

Indeterminacy and
insight: percy's
"words-a-pix" method
in "the loss of the
creat...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Little kids often sit at their kitchen table, trying to connect the dots in the newspaper game section. They go from number to number, not knowing what the emerging picture will be until they reach the last one. As they slowly drag their pencil across the paper, connecting the last few dots, a masterpiece is revealed. Walker Percy's "The Loss of the Creature" is his own Dot-a-Pix, except he intentionally leaves off the numbers. His essay is a group of random dots that he allows the reader to connect in any way they please. This gives each reader the sovereignty to create their own "masterpiece." Percy does this intentionally. He does not explicitly pencil out his main claim because he wants each reader to interpret his paper through their own unique perspective. Even though the essay lacks a single sharpened thesis, it is nevertheless permeated by a constant theme: that of loss of sovereignty.

Percy masterfully composes his essay using a mixture of ambiguous, high-minded general statements, sometimes containing difficult vocabulary words with much more down-to-earth specific examples. This mix can become disorienting as it leaves the reader gasping for common threads of understanding that do not appear naturally. Only through repetitive reading, does the reader begin to see a common theme emerge. Percy does this on purpose. His examples are meant to provide illumination on his more general statements and aim to incite readers' curiosity. That said, each example offers but a glimpse of the overall theme that we have lost the sovereignty over how we perceive the world around us. When offering different examples regarding individual sovereignty, he does not come across with a definitive point or statement. Instead, he decides to jump from point to point, leaving

the reader to wonder where all these connecting dots lead to. This can be seen at the beginning of Percy's essay when he mentions tourists visiting the Grand Canyon. He presents several situations, such as tourists who are members of organized tours, others who visit with family, and some who choose to go off the beaten track. In one particular example of the tourist from Boston, he asks " Has this man seen the Grand Canyon? Possibly he has. But it is more likely that what he has done is the one sure way not to see the Grand Canyon" (Percy 463). Here, Percy offers both viewpoints, leaving the reader wondering which of the two he truly supports. This type of ambiguous obfuscation is a rhetorical device he uses to provide contradictory, noncommittal views which forces the reader to formulate their own opinion. This, in turn, is Percy's way to allow the reader to have individual sovereignty.

Here is a second example Percy presents that uses yet another rhetorical device: a scene from a movie in which a girl hides in the bushes listening in on a record playing Beethoven. Right when we are led to believe that a concrete claim is about to be made, the author ends the story with yet another question: " What is the best way to hear Beethoven: sitting in a proper silence around the Capehart or eavesdropping from an azalea bush?" (Percy 473). Every other sentence leading up to that question insinuates that Percy believes that it is the girl with the more authentic, true experience. However, Percy again surprises by using a question that does not provide closure, but serves to stimulate the reader's own intellectual assessment of the situation. It is Percy's use of literary devices, such as in the examples above, that creates an ambiguous feel to the paper. Instead of stating his

own opinion, Percy prefers questions that purposefully leave things open to interpretation. He does so to increase his reader's sovereignty over his own paper. The contrast between the two examples is quite obvious. In the case of the tourists at the Grand Canyon, Percy offers many scenarios, each with its own question and answer, whereas the young girl's example has a very short and straightforward story. It's as if each of the Grand Canyon stories is its own sub-Dot-a-Pix, while the girl's story contains only a couple of dots. The effect is the same in that none of them on their own reveal the big picture.

Percy presents examples and questions to the reader, rather than making definitive statements. This allows readers to ponder and formulate their own viewpoint. The paper's lack of a definitive thesis, its ambiguous syntax, and the use of rhetorical questions as literary devices denote Percy's effort to empower his readers so they become more sovereign. Each reader is allowed the freedom to pick whichever dots they choose, and to connect them accordingly so as to arrive at their own "big picture." In this way, the final product of the essay, the masterpiece which is Percy's claim, is one that is up to interpretation.