaction by the degree to which the canyon conforms to his preformed complex” (469). We then become people who do not see with our eyes but see with our minds.

All hope is not lost for the one who yearns for the creature though. Percy offers several solutions for the sightseer to regain his or her sovereignty. He suggests that the sightseer leave the beaten path that is the most walked upon, most photographed, most explained, and the most expected (470). It is the path where the subtle whisper is not heard and the creature is not seen by most of those who tread on it. However, he also suggests that there is hope for the beaten path. If a sightseer sovereignly walks on a level above it, he may discover the lost creature (470).

Thus begins the story of my own journey of discovering the path less treaded on. It was on this off beaten path that I discovered the creature and regained my sovereignty to hear the subtle whisper in all of creation. It was through walking off the worn-out path that I was able to appreciate the beauty of it.

The inner itch for a different way started during my junior year of high school. Education became a procedure. I was so concerned about my grades that I forgot to enjoy the material that I was learning. For example, my English class read through William Shakespeare’s play, *Romeo and Juliet*. I thought the play was incredibly dull because I was reading it in order to understand the correct meaning of it. All I was seeking from the play was a correct answer in order to get a good grade. While I anxiously tried to figure out what the experts understood and saw in the piece, I lacked the sovereignty to appreciate the beauty, talent, and skill this play possessed.

The drive for the correct grade stemmed a lot from my own perfectionism, but it also stemmed from the set-up of our education system. Lesley Rex, in her article entitled, *Loss of the Creature: The Obscuring of Inclusivity in Classroom Discourse* discusses how the implementation of standardized testing has changed the learning environment (30-46). The classroom setting no longer provides the flexibility and freedom for students to interact, discover, and relate to the material taught to them. The teachers now have the pressure to teach children to think and respond to material in ways that would get them a good test score. As a result, children are told how to think, write, and respond, and they are taught that there is a definable standard for academic success. This standard discourages independent thought, creativity, and genuine connection with the material (30-46). She states in her article, “What if their students are struggling with the kind of student they need to be, or with the role of school in their lives? What if they don’t believe they need to talk, read, or write in the ways the high stakes tests imply they should? What if their students don’t
have any experience with or interest in engaging in the classroom’s discourses of achievement? What classroom conversations are lost and what opportunities for inclusion disappear when much of the talk is about reading and writing as they appear on the test” (39)? The creature is found in the conversations that allow the students to wrestle, engage, question, and apply the material to their own lives.

English class was not the only class in which I overlooked the beauty in the subject matter. I willingly ignored the whisper that the Shakespeare piece, the mathematical equation, the United States’ history lesson, and the science experiment continually called out. I grew weary of the busy-ness, pressure, and dryness of the beaten path of education, academics, and sports. It became an unending treadmill of relentless responsibilities, stresses, and pressures. It seemed more like a prison than a place of great beauty. I could not stop long enough to enjoy the people, relationships, and beauty surrounding me every day.

I came to the conclusion that this beaten path is consumed with unending striving and performance. Our culture tells us that it is not only acceptable but expected of us. Life is about going to college, starting a career, buying nice things, and retiring. Not that those things are not good or beneficial, but it creates a people who become like hypnotized mummies walking through the motions. We do not make our own decisions but make decisions based on the expectations of other people. We choose to take on responsibilities such as college because we feel we should rather than because we want to. And in the midst of our busy-ness and striving, we lose the beauty in life. We lose the sovereignty to appreciate not only school but also our humanity. We cannot stop ourselves long enough to question our reasons for our constant striving, to discover who we truly are, to enjoy the present moment, to be present with people, to fully delve into our interests and loves, and to appreciate the beauty that surrounds us each and every day. In a way, we allow ourselves to be told what life is and to ignore the subtle whisper that is constantly calling to us in the shadows.

Senior year of high school finally came, and I was inundated with conversations about college. It was the beaten path and often portrayed as the only route available. However, I wanted to explore outside the parameters of college. I was weary with education and had no appreciation for it. I felt uneasy with the definition of life my culture had given me. I had heard the whisper faintly in the distance, and it stirred more and more of my curiosity. It offered the possibility of another path of freedom and one which became incredibly captivating. It forced me to forget the expectations of others, leave the beaten path, and redefine life outside of my culture’s definition.

This whisper led me to a tiny school called Nicolet Bible Institute in White Lake, Wisconsin. They taught courses on the Bible which sparked my desire to know the Author behind this
book. As I read into Scripture and spent time observing the beauty in the simplest objects, I found the source of this small whisper. It was not through a definition or explanation but with a seeking, observant, and quiet heart that I discovered it. This whisper spoke of the beauty, mystery, complexity, and greatness in all of the created things around me. The cause of our awe in the sight of a Grand Canyon is in the fact that there is a complex, mysterious, glorious, and beautiful Creator behind the workings of these masterpieces. Creation contains an essence which strikes us, confronts us, and pierces our hearts with the understanding that there is something higher and greater than us. Now, the simplest rock or a setting like the one below had significance and meaning because a Majestic Being had created it and set it into motion.

I resonated with the words of David when he wrote, “O LORD, how manifold are your works! / In wisdom have you made them all; / the earth is full of your creatures” (English Standard Version, Ps. 104:24).

The uneasiness, emptiness, and unrest I had felt during my high school years had finally found peace. I had finally discovered life and freedom, and I found that in the Creator. Only by getting off the busy and restless path to stop and observe the world around me did I discover and possess this knowledge and understanding.

As I continued to understand the value and beauty in a tiny fish or a beautiful starry night, I discovered more about the Creator behind these art pieces. He was even more intricate in his construction of me as he was the sunrise I watched and the lake I swam in. He not only had complete knowledge of me, but desired me. As I spent more time with this Creator, the more I loved Him as my Father. I experienced His compassion, care, love, and grace in ways too deep for words to convey. John Berger in his article, Ways of Seeing, discusses how the perception of art is changed through reproduction, knowledge, and atmosphere (134-167). He begins his passage by saying, “When in love, the sight of the beloved has a completeness which no words and no embrace can match; a completeness which only the act of making love can temporarily accommodate” (134). My experience of this Creator could not be contained in words, for they were empty explanations of His greatness. My only reaction to such a being was to spend more time in His presence, appreciating the things He had created, and seeing
His handprints in even the most mundane and simplest things of life.

Education could not fully teach me about where true life and freedom is found, and how to appreciate the beauty in even the simplest invention. The off beaten path allowed me to regain my sovereignty to truly see the world and its beauty. However, it also developed an appreciation within me for the well-worn path of education. Percy writes that the creature “may be recovered by a dialectical movement which brings one back to the beaten track but at a level above it” (470).

I could then appreciate the beauty in education because I saw my Creator in it. He gave us minds to understand, He created the concepts in which we study, and He laid the groundwork for us to discover, understand, study, and appreciate His creation. The beauty in it is that we will never fully unravel the mystery and beauty that surrounds us. We will always, as long as we are here, have a mystery to solve and a new thing to discover. I was finally ready to tread the well-worn path of college, however in a much different way than before. I could see that as I learned more about the world and what others have discovered about it, I was learning more about its Creator. I entered college with the sovereignty to see the beauty in the complexity of a cell, the workings of the human mind, the intellect to write an essay, and the intricacy of a fetus in the womb. I had finally found the lost creature.

Works Cited


