

Why Did I Write That
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“A dynamic character is a character that changes and develops as a result of experience. In the novel *The Call of the Wild* by Jack London, the protagonist, Buck, is a dynamic character because he transforms himself from a domesticated house pet into a primordial dominant beast as a result of his experiences.”

That was the opener for the first essay I ever wrote, way back in seventh grade. If memory holds true, my teacher complimented my use of definitions as topic sentences, highlighting both that first sentence and my later definitions of betrayal, primordial, beast, adversity, and transformation. I even used quotes from the book.

Have you ever read essays that you wrote back in the day? It’s painful. All those joyful memories of your first A are squashed when you see the drivel which actually comprised the essay. It only took one paper for me to realize this. It was something I wrote for a sophomore English class in which I used “however” ten times and “for as” eight times. It was a three-page paper. A comparison of several essays from freshman year also revealed a propensity to use “Such is the case with.” Why I locked onto that particular phrase will forever remain a mystery to me.

The papers are bad. Horrid, really. But we were assigned them in order to improve as writers, right? Well, I hope I’ve improved because there’s no way I would be at Harvard if I were still reworking grammar into sentences like “It is fact women know themselves best.” I’m hoping that was just a typo. Nor if my greatest observation was still ““Evilness can, however, arise from mistreatment of one’s inferiors. Locking up an insane wife, for example, does not exactly recommend Rochester’s goodness.” No, I would say not.

Development, then, was the name of the game. Development. Ah, but of what kind? Did I really have to write those papers just to develop my sense of syntax? Well, yes, but there was a far more important developmental process going on and that was development of self.

It’s from that perspective that I reread my paper on *The Remains of the Day*, finally seeing that when I wrote “What is evening but the dawning of isolation—a loss of light that plunges one into his own mind and thoughts with an exit not easy to find?” it wasn’t really of Mr. Stevenson that was thinking. I wasn’t bemoaning Emma Bovary’s failed love life when discussing the flaws inherent in legally-bound marriages. It passed over my head between the hours of 5 and 7 am when I wrote so many of these rushed 4 page papers, but the simple act of analyzing a book initiated the far more complex act of analyzing myself. How Emma’s hopeless dreams for romantic reality reflected the delusions to which I did not wish to succumb; how Mr. Stevenson’s uneasy nights were mine as well; and how Rochester was kind of a buttface with whom I would never associate in real life.

It's weird seeing me come to life through mundane and poorly written analyses of canonical literature. I've always thought that putting a person down on paper is an impossible task since there are so many facets to us, but I now see that I've been writing myself and in the process developing myself for ten years. It began in seventh grade when I concluded that brilliant piece on the *Call of the Wild* by saying "All people including me are like Buck, for we learn from experience, and gain more knowledge from the world around us." Flash forward to my senior year of high school, when the crux of my common app essay was this:

"I am a combination of every character in every book and movie I have read and watched, every fashion editor I see online and every common person I pass in the street. I am all of these people and yet I am none of them. I am ever-evolving, ever-changing, tossing aside identities like used tissues."

Ironically, I haven't changed that much because while the writing is different the message is the same as it was in seventh grade: people change, I've changed, and I'll keep changing based on experience. What I'm saying now will likely have me cringing in a year, just as I'm cringing now at seventh grade Maura. So why did I bother writing this? Because while this one speech is just a solitary snapshot which speaks to one moment in my life, if you print out all the pages of all the essays and read them all through, they will collectively say one thing: This is me.