



NEW LEAF

The English Cooperative Review

Volume 2 Issue 1 January 2017

GOING GUERRILLA

Cassadaga: I Still Don't Believe,
but Perhaps I Should.

My Water Body:
St. Petersburg Beach and
the St. Johns River

Encomium of Escobar

Review: *I Didn't Come Here
to Die*

Was I Taught to Write?: A
Modern Answer to a
Classical Question

Cassadaga: I Still Don't Believe, but Perhaps I Should

Cassadaga is rural town north of Orlando whose entire community revolves around the concept of spiritualism. Spiritualism is the belief the one can talk to spirits and see into one's future or look into one's past. From the time I was young the idea of a human connection to another dimension or psychic ability has fascinated me. In 8th grade, I was shown a magic and psychic debunker named James Randi (stage name the "The Amazing Randi"). He fascinated me because of his knowledge of magic and because it seemed like he was doing the right thing, since many people were looking to these people who claimed magic or special power. Time to time, he would show how a trick was done but his main objective was to expose people who claimed to be psychic and who took money from naïve people. After years of watching his videos, I believe I know how to go about a psychic reading, as many readings come from reading body language and reactions of the person (cold readings). I learned from "The Amazing Randi" to just stay still and let psychics go on their tangents. From seeing Randy debunk many, I did not believe in spiritualism or psychics. This being the case, my reading was very interesting.

My psychics name was X, a medium who, by his own account, is still beginning to learn the practice. This alone made me skeptical because if one truly is psychic then being able to communicate should not be a new skill. It should be innate. However, three messages he communicated stood out to me. In the beginning, he mentioned that both my paternal grandparents were gone and that there was another male presence in the room. He also mentioned that my maternal grandparents were still here. The part about my grandparents was 100% accurate, as my only living grandparents are my maternal. However, the other male presence threw me off. We then began to discuss my future. He assumed that I wanted to be a Dr. of some sorts because my father wanted me to, which is the complete opposite of the truth. However, he said out of nowhere, "You want to work with bones?". To which I responded, "No." He seemed puzzled by this, as he said something about bones was bugging him. I was born with a condition called Osteogenesis

Imperfecta, also known as Brittle Bone Disease. I have had numerous fractures in my life, so it's interesting that he brought up bones out of nowhere.

The final message to me that still makes me second guess all my skeptical opinions of spiritualism was at the very end. There had been lots of silence, and finally he said, "I would feel awful if I ignored this, but this name keeps coming back to me, and that name is Roger." My heart dropped as this name has been a huge factor in my life for the past year. My great uncle was named Roger and he passed away from cancer two weeks before the reading. For the past year, as my family was coming to terms with his diagnoses, we traveled to California to see him and he was the focal point of our family's conversations for the whole year. So for him to bring up that specific name threw me off track of my "stay still and don't react" response.

After my reading with X, I did a lot of thinking about my session. I concluded that although it was a truly amazing thing to experience, I still don't believe in spiritualism. For the 30 minutes I was with him he only presented three truthful elements from my life. Not only this, but what he said for the rest of the time was so wrong and so far from the truth that it canceled out the things he did get right. What I have learned from Randi is that the reason people go to psychics constantly is that when they get something right people usually are comfortable looking the other way at the things the person got wrong. With this idea in mind, I looked at what he got wrong, and he just got too much wrong. I personally believe that if someone truly had these abilities that he should not get anything wrong or that there would be much more right than wrong. In sum, even though I still do not believe in the concept of spiritualism, I can see why so many people do.

Session Transcript

Medium: Have you had readings before?

Student: Never

Medium: That's good. I'm new at this, too. When I read the first half (or 60 percent of the time) I will be speaking really consistently. During that time, any information that's provided to me I will pass on to you. During that time, you can say, "Yes," "No," or "I don't know." Everything's fine. OK? Spirit contact also happens throughout the reading, and they maintain contact once they connect. And very often they are recognizable, just like who they are, where they come from, and sometimes they just bring information that's essential. OK?

Student: OK

Medium: The balance of the reading becomes a conversation where you can just ask questions or talk, whichever is easier for you. OK?

Student: Yep. OK

Medium: (Breathing Deeply, one minute) As I'm tuning in on your energy and focusing there, I feel like I'm on water, and I work with symbology. Lots of times there are images that flash, and I have to understand whether they are literal or just information, so as I see this, I see you in a canoe. I see you in a vessel that travels on water, and it's something that one, maybe two persons manages. As I see this, it's as if you are on the backside. I've never done canoeing, so if you have, then you know which one controls most of the power. And as I see this, the water is choppy. It's not flat or smooth; it's choppy, and you have to manage that. As I tune into the energy, that's what I feel like; it's you trying to take the power seat of life at this point. And whatever's been going on for the last four or five month's time period, it seems like things are not settled. They are just bumpy. You understand that. It just seems that life is not at it's best place when it comes to dealing with yourself or someone else around you. If this is a relationship issue or this is an issue that pertains to or includes a second person it just doesn't feel . . . Does this make sense to you? Work-wise you should be fine. Education-wise you should be fine. I feel more emotionally, heart-related, and as I tune in, I feel "I'm giving . . . I'm giving a lot of power to this. Could this be?

Student: More or less, yes.

Medium: OK - a yes-and-no thing. And as I tune into this, I am feeling, "I am doing all that I could. I've done all that I can." But the person in the front of you or in relationship to this observation, should they be doing what they should be doing, then this would be far more fast-moving than the way things are. So that's my initial impression. I also feel that there's a man's presence here on the spirit side of life. He comes with love. He comes with a family, a familiar family connection. In that observation, if I were to see him, he looks somewhat like you, a little bit different, perhaps a generational gap between you and him, but has the body frame, the structure like you, but he comes with love for the family. He is sort of . . . I don't want to say that he has dictated every decision for the family or for whoever his kids were at that point, but I do know that he carries a lot of wisdom around him, that he has a lot of knowledge about how life works, about his time and the way things should be, how the expansion of the family should take place. So he has a wisdom base to his energy, and he is connecting with you, and he is saying, "Where should your focus be at this point, and ask yourself that question." I can see the energy of you going in and out, and he is asking, "Where should your focus be?" He leaves it at this. He is not wanting to dictate those terms for you, but to make you think at this point. I also see in his energy that he's very excited to be talking to you through me or through any channel that is present because you matter to him, and he is feeling very proud and joy with me, and I have complete presence of his appearance in that aspect with me.

I am also being taken to a mountain-like state, and I feel that if I were to travel, it would be way up north where it is really cold this time of the year. And as I travel with this aspect, I feel that I would find more family there. I am asking him, "Give me, give me visual" and going as far as maybe Vermont. That comes to mind. I could be off a little off by the demographic, but I feel I am traveling far north to find family or close relationships in this point in time. And he is wanting to say that if you are not communicating with them or not responding to their communication, then that's something to be factored in as well. He is also opening a new business sign; it's almost as if a new shop is being opened or new avenues are being presented to you in just about this timeframe. It might be school season for the rest of the world, but for you, if you project your energy for work, I believe you will find work or do more work. You are still moving in a healthy direction, and he is opening up a new business sign for you. For me, it feels like these are just simply opportunities. These are saying, "Don't feel that you are slow or that you are not making progress." All of this is coming forth, and as soon as I go, I celebrate a date in January next year,

perhaps a birthdate, and as this date goes by, things will begin falling in place for you. Don't give up hope, and don't belittle yourself that you didn't do what you were supposed to. Things are happening, and lots of other things are happening around you as well. The month of January should have some significance for you and your family's life. The day that this crosses (I keep picking up the 18th, 19th, maybe 20th of January, somewhere in that timeframe), it's critical for me, so I need to attend to it.

I am also feeling very tearful at this moment, as if someone's passing is signified by the month of January. Either they fell sick at that point or that someone has passed in the very first part of the year. And as I feel this, I feel that a woman is presenting herself within this impression. Either she was starting to understand what's happening in her life is close to fatal or nothing will recover from this point in life, a turning-of-illness type of situation, but I feel that this woman is also coming on a family connection and with love toward you at this point. I also feel that around this time of January that not only will you feel more confident and in command of your life per se, but others in your family will also feel a similar effects, so to speak, So just be mindful of those dates. It's on the recording, too, so just be mindful in that aspect.

Going back into your personal energy, I feel that you have much more to offer than you are channeling yourself. I see the colors at the core of your physical body are too brilliant to be wasting time on just idling or doing anything. You have a creative brain. From this side of your mind, I just see a silver channel that goes all the way to the center of your head. It also says that if you keep your eyes here, you may be oscillating on a lower level of physical but the back of your mind is telling you, "This is not it for you. You need to stay focused up here." It's something for you to think about. It's not anybody's place to say what you should or should not be doing. But I know on a mind level you know you know you are here, while subconsciously you know you should be far beyond whatever your connections are, you need to fine tune those processes. On this side of your body it says, "I am a business-oriented man. I am looking to be my own boss in the near future or I should be right now. If I have the option, given the resources, you will become your own boss in no time. This is what I feel. On this side of your channel, it is saying, "I need to be my own owner. I can't take orders. I can't work with others, so to speak, but I am opening those avenues for myself.

So, having said that, you should be working on your educational processes at this point, you are not finalized yet. Nothing - sort of like rough draft, in between the final stages, and I also feel you are thinking about changing your track. It just feels like you want to do something more fast-paced, something that has quick results, instead of seven years of college and becoming a doctor and still not knowing where my life is, something like that, but I know that your heart is wanting to change that track. So this gentleman that came through in the first part of the conversation, he is saying to "just allow yourself to think more than twice and don't make any absurd choices. He uses a different word, so if I knew his vocabulary, he is very outspoken regarding his words, "Don't make any absurd or stupid choices, but to think before you make that final track change, because that will finalize your options. One more chain, and then you'll be locked in, not able to do anything else. So think hard. It's not a bad choice, but he's wanting you to understand what your heart is talking about. Not because someone else is saying they want you to do something; he is wanting you to trust your part of the processes, too. So for me, I have a strong, computer-oriented brain that flows on this side. I want to do something that has to do with software engineering or software programming, something that integrates technology with life. This is the flow of the energy, but the mid-pathway that you should be walking is very traditional. It's like, my grandfather was an engineer, my dad's an engineer, I've got to be an engineer. This is what it feels like, the channel of energy is passed on, and I feel like your heart is like, "Don't take it as a hand-me-down family trade; do something that's creative. Do something beautiful with it. You're allowed to do that, but make that choice knowing I'm going to be doing this not because it fancies

me today, but because it will be magical for the rest of my life. And basically, this man's energy lights up with that expression, "Do something that you can do for the rest of your life." You are navigating two or three channels, wanting this but jumping off for this, but he is saying, "Don't make any absurd choices."

So you are going back home for the holidays?

Student: Yes

Medium: Home just doesn't feel in Florida, for whatever reason; it feels you will be in a totally different demographic, to say the least.

Student: Yes (laughing)

Medium: I also feel like, I'm not sure who this person is as of yet, but he should be fanciful with firearms or guns so to speak, whoever this person is from the spirit side of life, he is coming as if he was in the military or he loved hunting or outdoor lifestyle should have been very definite for him, like one of those uncles that you have in your family. You would find him more in the forest than at home. That sort of feeling, someone who is wanting to say, "Go outside, connect with nature, like you used to as a kid, disappearing in the woods and just having a fun time. It seems you were drawn more and more away from it because of wherever you are or wherever life is, but I feel when you go back home, I see a lot of wooded elements around you, a lot of nature around you, so old friends, old family, wherever you live, I see lots of forest and natural elements in the backdrop. You understand that? I mean, it's not like the forest is "there," but you have access to those elements back home.

Student: Yeah

Medium: Once again, the idea here, the visual that's coming up is to tie in with the natural elements, and you will find everything is fine, and you will find yourself there as well. Have you ever work with a potter's wheel?

Student: Once or twice, yes.

Medium: I see that too in your thing. What is the best lesson you learned from that?

Student: Don't be an art major (laughing)

Medium: No, the teaching I see there is that your hands are shaking on the potter's wheel, not knowing how much is little and how much is how much more. And this is what I see, hands are not coordinated, but that impression goes into your heart's vibration, and this is what I would bring forth and this point, this is what it feels like, if you are dealing with relationships, issues of the heart, like everyone else does, I just feel you don't know where the boundary is, whether it's you or it's too much or too little. It just feels like your heart is restless to get to the next level or to know what's there or why it is the way it is, and I just feel like this is what's making you restless also, in addition to making a professional, career-related choice for yourself. Do you understand that?

Student: Yeah

Medium: So, the idea is the mind just throws images and it's just like (pause). The image that the mind is picking up is that little white thing that float in the air. You know what I am talking about?

Student: Umm, yes.

Medium: To be like that for at least six to eight weeks' time period. Don't make any choices. Let it be what it is. Just go on with life one day at a time, but I just see you as this floating thing, and once you finally land where you need to be everything will be beautiful and just fit right in, but for the next six to eight weeks, the inspiration is not to make any judgment or make any choices; just observe. Just observe what is happening, and you will have complete acceptance of whatever happens after that time period. You will just be OK with that choice, decision, whatever is coming up. But I feel like just float, and just float is an important aspect for you. You have travelled outside the US?

Student: Yes

Medium: I feel that you will have another option going into the first quarter of next year. In March and April, I feel that you will travel to the Middle East for some reason. It just feels good, like when the churches and hospitals do the mission trips. It's some humanitarian idea behind it, but I just feel that I am travelling to the Middle Eastern countries to just do that outreach for people who are needing help or whatever this is. Right now, March and April will mandate going outside the US, and everything just feels fine. If you are sponsored, take it. It adds to your portfolio, that being said. So if I bring anybody that's alive, that's where they are supposed to be. But I also feel I need to talk about your father at some aspect between you and your father and this gentleman that is here. I feel that there is a connection on a genetic level. Your father should be alive here, right? You are holding concerns about your father because vibrationally this man and the lady are both sort of pulling this subtle energy of your father for you, so if you are holding thoughts or like you are not wanting to go back home because of him or whatever goes on beyond that point, what they are saying to you is "Sometimes when you warm up the knife it goes through the butter easier." I don't know what you think of that, but that's what they whispered in my ear, an old-fashioned thing; when you don't have to fight with something then just be. Whatever there is between you and your father, they are wanting you to understand you don't really have to fight because there's no reason to be in that tension or in that tug-o-war situation. So when the word "fight, it's not like a physical thing, it's you just don't have to create that friction. That is not necessary, but I am being made observed, your father has sort of a dense, a different dynamic energy on his own, either he is trying to dictate terms to you or whatever this is, when you go back you will observe that once you click and become that warm knife, everything will become just fine. It's not about him melting, but about you navigating whatever time you have there. Questions?

Student: Not really, no.

Medium: Did you come here with any questions?

Student: Did I come here with any questions? It was just an experience I wanted to feel.

Medium: OK. Your grandpa should be on the spirit side of life, right?

Student: One of them, yes.

Medium: Which one is?

Student: The paternal

Medium: The paternal?

Student: Yes

Medium: You have a very good likeness for him at this point. If he was younger, he would look like you. I am also going into his energy and we will see where he takes me with that aspect, but when I go into the grandfather's energy, I feel that I worked some part of my life and that I am independent some part of my life, so you can tell me yes and no, I take both answers with respect, so he has worked for someone else for a good part of his life and then at some level he has also worked independently either as a second trade or he has done something, has a trade that he has ...

Student: Only for somebody, never independently.

Medium: Yes, but I feel that he has done work outside of that work. For example, a lot of old-school technicians, they would work in their environment but then take things home to supplement income. So, I see this part of his energy and that he has worked independently, not to have a shop or a business but to be able to do things independently to enhance whatever the money value is or even if it is an exchange of commodities and services. What he is saying is to channel yourself in that aspiration because whatever you are you are using your potential to do what you can. It's almost as if you are skimming by because it feels good, it gives you more time for fun and play. He is not denying you that, but that skimming by can be brought up two levels at least, if not more. So he is allowing you to think in those terms because those opportunities will lift and rise for you for you. When I go into his physical body I feel that it's either my kidneys or liver or my lungs, right in the back of my body in this channel. Right here, just in the bottom of my rib cage I feel that I have a lot of tension or stress right in there, in that part of my physical body. This could be one of the attributes that added to his passing at some level, but I feel that somewhere in the chest cavity is where a lot goes on and goes on very quickly once it starts to happen as I move on towards the end of my life. I just feel that I am very tense in here. Do you understand that?

Student: Not really, no.

Medium: Do you know what his passing was about?

Student: Yes

Medium: I just feel that here in the back is where I am hurting. I don't know if he had a bad back or spinal column, but I just feel in this channel right here is a lot of stress, unless I'm picking up your energy, unless you're going through anything that happened also. I just feel that he's making me aware that his thoracic cavity or his rib cage is where a lot of things occur for him in that aspect. I also that there is a lot of noise in his environment. In the place where he might have worked there is internal and external noise for me, so I see just a small glimpse of this noise but it goes away very quickly. My mind draws to the environment of his working had a lot of noise, mechanical or a lot of tool-related noise. I'm not exactly sure what this is because, to me it's just noise; I can't differentiate if it's metal saws going or the machinery moving; it's just a lot of noise in his environment. He is also giving me railroad tracks or train tracks for you. It's just almost like you are sitting in the middle of railroad tracks, and that this track is just a fond memory of seeing you playing, whatever this toy story is, but I feel he can also be identified with railroad track, either very close to his work or very close to his home. Wherever this is, I feel there are active railroad tracks around him as well. Questions? Anything goes.

Student: Questions? I don't know (minute pause). What education future, is it going to be what I am studying or is it going to be something completely different?

Medium: Right now, the energy says that you are going in a different direction, where what you chose, I feel like it's fleeting you. It's very faded; it's almost like it isn't holding the charm for you, whatever the active ingredient is, it's missing. I just feel you are drifting or evaluating what should be the next choice for you. Do you deal with bones?

Student: Yeah.

Medium: Right

Student: Do I deal with bones?

Medium: Yes. Right? Bones. You are studying to be a medical professional?

Student: Oh, you mean like for studying? No, I don't study bones.

Medium: But you deal with bones?

Student: Personally, yes.

Medium: Medicine and technology are both integrated into your personal energy right now. So, choose what you can, but I know that technology is more pulling the string at this point. And then again, that's also not just creating an act, but it's an act of big programming. It's either you are lending the visionary part to whoever's technology geek is, whatever this relationship is will come together, but I feel you have the dreamer's mind. It works on its connections, and they will have the knowledge to substantiate that, but I feel that I am more drawn to technology in this time period for you. So, where did you leave your school?

Student: What do you mean?

Medium: Where did you leave your school?

Student: You mean where am I studying? I'm still studying at (university name).

Medium: Have you changed your program work?

Student: No

Medium: (Pause) I see you; I am projecting where I see you when you're done. It's either a doctor's office or this is a legal office. You know, typical, those big volumes in the background. You know, the personal library, I'm not sure if they are real books or fake books (laughing), but I see this vision that just evolves in the background. But I just see you in a high potential capacity in that scenario. You do it or you don't, it all OK either ways, but I know you're going to be tuning into something bigger, so shoot for that. Don't stay on the bottom. Your focus, that gentleman says, needs to be on you. Because everything else that will go on in your life at any point will be because of you. And if you give yourself enough importance, enough love and care you will always feel fulfilled and complete. If you shift that responsibility to your family, to your relationships, to your friends, to your work, you will always feel not satisfied and deprived. That's the man's wisdom. I don't know where he got it, from his own personal life experiences and not being a part of them, because he had to do what he had to do, but he is giving that little nugget of information for you. I also feel that you are drawn to the earth sciences or the earth energy, metallurgy or talking to gem stones or rooting for, whatever this is; it's a magnetic sense of energy that takes, that I just feels is

going through your elbow all the way into the ground. Let's say you are connected in your own way. You know where the right stuff is or if you were to hunt for water sources, you should be able to track where they are just by feeling the energy. So if you are sensitive, also enhance that for yourself. Work with that. Play with that. You are so close to this town and anything else, pick up classes whatever you can. I know that you are drawn to activities like that on your own. It's almost like seeing yourself in an esoteric, magical world. I'm going to ask you a question, "Do you sense out signals through your mind to your friends?"

Student: No (laughing)

Medium: OK. Play with it. Play with it. So you've heard of the name of David Blaine, right?

Student: Yeah

Medium: He's somewhere there, but something like that. I don't know what the true outcome is for you, but you should have the ability to channel the energy and put it to some worthwhile use. But to understand, you are connected, to feel that connection to the earth or the energies. See what it's all about. Explore it. If things go "bump in the dark," follow it. See what it does for you. I know you are having this question of where you are in the right or not situation. The guidance says you can make your choice different, but think about it hard.

So what is your second line of work? If you were to choose, tell me what it is.

Student: Umm, hip-hop music.

Medium: That will work. That will work, if you can put yourself into it. That will definitely work. There's a long learning curve for you, and I am not the one to channel that for you, but if you feel the earth and use those vibrations for yourself or for your music, see what it does for you. Do an experiment, and you will find the results, but I am being shown what I am being shown, and I am sharing that with you.

So what does your dad want you to be?

Student: Whatever I want to be (laughing).

Medium: Well, what would he like to see you as?

Student: Umm, something I'm passionate about, because he honestly doesn't care.

Medium: What is he by profession?

Student: He's a security director at a university. But he's always, if I have a passion, he's always adamant about getting me the best utilities for that passion. And if I change passion, he will shift and go with me with that passion.

Medium: That's fine, but you have to recognize what's there for you. So if you are wanting to change your tracks, sit back and float and see what's there for you. Possible that these are endless.

Umm (pause), I only have one name, and it's repeating like a loop, and the names are connecting names, so they could be people that are passed or someone on the earth side, and I hear that name of "Roger." Or whoever this is, or however it means to you, you can take it with you. It's just

the name, loop, loop. It just keeps coming back, and it happened enough that I have to present it. That's what we have for you.

Student: Heard?

Medium: You relate to that name?

Student: Yeah.

Medium: Who is he? Student:

He's my mom's uncle. Medium:

What is he?

Student: He recently passed about a month ago.

Medium: Take his love. He's here, just keeps coming. Well, what he, what Roger is writing here is that every day matters. And try to live more here than out there. If you know what you want to be, don't wait for two years out. To me, I just feel like I am a character if I am Roger. I just want to be out there. Huge sense of energy with him. He wanted you to be who you are today and every day, instead of "When I graduate I'll do this" or "When I turn twenty seven hundred years old, I want to do this.". Everything is here as he is evolving in life out there. That's what I have for you.

Student: Thank you.

Medium: Yeah, I couldn't let that one pass. It was going (recording stops).

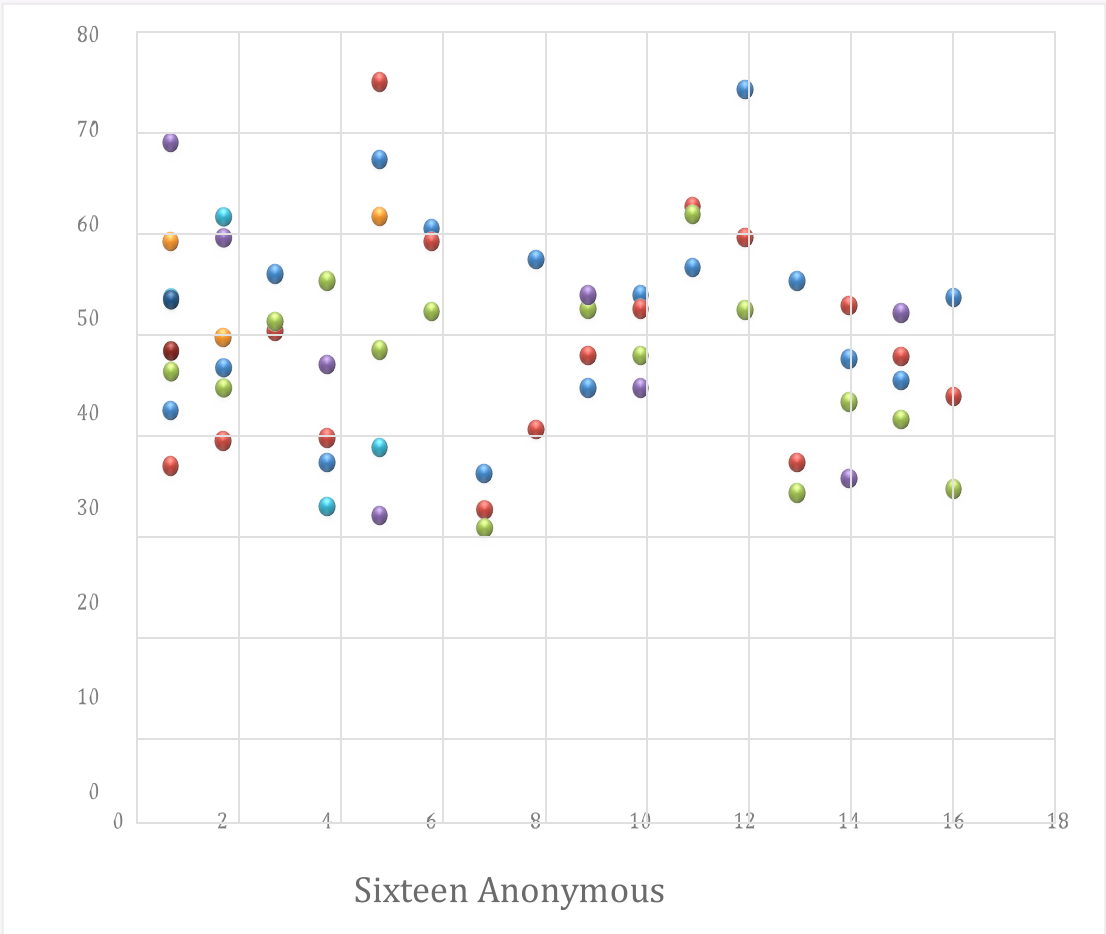
Was I Taught to Write?

How Many People: Quantitative				Intro:		Organization	
#1 You were taught to write:	8 yes 6 No	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability	- include some disciplinary models (Scientists, Creative Writing, Analytical English...)	
#2 Do you feel this tool is meaningful	8 yes 6 No	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability	- provide more narrative elements	
#3 Will you continue to use Readability Stats	10 yes 4 No	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability	- group narratives according to type	
#4 You complexity increased	13 yes 1 No	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability	- provide a frame (intro/conclusion) with a consistent purpose/voice	
#5 Is the tool/process motivational	8 yes 6 No	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability	- make the numbers/stats/benchmark more conspicuous: (Chart) state in each narrative up front ...	
Grade level	6-8 9-10 11-13 14-15	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability	intro / chart / narrative with stats / conclusion	
Readability:	0-10 11-20 21-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability		
English Majors	7	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability		
minors	2	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability		
Hard Sciences	4	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability		
Social Sciences	2	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability	English Readability		

In the Platonic dialogue *Gorgias*, the question whether rhetoric can be taught was first posed. In an attempt to answer this classical dispute with a modern solution, our Composition and Rhetoric class employed the often-overlooked readability statistics function in Microsoft Word. Unlike Grammar or Spell Check, this tool is turned off by default. These statistical tools have the capability to measure the readability and grade level scores of any form of written work and to determine the intricacy of the work by factoring in syllables per word, sentence length, words per sentence, and number of paragraphs. Complexity can vary from negative to positive numbers; the lower the score, the higher the complexity. A research assumption of this project is that over time, in an academic environment, a student's sentence complexity should increase.

Our college class consisted of sophomores and juniors of numerous majors and differing ages; each respective student brought his/her own social history and educational background. We followed a guerrilla research plan in that we used readily available technology, had no research budget, and used improvised archives (e.g. saved papers from previous semesters). The ultimate purpose of our compiled narratives is to question whether writing is a "knack" (*Gorgias*) or a learned skill by checking if each student's writing increased in complexity over time in the classroom. The following narratives represent the process of answering the question, "Was I Taught to Write?".

Group Readability Score Statistics



English Major Narratives:

Month Year—Read Ease

August 2014—40.0

October 2014—34.1

November 2014—44.1

December 2014—68.3

March 2015—51.8

April 2015—57.9

April 2015—51.6

April 2015—46.2

As a 25-year-old woman recovering from a sheltered, private-schooled childhood, I can say that I was definitely NOT taught how to write. Sure, I could beat your grandmother at cursive, and don't even get me started about grammar and spelling... but writing? I was never allowed creative expression; learning was simple regurgitation of facts tainted by religious bias. Why would I be taught a passive aggressive way to splay my thoughts and emotions? Sarcasm and irony intended. My parents finally gave in and allowed me to attend my last three years of primary education in public school where I learned all sorts of evil things like global warming and evolution. Naturally, I dove in head first and completely drowned on my first research paper in Mr. Palmer's class. Thankfully there were many avenues of help available and overtime, I discovered a natural talent for writing. It would make me feel really good to believe that my composition skills have drastically improved since tenth grade, yet my Read Ease and Grade Level score statistics would seem to prove otherwise.

I compared the Read Ease and Grade Level scores of eight papers/essays from my time at college; the dates of these compositions range from August of 2014 to April of 2015. One of the only visible patterns noted in my papers are closely consistent sentences per paragraph, words per sentence, and characters per word. I also noticed that my

readability scores were pretty high on papers that I composed in my Junior Seminar course last semester. I enjoyed the teacher, but often found the subject material to be drab and I knew that the teacher had a lenient grading scale. I am embarrassed to admit that my lowest Grade Level score was a 7.3. What the heck?! This was an analytical paper I wrote in my freshmen English class; the topic was on the movie *Groundhog Day*—something I thought was pretty cool! The professor deemed it an A+ paper and, given her harsh grading reputation, I was proud! This particular paper was recorded at a Read Ease level of 68.3, and that Grade Level of 7.3 stings like an angry wasp. Ouch. I have various other scores that range between a 9.5 and a 13.5 (still nothing to be proud of), but I've never been given a grade lower than a B+ at this university! One thing I can be sure of is that writing of any kind is completely subjective. You can pour your soul onto the keyboard, research sources until 3:00am, and paint your work with flowery, fanciful language, but if your reader/grader doesn't like or agree with what you're producing then it's all for naught. Therefore, should these Read Ease and Grade Level scores really matter as long as we're placating our audience? Maybe not.

We're often asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Well, I want to be a teacher. The kind of teacher who creates meaning out of nothing, the kind of teacher you remember when you're 75 years old, the kind of teacher who makes learning and genuine retention worth it, and the kind of teacher that my parents deprived me of. I'm not bitter, by any means, because I had a very stable and fun childhood...but I often times wonder how different I would be if I had been allowed to think and act freely and creatively. Would my Read Ease and Grade Level score be higher? Lower? The same? All I know is that somewhere, deep inside of me, these scores hurt me pretty badly.

Month Year—Read Ease

2013—44.4

2013—36.8

2014—42.3

2014—58.2

August 2015—60.4

September 2015—47.7

According to my Flesch-Kincaid readability score numbers, I have shown little variation in my reading scores over the past couple of years. The vast majority of my work from the end of my senior year of high school to now falls within a 50 to 65 score range, placing my writing somewhere in the tenth to eleventh grade range of reading level. The academic level of my essays appears to have stagnated upon entering my collegiate career. This may be because I have never given much consideration to the academic level of my writing. I habitually orient myself toward an audience outside of academia, and most of my experience with writing has either been creative or journalistic in nature. This may be part of the reason for my falling behind. Freshman year did not seem to hold me to any higher standard than this, so that may be another reason for my stagnation.

As a point of my own philosophy, I feel that volumes of meaning can be derived from small words and sentences, and that that meaning is far more important to the quality of writing than is that writing's incomprehensibility to an uneducated reader. The last sentence of George Orwell's 1984 was "He loved Big Brother," a sentence with a reading level on par with the "Cat in the Hat," but that does not make those words any less important or poignant. Small words can mean just as much as gargantuan ones. I feel the emphasis on creating longer sentences with longer words reeks of pretention. From my perspective, it appears to be an arbitrary means for academics to separate themselves from the uneducated masses. Maybe people with doctorates get a sort of buyer's remorse when they see high-schoolers reading and understanding their papers? I recognize that I am talking up from the bottom here, so it is possible that there are layers to this issue that I am missing, but I have my doubts about the need for a high reading level. But these are pointless and empty criticisms. My own philosophy is irrelevant at this point. I am being held to the literary standards of the academic world and it is my job now to adapt and grow, lest I needlessly fall behind.

This is not to say I cannot be taught or brought to a higher level by outside help. After looking through some old flash-drives, I can say for certain that the level of my writing improved between my freshman and sophomore years of high school. In freshman year, my readability scores were frequently in or above the seventies. Sophomore year, my readability scores steadily began to descend. This is an improvement that I will attribute to my high school sophomore year honors English

teacher, Mrs. King. She was, for the entire duration of my high school career, the only English teacher ever to have given me a B as a class grade, as opposed to an A. She knew I was not editing thoroughly or putting out my best effort. She scrutinized every piece of writing heavily, and set days aside where she would go through students, one by one, and personally conference them about the quality of their essays. My writing was securely above the academic standards of those in my grade level, as tended to be the case, but Mrs. King would not allow me to get by with just that. She recognized that anyone's writing could be improved. She held me to a higher academic standard, and I improved through that. Maybe now what I'm waiting for is another teacher who will hold me to a higher academic standard, and raise the bar to give me something to reach for. Or maybe it is up to me.

Month Year—Read Ease

2012—66.5

2012—74.7

2013—46.4

2013—28.9

2014—36.1

2014—60.5

Readability score, the first time I heard this term in class, well, I was a little frightened. My previous class had been statistics, the realm of z scores, t scores and hypothesis testing. My thoughts wandered to reference distributions and numbers kept appearing before me, a readability score might be how fast you read and comprehension of material or I might finally know what grade level I was reading at. A readability score uses the average number of words in a sentence and average syllables in a word. The readability score provides a baseline for determining the reading ease of one's writing and determines the grade level for the paper written.

Surprise set in when I finally checked my writing samples and saw my scores. The reading ease scores of my papers for the most part over the course of two years decreased. A higher reading ease score indicates a middle school student can easily understand the written sample, while a lower score is better understood by university

students and graduates. My first paper in 2012 received a reading ease score of 66.5 with a grade level of 8.7 and on my fifth paper I received a reading ease score of 36.1 with a grade level of 12.6. This is surprising. I never expected my writing to increase at all; I never put forth any effort into improving my writing in general. I avoided writing and only wrote when I had a paper due, never for fun or to capture my thoughts on paper. Of course, if it was an important paper I would edit and re-edit and have friends and my sister help me edit. I then felt proud of myself; all the hours I spent editing and asking people to read my writing actually had a measureable effect.

Comprehension dawned on me as I further analyzed the scores in front of me. I know my writing skills are suboptimal and I always struggle to write grammatically coherent papers but I never attributed it to the topics and classes for which I wrote. For example, my sixth paper was for a general education class, and I knew I could receive a C on the final paper and pass the class with an A. I neglected the editing process that I have always adhered to and submitted an unrevised paper. Another simple and probably obvious reason might be the topic I write about; my history and statistics papers tended to have lower readings scores ranging from 28.9 -46.4 with grade levels between 10.4-13.6. On the other hand, I might have used more terminology associated with both subject matters biasing the reading ease score and grade level.

I finally acknowledged that maybe finding out my readability score was not too catastrophic. I managed to interpret my numbers and find plausible reasons for my standard of writing. However, these numbers do not inform me if someone taught me to write. I've been learning Russian for the past three years and the more I read Russian texts, I find myself incorporating words and phrases into my speech. In college, reading academic papers is necessary and perhaps when we as students begin to write, we mimic the style of papers from our fields. Maybe a professor taught me to write or my high school English teacher or perhaps indirectly it's the authors of the papers I've had to read.

Month Year—Read Ease

August 2014—54.4

September 2014—48.4

January 2015—49.4

My scores were not proficient enough for my liking, and I honestly believe that I could have higher scores than I do at the moment. I think that from my first semester of writing during freshman year to now, my writing has stayed the same. I could definitely improve on my sentence structure, my word complexity, and the amount of depth I put into my papers. Academic papers have always been hard for me to write, which pains me seeing the fact that I am an English major. I should be able to write at a college level or higher, but I am only writing at about an 11th grade level. This is insufficient to me, and I am going to do my best to work on my skills and to get my numbers down on the reading ease scale.

The first essay that I analyzed was one from a Psychology class I had last semester. The reading ease score for this essay was a 54.4. I was not satisfied with this number, so I went through that essay and found that my writing was not as complex as it could have been. The other two essays that I looked at were generally the same—the second essay was 48.4, and the last was 49.4. I kept seeing a lot of similarities between all three essays, and I now know that I need to heighten the complexity of all my future essays, and definitely watch out for any insufficient words that could make the essay less meaningful or juvenile.

Month Year – Read Ease

September 2013—56

July 2015—38

As I grew to love books and creative writing in middle school, I was constantly reminded of my inadequacies in this area when I attempted my own work, but in a odd way, this only made me more persistent to explore more types of books. I went into middle school with slight self-consciousness because of my reading and writing skills, and the fact that I was in marching band and on the math team set me back in the social realm. However, I seemed to do very well in both of these areas as time went on, and I earned a degree of pride in what I was good at. Still, middle school didn't prove to be what I thought and still do think of as the purpose of schooling: to provide a means of exploring academic areas of interest and developing those interests. In fact, my love for reading and creative writing during this time was at a plateau.

Not until ninth grade did I start trying again to branch out to what I really love to do. I enjoyed English class most of all and listened closely for book recommendations. For the first two weeks of English class in tenth grade we read a short story a day, “The Lottery” and “The Most Dangerous Game” being some of my favorites, and analyzed them for literary devices. I learned the personal qualities books offered, and the shared experience they can hold as well. Finally, the purpose of school for me had been fulfilled; I had been introduced to so many influential pieces of literature. I learned how to analyze these works, and even though I was still hesitant to call myself a writer, I felt as if some of my works had done quite well.

The first essay written by myself at this university I had assumed to be quite good. After revisiting “Back to the Blanket,” and knowing the readability score to be at 56 percent, a tenth grade reading level, I can now conclude that my writing was lacking much and could be greatly improved. In the least, it can be said that I was disappointed with the number. But did my writing actually improve since that less than graceful entrance course essay? In short, yes.

I had written an essay over the summer for an education junior seminar titled, “A Comparative Look at Primary School Special Education,” which had a readability score of 38 percent, putting this essay, at best, as understood only at a university level. That would be quite an improvement from my first college essay. So now I can assume that if anything, my writing has improved in the sense that my sentences are more complex, they are longer, and the words have more syllables per sentence. Does this mean that my writing style is better? Does an essay become more graceful with longer sentence structure and word length? Maybe not. And most definitely, not always. Repetition is not desired, and neither are run-on sentences. The scores might be upon first glance disheartening, but they also show growth and proof that improvement is achievable. I now use more graceful vocabulary, and also create more complex sentences. With this pace of improvement, I should be, in the coming years, writing papers that only graduate students would be able to read and respond to. So while my first score of a 56 is disappointing, I can also see that these scores overall do give promise to better writing in the future, if I can continue in the same way I have. Now that I have an estimate of how

fast my papers can be improved, it is important for me to stay on this track to success, which can be done through continued studies.

Month Year – Read Ease

March 2014—42.4

August 2015—45.8

December 2014—50.7

April 2015—52.2

While my writing has not evolved noticeably over the past year-and-a-half in terms of readability (all papers scored between a 42 and a 51), an interesting trend revealed itself when the sample papers were broken down into sections. My introductions scored the lowest readability in each of the four models, coming out as follows: 34.3, 36.1, 40.5, and 48.2. In contrast, my conclusions were consistently highest, with scores of 44.8, 50.5, 51.6, and 62.3. Further, papers that included a body between introduction and conclusion progressively increased in score, with introduction being lowest, body being in the middle, and conclusion being highest (this applied to two of the four samples).

My conjecture is that this trend is a result of how academic writing is taught in grade school—closing statements are generally thought to clarify or summarize the body of the work, and it is typically not until reaching the college level that one is instructed otherwise. This is useful information to me, as it demonstrates that I still have not shaken that outdated, yet ingrained method of composing an academic paper. Armed with the knowledge that my conclusions have been “dumbing down” or blatantly summarizing my points in a way far more elementary than the rest of my writing, I can (hopefully) better my overall body of work.

It is important to note, however, that all of the documents used in this exercise were not pigeonholed into the same genre; instead, they ranged from creative pieces to journal entries to academic papers. Most notably, there is evidence that the outliers in the selection, specifically the creative excerpt, skewed the reading ease results. The creative piece, which could be considered a narrative, opens with an intensely low reading score of 34.2, and dips as low as 2.1 in one sentence, but transitions into a different style following the opening paragraph. From this point to the end, it scored significantly

higher— 62.3. Even a researched paper that included sections of poetry considerably impacted the average reading score of the four. The academic portions of this particular piece scored a relatively normal 46, while the poetry segments soared to 75.2. This is no fault of mine, as the poetry was not my own; instead being incorporated to provide an example and to be expounded upon. In contrast, the other academic paper proved to be far more consistent, with the introduction being 36.1, the body being 40.6, and the conclusion being 44.8.

When the creative portions and poetic examples are excluded from the results, the average score descends from 49.1 to 42.1, or precisely 7 points, which is likely a more accurate representation of my academic writing's readability. It is important to question, however, the significance of the Flesch Reading Ease experiment and its outcomes. Does a lower score make an individual more intelligent, or in that vein, a more accomplished writer? For that matter, is a creative approach, which, if my results are any indication, scores notably higher than an academic method, less effective in delivering a point by default? I would argue that it is not, and likely cite Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" as an example, as it is one of the greatest satirical classics to exist, remaining poignant even in the modern era, yet scoring only a 68.1 when applied with the Flesch Reading Ease formula. For these reasons in particular, I take the results with a grain of salt, choosing to be more aware of my style and diction, but not placing too much weight on number or a formula.

Month Year – Read Ease

2014—73.9

2014—58.3

2015—50.6

As I repeatedly copied and pasted many of my previous document to Microsoft word, I noticed the almost unchanging readability scores I kept receiving, which I slowly recognize as restrictions that I allowed to take over my writings, and I recalled that the only reason I had formerly improved my writing during my middle and high school years was by breaking those restrictions and rules. When the teacher warned never to use "and" to begin a sentence, I used it to begin a "body" paragraph. Another teacher insisted that

an essay should never include “I,” and I did exactly the opposite. This is not to say that all of my previous teachers have been as strict when it came to their own writing ideals, but a great deal of what they said unintentionally had its negative effects, and didn’t allow me to expand my writing skills beyond that of a high school senior.

Therefore, even if I strongly believe that you cannot measure a work of art such as writing with mathematical equations, I understood that these score means something, and though it does not indicate the entire quality of my work, it certainly pushes me towards the right direction to where my writing is free to be as complex or simple as I wish. I also believed it to be a bit egotistical for the purpose of my writing to be unable to be understood by someone my youngest sister's age. I want to be able to express ideas in ways that enables those younger than me to be on the same page as I, but I also don't want to make the explicit effort to reduce the levels of my writing in hopes of connection with a youthful audience. So, I'm left with indecision when it comes to the readability test. It would an interesting battle in my later essays and pieces of written work to witness as my want to reach a larger audience and my need for a more complex writing fight to see which ends up on the final revision.

Month Year – Read Ease

November 2012—43.2

March 2013—45.7

September 2013—39.1

December 2013—50.3

My readability scores have fluctuated from a grade 9 readability score to a grade 12 readability score. My final paper for my dual enrollment class in junior year, a paper regarding the history and symbolic use of Evergreen Trees, scored a 43.2. What I find peculiar about that concept was that, out of the three essays I wrote for that class, that paper was the one I reflected on the least. I got a happy enough grade on it, an A, I believe, yet it is the one I put the least amount of effort in, and yet it still had the highest grade level. Does that make it better or worse? Since entering college, I had not written too many academic papers, and even the ones I did write, didn’t score as low as my

Evergreen Paper. Most of my writings this past year has been strictly narrative, creative nonfiction.

As a student angling on writing creative fiction one day in her life, it is my ultimate goal to be as cohesive as possible with my writing. These long, drawn out sentences and needlessly complicated vocabulary is, in fact, the opposite of what I would choose to devote my time and passion towards. If a student is able to articulate in one page what a teacher requires to be two, why should the student be penalized for transcribing their ideas in as coherent a way as possible? That is not to say I agree with the ‘dumbing down’ of academic writing in order for a wide audience to be able to understand and read it. On the contrary, if a professor is writing a thesis paper made for other professors, they should utilize a higher vocabulary in order to properly transcribe all of their ideas and concepts. But a low readability score should be the byproduct of a higher grade paper, not the end goal. It’s is very unhealthy for quality writing, as all the students are doing is intentionally loading their papers with pretentious writing rather than smart writing.

Month Year – Read Ease 2014—

55.1

2014—61.5

2015—60.7

Based on my Reading Ease Score results for three of my papers, I assess that I’ve gotten a little bit better at writing since my freshman year in college. Two of the papers were from my first year at college, and the other is the only paper I’ve had to write so far as a sophomore. The first paper I tested got a score of 55.1, and this was the third final draft I had to write as a freshman in my English class. For the second tested paper, I got a score of 61.5, and this was my fourth final draft I wrote as a freshman, showing some

improvement. The last paper that was tested was my *Gorgias* summary, and the only paper I have written so far as a sophomore. For the *Gorgias* summary, the score resulted as 60.7 so it did go down a little bit, but not a lot. Also for the last two papers I tested, the subject matter increased in complexity, which could be a sign that maybe I'm getting better at explaining complicated topics.

In fact, I believe the subject matter in the last two papers I tested was quite a bit more complicated than the first tested paper. My first paper, the third final draft I wrote as a freshman, was about how the American community suffered financially during the Great Depression and how the African American community severely suffered from racism during the 1940s in the United States. This paper compared and contrasted the suffering both communities faced so I'm sure readers can see that my first tested paper was pretty straight forward and not terribly complex.

My second tested paper on the other hand was substantially more difficult to explain and this was my fourth final draft I wrote as a freshman. This paper was specifically about Howard Hughes and how even though he had obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) he was still a very successful and maybe even a heroic person when it came to aviation business. In this paper I explained various symptoms of OCD such as constant checking, extreme cleanliness, and others.

I also argued in this paper that although Hughes had a severe case of OCD, his case was not the most severe ever. I explained that Hughes' case of OCD was more a matter of excessive neatness and perfection which I argued that those reasons are not extremely irrational when critically thought about, especially for someone who wants to be one of the most successful people in the world in aviation. I also explained that some OCD sufferers' reasons for being obsessive-compulsive are much more irrational than Hughes' reasons. I gave an example of how some people are OCD because they literally have a phobia of being "jinxed." I also explained that these OCDs who have a fear of being "jinxed" will do outrageous and absurd things such as opening and closing a door a certain number of times, or avoiding numbers that they believe will bring bad luck, such as the number thirteen. Hughes did not have a case of OCD like that. Hughes' OCD was more connected with extreme perfection and neatness in his aviation work.

With all of this in mind, I concluded that since Hughes didn't have a case of OCD like the one just mentioned, he was able to overcome his mental disorder more easily and succeed as an aviation entrepreneur. Also I argued that maybe Hughes' specific case of OCD may have made him a better businessman since his mental disorder was more about having perfection in his work and not about having a phobia of supernatural, unproven things like luck. I'm sure the readers of this narrative can see that my second tested paper was a lot more complex than my first tested paper. The score for my second tested paper went up to 61.5 from the first tested paper being 55.1, so the test results showed that my writing improved some.

The last paper I tested was my *Gorgias* Summary, which I wrote this year as a sophomore. *Gorgias* was about deep, philosophical topics such as the question, "Can rhetoric be used for good without philosophy?" and many other profound concepts. This paper did have a lower score than my paper about Howard Hughes, but only a little. The score I got for the *Gorgias* Summary was 60.7 so it did go down some, but not a lot.

Social Science Major Narratives:

Month Year – Read Ease

November 2013—34.5

April 2014—37.1

January 2015—53.7

February 2015—44.9

March 2015—29.9

As I flip through the pages of past essays written here I begin a lengthy flashback remembering when I became enchanted by the English language. I wonder how my readability scores became so strong by my freshman year of college and how I have continued to hone my writing skills so that I have reading grade levels ranging from 13 to 18.7 and ease scores from 51 to 29. These scores provided by Microsoft word imply that my writing, in my opinion is precisely where it should be concerning the quality of my writing.

As a young girl I liked to look closely at the world, every day after school I would walk down the road to the lake by my house and sit beneath the Australian Pine Trees. In my backpack I always brought snacks, notebooks, and pencils so I could write down anything and everything that I deemed beautiful. Looking closely at leaves and frog eggs, tiny beetles, fish, and sunning turtles jotting down my thoughts about their appearance and all the glorious smells wafting through the salty air coming from the ocean, I was never under stimulated. I began writing poetry for my fifth grade class and fell in love with the strict structured forms and the contrasting fluidity of my poems. Published by the Audubon Society by age ten, I have been casually writing poetry ever since, concentrating on dragonflies, owls, eagles and anything else that can fly. The English language is known by the rest of the world as being a harsh and garish language, unlike the romance languages, which is something I've never truly understood. How can someone claim the works of Edgar Allen Poe, Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, or John Keats as harsh even when spoken aloud?

By the time high school rolled around, I was ready for anything life could throw at me as I entered the International Baccalaureate program, also known as IB. My junior year English teacher Ms. Ballard was phenomenal and tough although more than willing to work with her students. She was stern and yet she made her classes interesting, in each of her pupils she tried to instill the importance of organization and structure of papers and creative pieces. Ms. Ballard wanted us to aim for uniformity and grace within the structure of our writing, she was so passionate it made you want to be daring, madame want to be a better writer.

The university has many writing intensive classes available for students of every major and year. My freshman seminar being Ecology and Evolution was not as writing intensive as I expected, however, I was able to recover the final paper for the class in which I received a writing grade level score of 15.2 and an ease score in the 30s. My first ever research paper and I am surprised to find out, two years later, that I am a better writer than I believed I was. I took my first college level English class for which I wrote papers with grade level scores ranging from 14 to 15.7; for my landscape ecology class that same year I received scores on papers ranging from 15.2 to 18.7 perhaps the vocabulary I have compiled from my environmental science classes boost my reading scores. Seeing as Environmental Science is my major I decided to see if science papers score higher than creative writing papers. My highest scores of 16.3, 16.9, and 18.7 were not research papers or even something that was graded, in fact, they were extra credit lecture summaries written at the end of my sophomore year.

The more I delve into reading scores and try to find more essays to double check I begin to doubt myself and more importantly Microsoft word. How is a computer program supposed to be qualified to give me a numbered score that tells me the quality of my writing? Although I discuss structure and form as a crucial component of quality writing I do not believe that is all that is important, the art of writing is just as significant, regardless of your topic your writing can be beautiful and rich if you fill it with passion. I plan to continue writing about the environment and its beauty, but also how we can stop its destruction. If the readability scores of my papers are truly as complex as Microsoft claims they are then maybe I should stay in the science business and write environmental summaries for the average person so the general public may finally understand how badly

we damage our planet. On another note, my assumptions could be false and my scores could be so advanced because I have an average of 38 words per sentence, either way I am confused yet proud of my awesome readability scores.

Month Year – Read Ease

September 2013—51.9

September 2014—41.5

September 2015—31.7

My first college paper, an essay about the presence of God in Yann Martel's "Life of Pi," had a 12.3 grade level, which from my point of view is not bad for a first year college student entering into college. However my percentage of passive sentences was at 8 percent, alongside a reading ease of 51.9. The reading ease for this type of assignment was quite high, however, for this type of assignment in which it was mandated to refer to the novel for information it was necessary to give vast amounts of detail. Narrative types of papers are not my strong suit and although it was my first year of college when that paper was written I understand why more scores were so poor.

Going into my second year of college, in my History of Florida class we were required to write an essay on the Florida and its relation to the Old South. In this paper my percentage for passive sentences rose to 25 percent, while my reading ease dropped to 41.5. My grade level for this essay also went up to 13. To me the changes in my writing scores are due to the type of assignment that was given. The length of this paper was shorter than that of my previous essay which surely made a difference in the amount of information I provided and how concise it should be. The writing in this class did wonders for my writing as it required me to shorten information and select better portions of information.

In my most recent college paper, an essay about the history, use, and benefits of medicinal marijuana showed great scores. My grade level was now 15.6, my reading ease dropped to 31.7 and the amount of passive sentences had risen to 30 percent. This type of writing assignment affected my scores greatly. I was able to do research on the topic; which allowed me to present information in a just matter, rather than go into detail. Research papers have always been a strong weapon in my writing arsenal.

Overall, through the course of three years, I can say that my writing has progressed. Going from a writing grade level of 12.3 to 15.6, and showing a great change in my reading ease from 51.9 to 31.7, my writing has definitely changed. There are many causes for these changes, however, experience is what I have seen to be the greatest factor. Most teachers in my experience don't spend enough time on writing styles in different types of papers. Good teaching along with the use of the readability statistics tool can make for a very promising writer in any situation.

Month Year – Read Ease

2012—66.5

2012—74.7

2013—46.4

2013—28.9

2014—36.1

2014—60.5

Readability score, the first time I heard this term in class, well I was a little frightened. My previous class had been statistics, the realm of z scores, t scores and hypothesis testing. My thoughts wandered to reference distributions and numbers kept appearing before me, a readability score might be how fast you read and comprehension of material or I might finally know what grade level I was reading at. A readability score uses the average number of words in a sentence and average syllables in a word. The readability score provides a baseline for determining the reading ease of one's writing and determines the grade level for the paper written.

Surprise set in when I finally checked my writing samples and saw my scores. The reading ease scores of my papers for the most part over the course of two years decreased. A higher reading ease score indicates a middle school student can easily understand the written sample, while a lower score is better understood by university students and graduates. My first paper in 2012 received a reading ease score of 66.5 with a grade level of 8.7 and on my fifth paper I received a reading ease score of 36.1 with a grade level of 12.6. I never expected my writing to increase at all; I never put forth any effort into improving my writing in general. I avoided writing and only wrote when I had

a paper due, never for fun or to capture my thoughts on paper. Of course if it was an important paper I would edit and re-edit and have friends and my sister help me edit. I then felt proud of myself, all the hours I spent editing and asking people to read my papers actually had a measurable effect.

Comprehension dawned on me as I further analyzed the scores in front of me. I know my writing skills are suboptimal and I always struggle to write grammatically coherent papers but I never attributed it to the topics and classes for which I wrote. For example, my sixth paper was for a general education class and I knew I could receive a C on the final paper and pass the class with an A. I neglected the editing process that I have always adhered to and submitted an unrevised paper. Another simple and probably obvious reason might be the topic I write about, my history and statistics papers tended to have lower readings scores ranging from 28.9 -46.4 with grade levels between 10.4-13.6. Those classes were enjoyable and I loved attending them, the material captivated me. On the other hand, I tended to use more terminology associated with both subject matters biasing the reading ease score and grade level.

I finally acknowledged that maybe finding out my readability score was not catastrophic. I managed to interpret my numbers and find plausible reasons for my standard of writing. However, these numbers do not inform me if someone taught me to write, instead that my writing, when looking at the readability index, has generally improved. I've been learning Russian for the past three years and the more I read Russian texts, I find myself incorporating words and phrases into my speech. In college, reading academic papers is necessary and perhaps when we as students begin to write, mimic the style of papers from our fields. Maybe a professor taught me to write or my high school English teacher or perhaps indirectly it's the authors of the papers I've had to read.

Hard Sciences Major Narratives:

Month Year – Read Ease

September 2012—59.2

October 2013—57.9

March 2014—50.4

After examining three papers varying from high school to college level, I can conclude that my writing quality improved slightly. Beginning with senior year of high school, I wrote an extended essay to try and receive credit for my IB diploma. After analyzing this thirteen-page paper, my grade level was a 9.4 and my reading ease score being a 59.2. Shortly after entering college and taking my first year seminar at here I had to write reflection papers on different articles each week. One of the first papers I wrote on racism and inequality in Harry Potter's World received a grade level of 9.9 and a reading ease score of 57.9. A reason why this score might have been so low is because of my disinterest in the course. I had to read articles involving racism, slavery, and prejudice, which were tedious and did not interest me. The final paper I wrote for my first year seminar received a grade level of 10.8 and a reading ease score of 50.4. After attending writing center sessions several times, I can see that my scores improved. However, due to my disinterest in the class my grade level and reading ease scores suffered.

In fourth grade, we were introduced to the FCAT, which was a standardized test involving math, reading, and writing. My teacher at the time was demanding and had very high expectations of us regarding the writing section of the FCAT. I had never been a strong writer but I practiced every day to achieve a high score. However, once scores came back I was surprised to see that I had one of the lowest in the class. My teacher actually pulled me aside to scold me on having such a disappointing grade. As one can assume, being a nine year old and being yelled at about your writing can be a little scary. I remember going home that same night and telling my mom what had happened at school. She tried to convince me that everything was not as big of a deal as I was making it, but I wouldn't accept that.

Ever since that trivial yet scarring incident I have struggled in growing as a writer. After calculating my readability scores it was clear that my writing has still not improved. I calculated readability for three separate papers ranging from being a senior in high school to a freshman in college. In senior year of high school I wrote an extended essay on a topic involving art, which I was completely unfamiliar with. Writing the extended essay was a tedious process especially because I did not enjoy what I was writing about. The other two papers I calculated my readability for were from my first year seminar being a freshman in college. My grade level did not go up that much most likely because I yet again did not like the material I was learning and had to write about. I believe enjoying what you are writing is vital to how successful your writing is.

Month Year – Read Ease

December 2013—33.3

September 2014—29.4

November 2014—27.5

The expectations of a molecular biology major in regards to complexity of writing are not considerably high. And I would like to highlight the fact that the three readability scores I received were not papers in my area of study, conversely they were in the area one would not expect a molecular biology major to thrive. The scores include a 33.3 from a paragraph sample of a history paper I wrote in the winter of 2013, a 29.4 from a sample of another history paper I wrote in the fall of 2014, and a 27.5 from a sample of an English paper written in the winter of 2014.

Overall, I'm pleased with the progress of my score over the year time frame. I believe that I have improved my writing, particularly in areas that I have a strong passion for; these three papers were based on topics that I deeply valued. The paper I wrote in the winter of 2013 regarding "Che" Guevara's involvement in the Cuban revolution was one I dedicated a significant amount of time to improve; therefore, I aimed to give it the complexity it deserved, meaning that I took extra time to understand the events and occurrences of his life so that I could express these directly in my work. This paper was part of an advanced studies program in my former high school, and it was essentially one of the key components to my final social studies and humanities grade for the program.

The individual I chose was someone I had generated interest on over my time watching documentary films about socialism in Latin America. My score demonstrates that my writing in terms of readability was considerably good for level of education at the time, eleventh grade year of high school to be exact.

The same goes for my history paper from 2014, the topic consisted of the deprivation of the Native-American social classes during American Westward expansion, a topic that drew me in and gave me complex thoughts. The score I received for this paper does show progression as compared to my previous paper from a year before in the same area of study. A score of 29.4 shows significant improvement over a period of less than a year, particularly when the writing you do grows to be more advanced. I believe progress from the lower level scores of readability can be much quicker and therefore a 10 or 20 point drop from a score of 70 to 60 or 50 would be reasonable, however, as writing becomes more advanced and vocabulary becomes more complicated, the improvement can be categorized with less magnitude of a figure. Thus the progress I achieved over this period of time between the winter 2013 and fall 2014 paper was plausible if my recent belief of development in readability holds true.

Finally, my English paper was based on a topic I could connect to due to my interest in Immigration policy in the United States. I look to my scores with satisfaction; however, I would like to continue improving my score as I attempt to improve my writing. The score was a 27.5, less than the winter of 2013 paper and the fall of 2014, to my advantage this paper was as one of my final assignments in my writing and rhetoric course, meaning that I had experienced a full semester of college level writing for this piece, unlike my college history paper which was earlier in my fall term of the same year, thus the nearly two point drop within one season seems formidable considering the situation. My belief that more gradual progress over the increased complexity of writing held true for this assignment as well, my score dropped by 1.9 in a period of 3 months, however the content I was provided through my college English course, aided my development.

April 2014—34.5

March 2015—31.3

The other day in class we were asked to attain our reading ease scores based on old essays we had written. I used three pieces written throughout the course of my freshman year of college. The first was a creative piece written for my first year seminar about music in television and movies. Next came a history paper on the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe during the 20th century. And last but certainly not least came my formal lab report on yeast fermentation of the strain *Sacchchromices Cervesia*. All pieces were written in the time span of one year but still managed to get varying reading ease scores. Why was this the case? Have I actually gotten better as a writer since I've come to college? These were the questions I asked myself and wanted to know more about.

My first paper that I wrote in college was a creative piece about what we interpreted the role of music in film to be. I scored a reading ease score of 53.7 with a grade level of 12.1. This all seemed very appropriate to me considering I had not written a paper in several months and had just graduated from the 12th grade. I was happy with this score but knew I had to have better papers out there somewhere. That's how I decided to use my World History Paper I had written at the end of my first semester of college to see how that stacked up. On my "Collapse of Communism" I scored even lower than before with a score of 34.5 and a grade level of 15.6. This made me quite happy because I had improved to a junior in college writing level and dropped 20 points in readability. The final paper I used to calculate a reading ease score was a formal lab report that I had done for my introductory biology class. This was my first time writing a formal paper so I wasn't sure how it would stack up. But to my surprise I scored even lower with 31.3 and an equivalent grade level as the paper before with 15.5. All of my papers had gotten progressively better over the year and were at a level I deemed appropriate and satisfactory for myself.

These scores really got me thinking about the question proposed in *Gorgias* about whether or not one can be taught to write. I lean towards the side of no, you cannot be taught to write. I have always been a strong writer, but it was never something that I worked towards getting better at. I seemed to have a natural ability that others did not. All

through middle school and high school I was pushed to take higher level English courses because my advisors and teachers thought that the regular courses were too easy to me. I would argue that taking classes and writing more will cause you to be a better writer but that is through internal practice and trial and error. People form their voice as they get older, so your writing style may improve, but it's not through direct influence of others, its though experiences and trial and error.

With all that being said I don't think that reading ease scores particularly are the most accurate tools of describing writing levels. My theory as to why my papers got better over time is due to the subject matter. A creative piece or narrative story is going to typically score lower than a formal lab report or history paper because of the vocabulary and subject matter. There are more sophisticated vocabulary and terminology that are used in more formal writing that lead to higher syllables per word and words per sentence. I also have little faith in algorithms that are supposed to put a quantitative value to some qualitative property such as writing ability. Because there is something to be said about how it is harder to use larger words and write longer sentences, but that's not the only thing that counts. Sometime it is harder to use fewer words to get the same point across, and sometimes it's more appropriate to write with smaller words. I just don't know how much faith we should put in a computer judging human writing ability.

Month Year – Read Ease

April 2014—45.4

June 2014—51.1

September 2014—40.9

March 2015—32.8

In the word processing program Microsoft Word there lies a feature that when activated allows the user to determine the ease of reading as well as a means of comparison to other works based off of an approximation of the grade level that the user composes their work at. I decided to utilize this aforementioned feature focusing my testing of it on four papers of varying lengths from a timespan ranging over the past two years of my writing career. These works include an AP Language and Composition prompt from the 12th grade, an university application essay from the summer prior to my freshman

year, a term paper on famous opera houses in Europe from the first semester of my freshman year, and finally a biology lab report on C-Fern reproduction from the second semester of my freshman year.

The results from the aforementioned pieces brought me mixed emotions. On one hand I was pleased because my ease of reading did have a steady downward trend when comparing my earlier pieces to the most recent ones meaning that my writings have in fact become more difficult to read. This statistic implies that my diction as well as my sentence structure has improved, which is the comforting part of my results. The other statistic that was determined was the estimated grade level at which I write at. All of my pieces according to Microsoft Word are written at a 12th grade level, which is as expected for my pieces written in the 12th grade but is not great news for my pieces written after that. This means that according to Microsoft Word I have been writing at a 12th grade level throughout my freshman year in college which is not ideal and could use improvement.

One issue that I believe is influencing my scores is the fact that all of my papers have varying lengths and topics. It is my hypothesis that paper length and topic greatly influences the score received, for example my university application, which is only about a page in length and on the topic of world travel, scored much worse than my tenpage scientific paper on C-Fern reproduction containing scientific lexicon. This provides firm evidence that my aforementioned theory about length and topic has a solid foundation but testing this theory on a larger scale would have to occur for it to be confirmed.

Conclusion:

One would expect a uniform answer from the question “Was I Taught to Write?”, yet the students in the study could not reach a single conclusion. Each student had their own opinions of their readability scores and the meaning thereof. From the information provided, the students dissected their research further by conducting a class survey: eight out of fourteen students felt as though they learned to write; thirteen found that their reading ease scores improved over time; most of the reading ease scores ranged from 41-60; grade level scores averaged between 11 and 13; and a few more than half of the class

consisted of English majors, while the remaining majored in either hard or social sciences. One would assume that in a college level class, each student's writing would improve over time; these results were just as different as the pupils measured. However, two consensuses reached were that all undergraduates, no matter their readability scores or field(s) of study, resolved to make conscious efforts to improve their writing and all would put to use readability statistics in the future. Might this be the desired goal of this venture? It is surprising that a group as diverse reached any sort of general agreement, given the range of genres, backgrounds, and writing abilities.

My Water Body

Clean Water for a Thriving Environment: St. Johns River

The St. Johns River is a safe, reliable water source to a certain degree. On one hand, the river is unique for its ability to cleanse itself from harmful bacteria. On the other hand, the pollution coming primarily from human sources contaminate the water's surface. Industrial waste and the rain wash from farmlands, highways, and agricultural sources constantly run into the river and spread exponentially. Though we have recently made some progress in disinfecting the river's surface, certain areas remain highly contaminated and contribute to low species diversity. In learning more about the actual process of the river's mode of self-cleansing, communities can clean out pollutants more effectively and provide the healthy water source necessary for a prosperous ecosystem.

As a shallow body of water, the river tends to create less tides the further up it travels, where it becomes wider and more shallow. The slowing tides travelling downstream to the north slow down the flow of the river and create algae build-up. Nitrogen and phosphorus contribute the most to algae growth; both chemicals spread from human waste of various sources, some of them including air pollutants from automobiles, air conditioning, and construction sites. Additionally, these chemicals are released into the air from power plants, lightening, and certain plants. Pond water and fertilizer contain substantial amounts of nitrogen and phosphorus; as ponds collect water from nearby farms and fertilizers in the soil, the pond water runs off into the river through pipes and ditches.

Nitrogen and Phosphorus are necessary for the river's biological diversity, but they also contribute to the river's main problem of nutrient overload. Nutrient overload builds up algae and depletes water oxygen. Excessive nutrients create an ecological imbalance; the imbalance creates bacteria harmful to delicate species of fresh-water wildlife. As

mentioned, nutrient overload is largely the consequence of industrial and agricultural waste. What's more, these particular pollution sources introduce harmful elements into the river including mercury, zinc, copper, lead, dioxin, pesticides, and herbicide. All of these chemicals these become even more dangerous when they are imbedded into the sediment at the bottom of the body of water, where they cause long-term damage from the floor to the surface. Bacterial transport from sediments depends on environmental factors and is largely unpredictable. Harmful elements certainly threaten the river's ecological health. Clean water is key to supporting safe environments for vegetation and wildlife. A clean water source not only benefits nature, but also betters the surrounding community by providing a safe living space for residents. Those using the river for recreational activities and food harvesting, for instance, need a large, sharable, and clean space. Indeed, many find places on the river ideal for holding certain business. The St. Johns river could potentially be a source of great economic activity as well as a popular attraction site. Improving the river's sanitation will spur communal growth and improve overall quality of life.

The Contaminated Water of St. Petersburg

I have been living in Florida for a year now. In that year, I have spent ample time exploring the beaches, specifically surrounding the Tampa Area. I have favorite a few; Treasure Island, Caladesi Island State Park, Clearwater, Madeira, and St. Petersburg beaches. St. Petersburg has quite a few hotels lining its beach, as it's a bit more of a commercial area than the state parks. It attracts almost 25 million tourists per year. One of the most esteemed hotels on the beach is The Don Cesar beach resort. It is an iconic, pink, looming palace of a place, and appears luxurious. Inside, it lives up to its standards, but beyond the cabanas, powder white sand and exclusive water; I have noticed a huge defect.

For someone who used to find Cape May, NJ the most tropical place on Earth, I have accustomed of Florida's scenic beaches and clear water. The St. Petersburg beaches specifically surrounding this resort is disappointing. It reeks something especially foul, the water is tainted green and brown but not from dirt and algae. I am slightly germophobic, so I have wondered as I've dipped my toes in the water there if I am entering a toxic environment. I have noticed trash on the shoreline as it comes in with the tide. It is not like there are used needles washing up, but to say the least- I find it disgusting. I wonder if I am compromising my health and safety by enjoying a day on the beach.

I completed a water test outside of Don Cesar from the shoreline at the end of October. The test revealed elevated levels of lead, bacteria including the presence of E Coli, Crypto Sporidium, Salmonella, Naegleria, and Fowleri, which is a brain eating amoeba! It isn't guaranteed that you contract these diseases when swimming but it is frightening for cure. The test also showed that the water had an unusually large amount of pesticides, iron, nitrates, chlorine, copper, alkalinity, and pH. All of these are usually present in water, even drinking water but large amounts of problematic and can cause health symptoms, and problems. These elevated levels can cause developmental, neurological, gastrointestinal, reproductive, organ damage, and even increase cancer rates. It is very disheartening to know all of this and not really realized a vacation or visit to the beach could be harmful. I think the resort should be responsible for putting a warning sign in front of the beach to let guests know what they are really swimming in. I don't litter into the beach, and I don't pee or willingly contaminate the water, so I feel at loss personally to how I could help this problem. I am now going to rinse off before and after I enter the water. I usually do not get water up my nose, but I think at this point, dipping my head in the water is frightening in a way.

St. Petersburg beach is an idealistic place, even more so at the Don Cesar Beach Resort. In a way, it is an illusion to think that the place or water itself is the place to be.

Ignorance is bliss, but as humans with fragile lives, we must be aware of what we are susceptible to and how we can minimize risks. The Don Cesar Beach Resort at St. Petersburg can be dangerous to swim in and I will remember that as I choose where I spend my days basking in the sun from here on out.

Encomium of Escobar

In recent years, sources of media such as television and films have taken individuals, who have historically been seen as hostile tyrants and killers, and recreated their images. Perhaps even shifting these preconceived societal notions that we have established. These films, series and documentaries go beyond the atrocities these individuals are suspected to have committed and give viewers a look into their personal lives. The very essence of their existence may be reevaluated by the viewers, and may even provide justification for their actions. A rhetorical tradition, known as a sophistic encomium, may be taking off again in the modern world. This technique of taking an individual and reforming them for an audience dates back thousands of years to the very foundations of rhetoric in ancient Greece.

The "Encomium of Helen" by Gorgias took Helen, a daughter of Zeus whose personal charm and beauty attracted many suitors; it would be these factors that Gorgias proposed were the causes of her misfortune. Gorgias took an individual who the ancient Greeks saw as an immoral being and discussed her attributes even praised these attributes. After considering these attributes, Gorgias assembled an argument that steered the fault away from Helen. Gorgias approached Helen as a victim and shifted the blame from her own doing to someone else's. For example, Gorgias claimed that if Helen's misfortune was due to the gods, then it should be the gods who were responsible for her fate. This method proved to be impactful, as it remains one of Gorgias's most distinguished works. Modern reconstructions of notorious criminals' lives employ some of the same methods utilized in the *Encomium of Helen*, alongside others methods used by the directors and producers. The ultimate result of these reconstructions is that audience members may develop a change in their perspective of these portrayed individuals. Changes in perspective may include emotions such as feelings of empathy or even admiration of individuals who were portrayed as complete monsters.

One of these notorious criminals is Pablo Emilio Escobar Gaviria. He would become recognized as one of the most well-known figures of the late 20th century, and seen as a legend—a modern day Robinhood-- to the poor of Colombia and a savage to others. The fascination with his lifestyle and his suspected atrocities mystify many Americans to this day. A man of no extraordinary background became the face of the drug empire that clouded the United States and further ignited a fire in the war against drugs. It has even been said that he held the nation of Colombia by the throat at his personal mercy at times. Today there are dozens of novels, films, documentaries and movies based on the life of Escobar. His presentation to audiences is vital to the perception that readers and viewers develop of his identity. As mentioned earlier, there has been a shift in the presentation of individuals like Escobar to audiences. The presentation of Escobar can be clearly seen and assessed in the film *Escobar: Paradise Lost*, a documentary called *Pablo Escobar- King of Coke*, and a popular American television series known as *Narcos*.

Sources claim he begun his criminal career from a very early age by stealing gravestones, sanding them, then reselling them. After his early years he moved to more intricate activity, particularly smuggling goods illegally imported goods throughout Colombia. His next endeavor would be in the drug sector with cocaine production. Eventually, he would begin to export cocaine to the United States growing his exportation rate to exponential levels. The sale of this product resulted with an extremely high profit for Escobar, turning him into an instant billionaire (Forbes). We know that Escobar lived a life of extravagance, as he was claimed to be one of the richest men in the world (Pablo Escobar Biography). He also made an attempt to become involved in Colombian politics as an alternate in the Colombian Congress. He built an empire through the exportation of cocaine to not only the United States but also other developed

nations. His trade came with a price as he was connected to a series of violent attacks that resulted in the killing of hundreds of individuals who opposed his business and personal interests. He was a family man who supported his mother, wife and two kids through his vast finances. Finally, we also know he was one of the most wanted men by the United States National Government for his involvement in the American epidemic of drugs being brought to its shores. One American television series depicts the methods used by Escobar to establish his empire effectively.

Narcos

The popular American Netflix series *Narcos*, dramatizes the life of Steve Murphy, a DEA agent who with his partner Javier Peña pursue Escobar's criminal organization. The series successfully stages the life of Escobar, his rise to power in the drug trade, his business transactions and personal life. From the beginning of the series Escobar was immediately portrayed as an individual in complete control. One of the first scenes in the series begins with Escobar transporting contraband through a bridge where a military checkpoint is being held. Cool-headed Escobar showed no signs of worry as he offered the soldiers some of his contraband and also began to make remarks about each individual soldier's name and their familial information. This method is almost admirable, certainly impressive, as he knew by direct knowledge each individual soldier's personal information. Immediately this tells us that Escobar used illegal methods of controlling individuals and attaining what he wanted. The approach the directors used to present Escobar in this particular scene was that of a confident, serious and knowledgeable man, yet the expected response from the audience may have been much less admirable. The scene constructs immediate sentiments for the viewers on Escobar.

An immediate conclusion that can be made about Escobar is that he was able to manipulate individuals through his methods of intimidation and his wealth. However, if these individuals had not originally accepted his bribes, and he had not been allowed to exhort such methods, how would he have been able to manipulate them? In comparison to the *Encomium of Helen*, it was not simply Escobar's fault, it was also the soldiers and larger governmental institutions that allowed him to establish his dominance through bribes and eventually "plomo" (lead). This pattern of bribery appears again and again

throughout the series as he buys out information, men, and the loyalty of those whose connection would prove to be beneficial in his interests. In the series, he bought his way to his election as an alternate for the Colombian National Congress through offering large amounts of donations to the Justice Minister of Colombia. Because no one refused to take Escobar's bribe money, it could be possible that he developed an expectation that through money he could achieve everything. As for those who were not influenced by his wealth, they could be killed. This man was therefore one who saw an opportunity with bribing individuals to attain a higher place in society. It's admirable that a man of such humble beginnings was able to scale his way—somehow-- to the political elite of Colombia. Although the series does not directly portray his background, the directors present his image in a manner that the audience knew of his non-elite upbringings.

Throughout the series, Escobar was romantically involved with a famous Colombian journalist. This relationship occurred despite Pablo's marriage and children. Typically to Americans, this seems immoral, however, considering the *machismo* culture Escobar had been raised in, it was almost an expectation for him to be involved with as many women as possible. Under this principle, men who could sleep with multiple women even when they were married were seen as true men. Perhaps Escobar was just a victim of such principle, due to years of cultural conditioning from his childhood. Perhaps the directors decided to use this relationship as a way to create more conflict, but an alternative reason is also likely. This relationship could have been used to demonstrate Escobar's weakness in character as he adhered to the *machismo* ideology.

The series features the famous prison Escobar built for himself, known as "*La Catedral*" where after his "arrest" he would spend his sentence for drug trafficking. By constructing a prison for himself, and also by being in absolute control of the operations and logistics of his prison, he was able to do nearly everything he wanted. This proves his intelligence and ability to control even situations that are not in his own favor. Yet, despite the control he held while in prison, he continued committing crimes within the penitentiary walls, further proving his immorality. Perhaps the most brutal scene within the series was one in which Pablo killed one of his associates that visited the prison by his own hands. The freedom that Escobar has to commit this crime is one that is not common of any prison. By selecting this particular scene and the violent nature by which

it was portrayed, the directors presented Escobar's power and his willingness to take extreme measures.

What's perhaps one of the most impressive feats that Escobar is able to achieve in the series is that he acquires the support of the common people of the poor neighborhoods of Colombia. One particular scene portrays the loyalty these individuals had for Escobar. During a police chase DEA agent Murphy and Peña corner one of Escobar's top henchmen in a poor neighborhood in Medellín. By surprise however, a 10-year-old boy from the *barrio* appears pointing a gun at the agents allowing the henchman to escape. Directors presented this scene as a display of Escobar's influence in the impoverished neighborhoods of Colombia despite the series of violent accusations he faced.

Despite the cheating and immoral acts Escobar committed, this series proves that Escobar was a man who would do anything for his family. Throughout the series he provided his family the finest living arrangements as well as the emotional support they needed. When his son mentioned that he wanted to kill his sister because she cried so often, Escobar lectures the boy why he should take care of her and the importance of family. This moment of emotion may have a significant effect on the viewers as it shows a sentimental side of Escobar that proves he is perhaps more than just a man without any kind of morals or consideration for others. Maybe, it was his family that was the only thing that kept him somewhat human. *Narcos* does a satisfactory job in presenting Escobar's personal life and connections. However, when considering the recreation of an individual to take a look at his familial relations, one film exceeds. This film is the 2014 film *Escobar: Paradise Lost*.

Paradise Lost

Escobar: Paradise Lost is a film about a young man named Nick who became romantically involved with Pablo Escobar's niece Maria. He married her and became close with Escobar and his family, eventually living with Escobar and working for his Hacienda Napoles. Here he began to witness the atrocities Escobar directed. This film much like *Narcos*, constantly demonstrated his vast wealth and power. It would be Escobar's large fortunes that eventually lead to Nick's own demise.

Escobar is presented as a controlling father figure who attempts to establish a close relationship with Nick. Externally, Escobar helps build clinics and other forms of

infrastructure for the poor communities of the *barrios* of Colombia. However, it possible to consider the fact that he does this in the interest of his political future. By building such infrastructure, Escobar is able to gain popularity among the people and, in doing so, is able to consolidate his own power over the region. One of the first encounters Nick had with Escobar was when he met him during a rally in the town he met his niece. Immediately we see that Escobar is a figure of a celebrity status, which is admirable due to the fact that he was able to win the support of so many individuals.

Overall the film shows mixed and changing appearances of Escobar, the way he interacts with his family is ideal, but the way he handles business is ruthless. There is a point in the movie where Nick discovers Escobar's henchmen cleaning themselves of blood, which clearly was not their own but rather a victim's. Escobar is portrayed as a brutal killer even though it's not directly shown by the actions and behaviors Escobar exhibits. The directors presented Escobar as a criminal who did not get his own hands dirty in away way, but instead resorted to his henchmen to do the deeds. The film does an extraordinary job of presenting the type of administration Escobar used when carrying out his acts.

The main conflict in *Paradise: Lost* was when Nick became convinced to transport millions of dollars of Escobar's money to a secretive site. His clandestine task was to kill the guide and return to the town where he was supposed to be killed by Escobar's henchmen. Nick unraveled this plot, but in doing so he faced the power of Escobar's influence and methods to kill. He shows absolutely no pity for Nick and ordered that he be hunted down like an animal and killed. By doing this, Escobar's power is shown as he brings in local law enforcement and even the military to terminate an individual who he saw as a threat to his image. What may create mixed emotions for some viewers is that Nick was a part of his large family as he had married his niece. Ironically, before he had told Nick that he saw him as a son. And even more confusing was the fact that he had called his own mother to pray about going to prison, and then admitting that he was fearful that God would abandon him. The directors contradict Escobar's actions in many ways, creating the mixed emotions that are possibly generated by the audience. Ultimately, Nick dies in a church in the arms of his wife from a shot of

one of the men after him. The way the final scene was produced essentially shows that Escobar was a man who took the most extreme measures to save himself.

Pablo Escobar- King of Coke

Pablo Escobar- King of Coke is an American-produced documentary that focuses on roots of Escobar's illegal activities as well as the events leading up to his capture. The documentary also presents a historical background of Colombia and the circumstances surrounding Pablo Escobar's societal conflicts during his birth. He was born in 1949 during a time known as *La Violencia*, during which hundreds of thousands of individuals were brutally killed by the government, revolutionary factions and other groups attempting to consolidate power in the nation. Violence was a constant theme in the lives of people like young Escobar. It's possible that this period could have deeply affected Escobar as a boy growing up in Colombia. The result: a preconceived impression that it was right to kill and that in order to attain power there must be termination of those who stand in your way. Certainly, an argument could be made to support the blame for Escobar's gruesome actions to the instability of his nation during his childhood. It's been psychologically proven that environment is one of the factors that influence an individual's development. Could Escobar merely have been a creation of the environment he was surrounded by?

The documentary highlights the fact that Pablo learned from his childhood that the law enforcement and individuals in many governmental institutions in Colombia could be bought for the right price. This certainly supports the fact that if the opportunity had not been present, then it would not have been so easy for Escobar to manipulate law enforcement and other government workers. With such a limitation, he would not have gotten as far as he had in his criminal activity and his violent crimes. Had the Colombian government had no price, it certainly would have been more difficult for Escobar to operate, resulting in less violent acts. Gorgias may have argued, that a man is only as evil as you allow him to be. Perhaps it was the appeasing police and judges that allowed Escobar to become so evil when he felt untouchable. Even when he agreed to take a sentence in prison, he was practically untouchable.

The documentary, like *Narcos*, speaks about the private prison Escobar built for himself when he “surrendered” to the Colombian law enforcement. Before this event, his constant violent actions as well as kidnappings were bringing Colombia to its knees. Escobar had a grasp on the nation that allowed him to change the constitution of Colombia outright banning extradition. Extradition to the United States was one of the major issues of the time that Escobar fought hardly against with his fellow drug trade colleagues. This approach to attain the outlawing of extradition was an effort that led to the loss of hundreds of lives. One of the most brutal attacks was the bombing of Avianca flight two hundred three which claimed the lives of one hundred ten individuals. Such an atrocity was highlighted in the documentary and was presented in a manner that without a doubt showed the catastrophe to its full extend. The directors chose to include the images and videos of the plane after it’s crashing to demonstrate the capabilities Escobar had and the extents to which he was able to operate to attain his demands.

Despite the repugnant brutality, Escobar partook in many welfare projects for the developing communities of Colombia. The documentary mentions that he built schools, housing developments and stadiums for the poor. He was a voice of the people in a sense that he acknowledged their existence and their poverty. He was one of the few politicians in Colombia at the time that directly contributed to their welfare. Such a deed is admirable even for the most violent individuals. It was this shadow that created such an extended support network for Escobar as he was able to rely on the people in the poor *barrios* of Colombia.

Family, as mentioned earlier was perhaps one of the where Escobar actually showed some form of moral human behavior. In his last weeks while trying to escape the Search blockade and his rival cartel’s private armies, he maintained a connection with his family. The well-being of his family was a goal that was clearly presented in the documentary as he made efforts to remove them from the violence that was following him. The directors may have chosen to include this in the documentary to show that there is some form of humanity in such individuals. Although he was presented as such monster, the fact that he remained active in the safety of his family is something commendable. It would be during this time of complete hiding that his end would come.

The documentary highlights the way Pablo was murdered. The Colombian search bloc murdered him and his bodyguard in a rooftop. However, what may create some sympathy towards Escobar is the fact that the individuals who murdered him posed by his dead body as if he were an animal. This action demonstrates the sentiment the military and Colombian government had towards, him. His death resembled almost a hunt for game rather than an actual manhunt.

Final remarks:

Pablo Escobar and his vast wealth and power have attracted the attentions of popular culture recently. Much of this attraction is due to the high levels of violence exhibited by his cartel. Escobar was a man who was able to manipulate those who opposed him in order to attain what he wanted while striking fear to those around him. He was clearly one who resorted to violence as a means for all the answers to his problems. However, his environment allowed for such actions to take place. He was brought up in the brutal time of *La Violencia* in a time where individuals may have come across scenarios where it was kill or get killed. This could have established a sentiment that found violence as a necessity to maintain his lifestyle. He did just that as he ordered the deaths of scores of individuals who opposed him. His methods were brutal and terrorizing.

Notwithstanding the justifications for his actions, he was indeed a man of absolute immoralities and it is possible his presence hindered the nation. Colombia was a torn nation that bled for far too long. Perhaps Escobar and his extreme methods were the last straw of tolerance for individuals who aimed to manipulate the nation to their own liking. Certainly these forms of media justify this concept. Without Escobar in the picture, the violence and threat of drugs could be lowered and this could be inferred from each individual form of media that was assessed.

Works Cited

Escobar: Paradise Lost. Dir. Andrea Di Stefano. Chapter 2, Nexus, Pathé, Roxbury Pictures, UFilm, RADiUS-TWC, 2014. Online Movie.

Pablo Escobar: The King Of Coke. Dir. Stephen Dupler. Unknown Studio., 2007.
DVD.

"Pablo Escobar Biography." George Jung. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Dec. 2015.
<<http://georgejung.org/pablo-escobar/>>.

Padilha, José, dir. "Episode 1-10." *Narcos*. Netflix. Fall 2015. Television. Poole,
Claire. "Pablo Escobar. Over to Gustavo?" *Forbes* 25 July 1990: n. pag.
Web.

The Fault in Ourselves

In the micro-budget horror film *I Didn't Come Here to Die*, six volunteers travel into the woods to complete a humanitarian project for under privileged youth. They are placed on a campsite where they explain their motives for participating in the project. Average college age students on a camping trip are pushed to the verge of insanity after one exaggerated accident on a drunken night. Whether to better their resume or reduce jail time, the characters make rash and harsh decisions that result in gut-wrenching violent incidents. Though the acting and film quality might not have been the best quality, the overall thematic purpose is incredibly relevant to the adversities of man. A film created by college students encompasses all of the stereotypical characters of the usual slasher film but lacks one key element: a true villain.

Miranda (Madi Goff), who symbolizes politicians in the film because she aspires to be one, first began to rat out the group drinking, but then when she failed she decides to join them. After an altercation with Julie (Indiana Adams), Miranda quickly turns to leave and gets her eye poked out by a sharp branch. This is a direct attack on politicians in America who are being blinded about what's actually going on in the Middle East. The stick itself is an abuse of the big stick policy, Americans use in regard to foreign countries, in which America threatens other countries and solves problems by having a stronger and bigger military force. The war on terrorism is referenced throughout *I Didn't Come Here to Die*.

Instead of sticking together, the irrational actions of one character result in a domino effect and turn characters against each other. Julie was messing around with the chainsaw, and swinging it around in the air. Steve (Jeremy Vandermause) told her repeatedly to stop. Julie, still intoxicated, decides not to wear safety equipment, and starts pretending to fight off zombies. In her careless actions, Julie ends up sending the chainsaw directly into her cranium. Steve goes over to help her, but is unsure what to do. When no

one comes to help him, Steve thinks that the best solution is to turn the chainsaw on in order to pull it out, which ends up cutting Julie's face in half. Giving the chainsaw more gas can be a reference to United States military decisions in which they choose to send more soldiers into an already chaotic situation. Rather than solve any of the problems in Iraq and Afghanistan, American leaders wanted to solve all issues with violence rather than diplomacy.

This scene's makeup, especially Julie's wound, is well done and gruesomely impressive. Director Bradley Scott Sullivan is effective in his attempt to stay realistic but provoke fear and disgust in the audience. After the accident, Steve starts hallucinating and goes into shock, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder which is common among soldiers. One of these hallucinations is of Julie in a gas mask, which is a common symbol of warfare.

The unpredictability that comes with human nature proves to be much more than these volunteers had expected and one by one they begin to realize the movie's tagline "volunteer work can be a killer." A cycle of poor decisions and an inability to adapt to changing surroundings and situations is what harms the characters; the characters fail to fully acknowledge their actions and mistakes. The audience is shown that the true monster can only be found within ourselves; the monster is humanity. We teach children this same concept. In television shows such as *Scooby Doo: Where Are You?* 'monsters' terrorize the group of teens, only to be discovered that each of the monsters was a human scheming for their own benefits. The show demonstrates how humans handle stressful situations. Characters Shaggy and Scooby hide and run from the 'monsters' while Fred, Daphne, and Velma are more likely to confront the creatures.

Sullivan's twist on the classic slasher film provides for a creepy uneasiness when the audience recognizes the true villains are the victims themselves. Similarly, George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), places seven people in an abandoned farmhouse with lack of communication and technology and are forced to not only fight against each other but the illogical behaviors of others. Romero's film debuted several

years prior but separated itself in drastic ways from movies of its time. The ghouls of this movie were none other than humans reanimated to attack and kill other humans. A young girl attacks and kills her own mother and the hero who is forced to kill the girl is also killed by the so-called rescue team. Zombies and shell shock are referenced in *The Night of the Living Dead* which also incorporates this theme of the monsters being ourselves. Romero's film reflects several aspects of the Vietnam War similar to how Sullivan's film resembles the war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

If a movie is capable of reflecting the flaws of humanity, criticizing irrational leadership, and causing its audience to rethink themselves and their surroundings, it is *I Didn't Come Here to Die*. There is no Frankenstein, there is no deformed sewer monster created from radiation. The audience is left to question what is the cause and/or reason for all of these deaths. In each film, the movie ends with the disappointing realization that there was no real threat, but it was on their own accord. We would recommend it to anyone who is willing to open their mind to a bigger picture. Our actions, whether great or small, always have consequences. Both being anti-war films, we believe that the most terrifying aspect of the film was that there were no paranormal monsters. The biggest fault is within ourselves.

