

Coyote Ugly

Last summer I fulfilled one of my long-awaited dreams. It was Coyote Ugly Saloon. I entered the bar at 10:55 on a Tuesday night. I brought along my friend Cleanth who was rather hesitant about going there. Cleanth was raised by pious Christians who went to church every Sunday and was as much devoted to his faith as his family. Therefore, the idea of going to a place where half-clad bartenders dance on the bar counter while pouring whiskey onto their hot bodies and spilling drops of liquid into the mouths of drunk, hairy and sweaty men and women seemed to be a little bit of repulsive and sickening. However, human beings are born curious. So here we are – a white lanky guy wearing flannel and khaki trousers and a somewhat well-rounded singer with dark face spots known in a narrow circle of followers on Instagram. We walked into the dimly lit square which might have served as an anteroom. Music was already blasting through the closed door, and we could hear women screaming and men roaring. I looked at Cleanth as if I was checking in on him. His eyes were already filled with enough disgust to leave, instead, he put his arm on the door handle and turned it, crashing down the knob. Dozens of flashing lights brightened our faces, and we were immediately dragged to the dance floor in the embrace of cheeky and impudent crowd. I lost the sense of reality as my nostrils were filled with persistent stink of alcohol and tobacco reek. My body felt as it was the centre of the Universe considering everyone that night wanted to get a little piece of it. People were touching me all over my curves but it appeared to be the natural flow of things at that exact moment. I completely forgot about each aspect of my life outside of this bar and even more is that it'd totally slipped out of my mind that I was responsible for bringing someone else here who didn't really share my enthusiasm. I looked around the place. The people were only coming in and bringing coolness with them which quickly died off in a heated atmosphere. Newcomers would order iced Jack Daniel's and get wasted pretty fast. People were all over the place: near the bar counter, on it, under it, lying on the floor and sitting on the stools. Leather, skin, hair, someone's bras were all I could see. I don't really know how I managed to find Cleanth. He was stunned. He was standing still in the corner near the bar counter silently watching drink after drink go into the throat of another customer. I ran up to him and touched his shoulder. He shuddered like he hadn't seen me coming at all and shrugged off my hand. I opened my mouth when a sudden raucous voice pierced the thick air. "DO WE DRINK WATER IN THIS GODDAMN BAR?" shouted the bulkiest bartender at one of the men standing in front of her. The guy gave her a strange look and was turning around to walk away out of this goddamn place (it could be seen in his eyes that this was the right word for the bar he'd stumbled upon trying to fulfil his thirst when all of a sudden the most bizarre and unpredicted thing happened. The woman whose name was Danesse as long as I could recall grabbed a hose which appeared out of the blue behind her

back and pointed it at the poor fella. His eyes went up his face and it took second for her to pull the trigger. Cleanth and I froze in awe (at least I thought so) watching the gallons of water splashing all over the place and soaking the man's suit. Danesse was standing at the counter and was dying laughing and screaming and making a lot of indescribable sounds. I felt anger grow in the place. The air has become so heavy it was beyond the bounds of possibility to breathe like a normal human being. The man's face was as red as blood. We were waiting for something irremediable to happen, he could hit Danesse and break her nose or worse – he could've easily told the manager about what she had caused him. However, the satiation became even more peculiar when the crowd started chanting "NO, WE DON'T" and grinning at the bartender who was having so much fun she couldn't stop. The poor guy left immediately when he noticed no one was as shocked as him (except for us surely). Cleanth gripped my hand and half-whispered, half-screamed into my ear that we must get out of here now and that he couldn't take it anymore. It would've been unfair of me to just let him go on his own, so we walked out of the club pretty fast. I was staring at the counter behind us and to my amazement, it didn't feel like I was missing out the opportunity. It was an exciting experience which had immediately occupied a part of my memory and become inerasable but in order to let it stay undamaged, I had to stop filling myself with too many emotions.

Cleanth rushed out of the club furiously cursing me and the place.

- I saw the Devil there, I swear! – he shouted at me.

I noticed he was shaking, so I just came up to him and gave him a hug while countlessly apologizing for having brought him here. He gave me a strange look and for a moment I thought I'd ruined our friendship. Luckily, Cleanth hugged me back and whispered something like "It's okay, I came here because I wanted, not your fault, I wasn't forced" and continued for a brief moment. I exhaled in relief and moved away from him just to take his hand in order to walk home hand in hand. My dear friend promised to never visit such places, however, when we walked up to his house, he thanked me for a night to my greatest astonishment.

Now looking back at it, I'm only thankful Cleanth went there with me as walking home with the friend laughing about what happened really made that day. It wasn't the bar.

I used to have very long and thick hair, combing it was a nightmare. I had huge knots which were impossible to detangle. I tried all kinds of brushes, automatic ones, with natural teeth, round, paddle and flat brushes. I was desperate to find one that could set me free from my suffering. Until one day I was casually wandering around the only form of entertainment there is in my town – the shopping mall – and I came upon the finest brush in the world. It was a red Tangle Teezer Brush for detangling thick & curly hair. It caught my attention in the first place because it was red, my favorite color. I have a red phone, I have a red backpack, I have a red computer mouse, I want to buy a red case for my laptop when this corona situation is over. I sure did want a red hair brush because it is something that people usually use a few times a day. I bought it even though it was a little pricy, it's a professional brand after all. One of the remarkable features of the brush is the absence of a handle. It easily fits in a palm and is not bigger than a 5-inch smartphone. It is shaped in a form of an uneven oval; the right side lowers a bit to conveniently lay in one's hand. The brush has two sets of teeth, the longer ones and the shorter ones to smooth the cuticle. The shorter teeth are 1cm long and they were designed to smooth the cuticle. The longer teeth are two times longer, and they are aimed at detangling the hair knots. This particular brush was created especially for tangled hair, and it has its own name "Thick & Curly". The name of the brand and the line is on the front of the brush. It does its job perfectly and I can't even remember what it was like to use other brushes to detangle my hair. Now I use those to groom my cat. I didn't enjoy them, but my cat sure does!

I usually brush my hair a few times a day. It's 3pm, and I'm quietly standing in front of the window detangling my hair and calming down. It's a busy time of the day. I've just done a half of my work, and am trying to rest a bit. It's time to have lunch when I'm finally done with my hair. Its color reminds me of wheat fields that are only available to our eyesight in the summer or late spring. The sun rays are reaching out to me and warming me up. The room is lit with brightly shining sun, and I have to keep my window open since it's getting warmer and warmer every day. Time flies, and seasons change so fast it's hard for me to adjust.

Suddenly the stream of my thoughts is interrupted by abrupt appearance of my mother. She walks into the room completely unnoticed and puts her hand on my shoulder. I feel nervousness and anxiety in her actions. I turn around and ask her what's wrong. She is quick to reassure me that there is nothing to worry about; she just wanted to spend some time with me. She cautiously takes my hair in her hands. It took her a few seconds to find brush until she starts to gently smooth my hair. She starts running her fingers through my hair and says

- I went through your childhood pictures. I can't believe my baby is an adult now. But one thing didn't change. You're still such a sweetheart.

She looks at me with such a loving expression that I cannot help myself but to give her a tight hug. 'Time flies,' I say to her. 'It's almost summer. I want to spend it with you.'

Fear of (public) speaking

Ever been tied to a rollercoaster with no brakes that just cannot stop going up and down? Try to imagine what will happen to a person who spent hours on such a ride. Let's hope they will be alive. Now imagine what it is like to be tied to a rollercoaster with no brakes while a brick is tied to your chest which shreds your ribs into pieces. What if the weight of the brick, the speed of the train would double or triple up when you get closer to another turn or a descent? People say that you just have to relax, breathe deeper and go all in. But how do you breathe deeply when your lungs are shredded, and the air is on fire? Fear of that burning air occupies all the free space, leaving you with nothing to stand on. The terror in your eyes fills up the vitreous humor exuding through both of your pupils. Tremor seizes your limbs, extorting the life from the body, once vigorous and healthy, now spiritless and sick. Your body betrays you and refuses to give you the signals when to eat or when to discharge what you have consumed. Time is no longer a concept, it is a dimensionless quantity that cannot be measured in seconds or minutes, it's traveling at the speed of light. It feels as if not only time is darting, but you are also riding a train which is getting faster and faster, which makes you feel nauseous and light-headed. You might ask when and where one could experience such a hazardous and strained situation. Well, if you fear public speaking or generally speaking to people, then this sickening situation is your life. However, it hasn't always been my reality.

When I was a child, I was the most talkative and confident girl I could think of. Starting a conversation with a stranger in the grocery shop, reciting a poem in front of 20 people, singing a song to the whole family were once things I did effortlessly, without a hitch, the way you would expect a seasoned surgeon to use a scalpel. Where did all of that go? This world's not the best place to live in, especially if you are a girl or gay, and I happen to be both. Controlling society obsessing over how people look or who they like made me hate my body, the way I dress, the way I talk. When you're different, you have two choices. You either submit, and become even more pathetic, pitiful, wretched, or you can stay "weird", and be an outcast, or shine bright. But the latter depends on how strong a person is. When I was 13, I was not strong, I could not yet strike back and take it upon myself to protect my feelings and emotions. I learned how to keep my mouth shut in order not to get hurt, not to spoil the family dinner, or receive a bad mark. I lacked the courage and confidence to speak up, and it was too painful. I have never found anything offensive, sensitive or obscene about my orientation or my background. When I was a teenager, I figured that if such a little fact about my identity could spark outraged and a hateful reaction, then none of my words would ever stimulate a thoughtful conversation. Therefore, the silence was the optimal option. I could quietly listen to different people. Some of them were like me, but they had sought the strength needed to speak their mind, to put themselves out in the world, and I worshipped them. Others were angry, loathsome, obnoxious, perilous. They would scream, yell, curse the Earth

they're standing on which had a great impact on me, forcing me to stay quiet and obediently listen to their profanities.

Growing up, I became accustomed to being afraid of speaking. This consuming and overwhelming fear took up too much space in my head so that my whole being was supplanted with it. Whenever it was my turn to speak, I hesitated and crawled back into my cave. Fear absorbed me completely. I have never been up in space and I do not know what it feels like to be in vacuum, but I'm convinced that I've already experienced it. The surrounding voices faded, suppressed by almighty fear of failure and resentment. The Sun didn't shine as brightly. I couldn't bring myself to say a word. My fingers were torturing themselves by ripping off the hangnails. The irritating voice of anxiety was speaking from within blaming me for thinking I could manage to say something meaningful. It was a nightmare.

It hasn't been long since I turned 18. Throughout my life, I learned how to fight this fear and not give in. Determine what exactly makes you wish you were dead instead of speaking in front of people and expressing your opinion. That reason is the root of fear. In my case, it was low self-esteem and the suggestibility of a child. These things are extremely difficult to get rid of. One has to learn to love themselves and be prepared to defend themselves. When you're confident, you don't let this fear overwhelm and absorb you. Although I have not yet reached that level of confidence and faith in myself, I can at least put myself out there in the world in the form of written texts which I wasn't able to perform several years ago. I can feel the fear slowly go away, nevertheless, it still lives in me, and I do not think it will ever leave. It wakes me up in the middle of the night, leaving me out of breath, dripping sweat. These lessons I've learned do not lessen my anxiety and frustration immediately. But I mustn't ever forget what I have already achieved. With close attention to my mental state, I can slowly achieve even more. I have no advice to give; I have a wish. A wish for everyone to be kind. Only together we can dig up the roots of this physiological problem of many more generations to come.

Argumentative essay on Liberal Arts

When it comes to discussing the Liberal arts educational system, the debates are extremely heated. Mostly, people believe that if students want to find a well-paid job after a college, they must apply for “certain” jobs which require STEM or business education. However, one of the richest people on Earth, for example, Howard Schultz, Starbucks CEO, Richard Pleper, HBO CEO or Susan Wojcicki, YouTube CEO, have a B.A. in philosophy, or literature, or history. Michael Eisner, former Walt Disney Company CEO, who has a B.A. in English Literature and Theatre, says about his degree “*Literature is unbelievably helpful because no matter what business you are in, you are dealing with interpersonal relationships. It gives you an appreciation of what makes people tick*”. Considering this, liberal arts are a great educational system that can help students to obtain and master their critical thinking skills which are a great aid to any professional field.

“*Liberal Arts have been especially hard hit,*” Sanford J. Ungar, the president of Goucher College in Baltimore, writes in his article “The New Liberal Arts”. The author is trying to persuade the reader that those misperceptions which are held against Liberal arts are false and have nothing to do with the reality. On the contrary, Victor Davis Hanson in his piece is trying to prove that Liberal Arts are a dead end, that “*graduating liberal-arts majors are quite confident and yet so often poorly educated.*” Situation in the States may differ, however in Russia Liberal arts education is not well-known yet. In fact, majority of the population has never heard about that type of educational system. To say liberal arts are dying in Russia would be ridiculous as they have just been born. Besides, more and more students every year become interested in this type of education. For example, the lowest admission score was 203 in 2018, and it raised to 241 in 2019 which shows that the fight for the place at the faculty had become more severe and ruthless, if one can say that when referring to the examination. Indeed, liberal arts in Russia provides students with choosing their career path after having tried some of them which can assist people when they are unsure of their next destination. “*It is far wiser for students to prepare for change*” argues Ungar in his article, defending the system and explaining the idea of Liberal arts. Conversely, Hanson blames liberal-arts graduates to be arrogant and ignorant without providing any arguments to prove his point. He states that “*Lots of employers have privately concluded <...> they were turned off by the strange combination of youthful ignorance and arrogance.*” This statement only provokes more questions, such as who were those employers, or if it was private, can it be proven at all?

Those claiming that Liberal arts are useless cannot provide concrete arguments to prove their point, therefore, it is a waste of space. Liberal arts are a place where people have more

opportunities to find their true selves and prepare for the future career even if their chosen path have no connection with history or literature at all. Our aim, as a society, is to allow more and more people educate themselves about different educational systems and let them choose the one they prefer instead of battling over who has the best education.

A Nice Pot of Instant Ramen Noodles

If you search ramen noodles in YouTube from any region the first video that will pop up is definitely a mukbang, where people consume an enormous amount of noodles in one sitting, with numerous boxes of pickles, kimchi and asparagus. That's not a recipe for a regular human being to have some smoking noodles after a hard workday in a cold city.

These videos are quite interesting and somehow, they attract a lot more people that one would expect, but what those people are doing to noodles is outrageous. Having tried noodles from all over Europe, I have combined eight rules of a perfect pot of instant ramen noodles to enjoy with grace and manner.

- First of all, one should not go crazy about all of the flavours the shops are introducing more and more every day. Shrimp doshirak might be a combination of all of the convenient things one might want – the extra spiciness, the specific reddish colour of the left-over water – but there's not much soul to it. How can one enjoy eating the noodles which resemble the smell of a fish stash in a narrow street which one passes on their way to the subway? Beef and chicken are still a golden classic. Too good to be replaced.
- Secondly, perfect ramen noodles are not about the price. One should forget and never recall those big-budget fancy packages of ramen that cost more than a mango. True, instant noodles once were considered a luxury item, as they were sold for a one-sixth price of fresh noodles, but nowadays everything's changed. Economically moderate and simple, noodles for reasonable prices are what one should be looking for.
- Thirdly, one package is not enough for one person. Two will at least make a difference for one's starving stomach. Due to the lack of fiber and protein, noodles will flow by unnoticed.
- Fourthly, soup base and seasonings should be put straight into boiling water. Many misguided people have not even heard of such a way of preparing noodles. Following outdated habits is not always helpful, especially when it comes to such a precious piece of food as noodles.
- Fifthly, when making a good-looking pot of noodles, one shall not forget to put the noodles into a boiling pot after the seasonings. In this case, it only takes three to five minutes for the meal to reach a state of readiness. Be cautious not to overcook the noodles! When noodles are overcooked, they start to look like a crib stuffed with multiple fat babies. No one wants to eat that.
- Sixthly, the noodles should be eaten right from the pot they've been cooked in. No plates, no bowls, no dishes. Some people put their noodles from the pot to other container and pour out the water which is strictly prohibited! This might be one of the most controversial things about

noodles, and those who oppose might bring forward some satisfactory powerful arguments, but my point of view will remain unbothered. The water adds to a richness in taste. If one is not a fan of water at all, one can at least pour off a little, which is allowed.

- Seventhly, as respect to the country of noodles' origin, Japan, it is only fair to touch noodles with chopsticks. Those plastic forks put by companies in packs of noodles must be there as a joke! Not only out of sheer respect, eating noodles with chopsticks makes a person feel better. Try eating everything with chopsticks for a fortnight and it is very unlikely you will ever want to ruin the sacred act of having a beautiful pot of bowls with forks or, God forbid, spoons.
- Eighthly, there is a culture of side food for noodles in South Korea, so why not take a look at it. Common Korean toppings include eggs, chopped scallions and chili peppers. This point is definitely for those who like it spicy. Korean way of seasoning noodles seems to be perfect! I know I'm a minority here, but how can one enjoy plain or over-spiced noodles which either leave you feeling nothing or your tongue burning. A little spice with a bite of eggs makes everything perfect. Got a bad grade? A little spice with a bite of eggs. Got divorced? A little spice with a bite of eggs.

Even with all of these rules, it is easy to get creative while consuming a couple of packages of noodles. One might wonder what there could be left to accustom, but the answer is on the surface. The left-over water! One can do anything with it. Drink it or flush it down the drain – anything one may want! Another matter one can lay their hands on is the appropriate time of the day to have noodles or a proper season, such as summer or winter. There are just no such things! Whatever one feels like would be a correct answer to all of these things. Everyone can propose different views on these two points, which makes cooking instant noodles an artistic process.

These are essential to follow to treat yourself on a special occasion or after a puzzling day. However, many might disagree with me, but it only shows how refined the business become. Noodles are something that is meant to be handled with grace, but I am afraid to be slung with mud after presenting my vision of cooking noodles. It is worth paying attention to the fact that noodles, originated from Japan, has become an international interest for people of all ages. The culture of preparing the noodles is more diverse now than any Ryan Murphy's new tv-show. It is important to understand all of these differences to face a well-cooked and properly handled meal. Treat noodles right to treat yourself.

Write down 5 well-developed goals (some of them are academic)

The first and main goal I've set is to move from Peterhof to the city. I want to reach that goal because living so far away from the place I have to go to almost every day is hard and makes me more exhausted. I spend 4 hours a day just on the transportation. On my days off I stay at home even when I would like to meet my friends or go to the cinema because the road would have been taken more than the city activity itself.

Speaking of academic goals, I would mention obtaining writing skills. I've come to the realisation that I am interested in becoming a writer one day and now I really am motivated to write and read more. I want to see the result of my work and be proud of myself. I want to enjoy writing.

Another academic goal would be succeeding in my exams. It is my first year, therefore I have no idea how those exams usually work. What will I be supposed to do? How many exams will I have to take? Will I have a falling off with one of the professors and will they make it harder for me to pass? Will it be unbearable for me? Will I fail so hard that I will be dismissed? I don't know any of these things which makes me anxious. Although uncertainty can really mess me up, I'm trying my best not to let it get to me, so I would also have mental stability to be one of my goals.

The last but not the least would be my personal desire to make connections and befriend smart and interesting people whom I can become great mates with. Moving from a small town to a huge city has not only become a life changing experience for me but a challenge. Adaptation is harder than I expected. I just can't manage to be one of the top students like I used to in my old school because everyone is at the top. I am trying not to turn the whole process of education into some kind of a competition; however, it is not that easy because people, including me, were and still are basically raised like this. In my opinion, it only harms us and makes up nervous about a lot of little unnecessary things we sometime mess up. This might be the reason it's hard for me to make connections. There is another reason whatsoever, but it's too personal to be shared in this list.

MOVIE REVIEW

‘Carol’: Some people change your life forever

Carol | My Own Pick | Directed by Todd Haynes | Screenplay by Phyllis Nagy | Romance, Melodrama | R | 1h 58m

By EIRENE SARANSKAYA December 4, 2019

At any rate, she was happier than she ever had been before. And why worry about defining everything?

- Patricia Highsmith “*The Price of Salt*”

Based on a semi-autobiographical revolutionary novel by Patricia Highsmith, ‘Carol’ challenges the audience not whether society will accept this kind of love, but whether the person will return their love or not. Taken place in New York City during the Christmas season of 1952, the story focuses on a romance between women from different backgrounds and obstacles they have to face.

Directed by a pioneer of the New Queer Cinema and Bard College alumnus Todd Haynes, ‘Carol’ marks another milestone in his career as a director. Todd Haynes is not afraid of emotions and feelings, and he proves it with another film. A light-headed narrative of desire and longing told through stolen glances and the soft graze of a lover’s anxious hands, there’s a timeless quality to the romance. Carol Aird (Cate Blanchett) is a glamorous woman who is going through a difficult divorce and fighting for custody over her daughter with her stubborn husband, Harge (Kyle Chandler). Therese Belivet (Rooney Mara) is an aspiring young photographer working in a department store in Manhattan. She is in a relationship with Richard (Jake Lucy), who is planning on to marry her, even though she shows no signs of affection towards him. Harge, ironically made up of ‘hard’ and ‘large’, is considering a “morality clause” threatening Carol to expose her homosexuality to get the full custody of their daughter Rindy. Weighed down by trouble with her soon-to-be ex-husband, Carol takes a road trip with Therese. Just like Lolita and Humbert, two women escape the society which considers their bond to be abnormal and abominable. The film’s production is unusual for Haynes since it is the first film he didn’t provide the screenplay for. Instead, it was written by Highsmith’s friend Phyllis Nagy, who wrote the first draft of a novel in 1997.

The heroines do not follow the same clichéd pattern that queer people have to go through an identity crisis in order to accept themselves or to reject their feelings for someone they love and fit into the heteronormative brackets by marrying someone of the opposite gender, who, for some mysterious and always the same reason, irritatingly sticks around. The book is labeled revolutionary for presenting a lesbian story with hints of a happy ending. Having to hide in the hotels and calling your lover a friend was and still is a reality for many same-sex couples, but

Carol opposes conservatives. Cate Blanchett deserves another round of applause as she masters her performance in which even a cigarette held close to her mouth discloses Carol's grasp and elegance at the same time. Unapologetically true to herself, just like Anne Lister, Carol's magnificent in her pride and fight for those she loves. Accompanied by her best friend and ex-lover Abby (flawlessly played by Sarah Paulson), the heroine embraces her feelings and chooses herself over society's murderous prejudices.

The atmosphere the audience is dipped into for two hours is so warm you can almost feel it on the skin. The film was shot on Super 16mm film which makes the grin not always visible, but always persistent. The original soundtrack by Carter Burwell is so well-composed that the smallest change in the narrative is instantly felt, or heard. Not only the colours of the scenery but the 50s songs contribute to enchanting effect the film has on its viewers. After 2 hours of such a magical experience, it is easy to get overwhelmed by thoughts running like sprinters after a gunshot. One thought might never stop occurring: "Why worry about defining everything?"

I have never considered myself to be a writer. Writing something does not surprisingly make all of us writers. For me, writer is a person whose only, or one of a few, passion lies in this particular creative process. I would not be voluntarily writing first thing in the morning, and come back to it before I go to sleep. A writer is someone who does not know of a better way to express their emotions. Needless to say, writing does not have to be a professional career of a person in order for them to be a writer, but I think that it requires aspiration to excel at this craft. I have yet to find myself, and I am not clearly certain about who I am and what I want. I can only work with what I already have.

Written assignments are our everything. (Just like Pushkin!) It is an effective way to evaluate someone's knowledge, and even more important, an attitude towards one's studies and the topic. One can definitely be seen through their texts, if they have enough freedom and are not afraid to express their opinion. Most educational institutions certainly lack the last ingredient. My writing experience can be divided into three categories. These are when I did not really have an opinion, when I had it and could not express it, and the present times, when I have it and I can express it. The first stage of my life as a 'writer' began when I first learnt how to write and lasted until the 5th or 6th grade in middle school. I had just learnt how to put my thoughts and visions on a piece of paper, and I was excited about it. The idea of allowing others to see what you bear in your mind amazed it, and I am pretty sure it still does. I described pictures, I wrote about my favorite books, I wrote numerous lyrics for my own pleasure, I even wrote a rap verse after watching a show that touched my heart and inspired me. These writings were made for fun, for creative expression, for their own sake. I never put something more complex and serious into them, because I just did not think about, for example, my place in this world when I was ten years old. As I was growing up, the written assignments at school became more academic and boring. They were so tedious, that I cannot even bring myself to recall what exactly I was told to write about. The most horrendous thing about all of this was the impenetrable bigotry of my teachers who did not encourage me or any of my classmates to form our own views and be able to defend our positions. I remember vividly when I quoted Joseph Goebbels, one of a German Nazi politicians and Hitler's closest associates. I could not even imagine that it would provoke such an outrageous resentment from my teacher who said that she hadn't even read my essay just because she had seen his name. (that says a lot, and it's a good example of these topics that seem to set off 'fireworks') I still do not understand why it happened, I did not defend him or Hitler, neither did I justify antisemitism or Nazism, I did not even say a word about Joseph Goebbels' persona. Let me clarify, the quote was not even about his political views or any other concerning matter. It was a famous saying that all genius things are simple. A lot of people had expressed the same thought years before he did. Euripides, Leonardo da Vinci, Leo Tolstoy, Albert Einstein, Napoleon Bonaparte all said something familiar. This incident still strikes me, and I do not understand what

was wrong with this one quote. This particular incident pretty much sums up my writing experience in the middle and high school. I had an opinion, my own vision, view, perspective, but no one needed it and wanted to read what I was writing. (And look how this impacted it you, you still recall it). As a result, I adapted, and did not even bother to try to be original and creative. I always knew what those teachers wanted to hear from us, and I just went along with it. I am not going, however, to dwell on the topics we were given, because an educated and well-rounded person should be able to participate in any discussion, so in that sense school taught me things.

The last two years of school were aimed at one thing, and that was the state exam. I could not think of any more standardized and cliched thing I had to do. All of the essays I had to write already had the standard which people expected me to follow. One small step aside, and you've lost. There was no room for any creativity or for expressing your own opinion. Somehow, I failed even though I knew all of those rules. The state exam only cultivated a repugnance of any sort of exam I will have ever to go through. Nevertheless, I managed to enroll in the university, and the new era of my writing experience began. I am almost at the point when I am allowed to express my opinion. I say 'almost' because I am afraid that I will get punished somehow for what I have to say, or tell, even if it is just a fact, not even my own thoughts. I went through a real struggle just a couple of days ago. I had to prepare a presentation on Walt Whitman' and Oscar Wilde's meeting. While searching for the information, I stumbled upon many resources that hinted that these two writers had more than just a talk about aestheticism. I did not really know how to put it into words. There are a lot of rumors stating that Wilde and Whitman engaged in sexual activity, and I was afraid to even say 'sexual activity' because I was not really sure how my professors would react. They are older than my grandmother, and I do not expect them to be tolerant towards LGBTQ+ community, therefore, I decided to play it safe, I simply said 'The poets discussed poetry.' However, the university so far has been very open to the opinions. I am allowed to choose a topic I am interested in, and I can at least bring up some important issues during the classes where I feel safe. One of the most significant texts was written for an English class, and it concerned really personal matters. I felt safe and I could open up without being afraid to be judged, for example I could say, 'I lacked the courage and confidence to speak up, and it was too painful.' It was a narrative about our fears, and there was nothing that I wanted to say but did not include. It felt great; putting yourself out there in the world is the most courageous thing, I think, people can do nowadays. I also really liked the way I finished the essay. 'I have no advice to give; I have a wish. A wish for everyone to be kind. Only together we can dig up the roots of this physiological problem of many more generations to come.' It is one of my favorite moments of this narrative, and I am kind of proud of myself for expressing how I really feel, without trying to live up to anyone's expectations. (I remember this essay! Thank you. This says volumes about the learning

environment and that you feel safe, only in this environment can you really open up as an individual and a writer)

I am mostly thankful for the professors, teachers, and tutors, who provide me with some constructive criticism, who support me when it is needed, encourage me, and give me something to dwell upon. I do not accept criticism lightly, I always take it too seriously, too close to heart. Criticism makes me feel bad about myself, although I do understand that it has nothing to do with who I am as a person, or how smart or creative I am. I understand that the criticism we get from our teachers is supposed to make us acknowledge the mistakes we have made simply not to repeat them again. I have been struggling with this problem for a while, and it still remains practically the same. I was especially nervous about the feedback for the narrative about the fear. This essay was the first time when I actually told someone who was not my friend about my orientation, and I did not know what reaction to expect, even though I had heard my teacher talk about gay people without any visible disgust. The feedback was positive, and there even was not any criticism. It encouraged me to be more open, since I have only one life, and it is just not worth worrying about some harsh criticism people might give you.

Honestly, I wish that my audience were wider. For now, it only consists of my teachers, a couple of friends whom I ask to describe the general vibe my text is giving off, and I, who proofread the texts all over again, even though sometimes it seems like a torture. Probably, the most important thing I have ever written was a love letter, and it was mainly just emotional, and overall overdramatic. When it comes to the actual audience of my texts, I tend to forget about it. Somehow, I just cannot imagine anyone reading my essays, I do not have that image in my head. Sometimes I forget that I am not the only one who reads my texts. I never quite think about who is going to read it, I just do what I have to do – just write. That is also why I do not think I am a writer. I do it mostly because I have to. I write essays for others to grade, and I do not re-read them, because I always think that I could've done better, even though I have always thought that essays are easy for me to write. Especially when it is an essay about me. I love writing about myself, I love talking about myself, because if I do not do it, who else will? (Exactly!! You are your biggest fan, nobody else will do this!)

I rarely got an opportunity to write about my own life and feelings, views and opinions at school. This life-consuming institution always taught me that I did not matter, and only thing that defined was my marks. I do understand, though, that it would not be great to write about myself all the time. There are a lot of great people with profound minds, thoughts, and ideas which we have to know in order to be intelligent and able to engage in a thoughtful conversation. Something tells me that an individual who is only capable of talking about themselves will not be very welcome at a social event. However, we should be able to speak about ourselves shamelessly. As far as I can judge from my own experience, school is shaming us into apologizing every time we

open up about ourselves, which is painfully disturbing. I think that this autobiography is a great outlet for us to find our own voices by looking back at all we have gone through. This reflective, so to say, paper is a response and feedback we give ourselves, we look through what we have already done, maybe some people will set new goals, or it will even help notice some little things we did not know about ourselves. I do believe that this assignment is actually one of the most helpful and meaningful things I have done this semester. I am certain that this will be read by someone, even though there has been a couple of tasks which I wrote, but no one asked us to turn in which was a pity because there were some texts I really enjoyed writing. For example, 'The opportunity to write about something meaningful and truly personal is not to be missed,' is the sentence from one of such pieces, and I keep thinking about it, its structure and word choice attract me for some unknown reason.

Besides essays and reflective papers, I absolutely enjoy creating lists. Lists are a great tool of organizing the work space and the thoughts in the head. Lists keep everything in order, which is especially important to me. That is why it is also of crucial significance to keep my workspace clean and tidy. I prefer writing at home; I am not one of those people who need to go to the café in order to concentrate on a paper or get some inspiration. On the contrary, such places create a very unhealthy environment for me, I cannot concentrate when I can hear distinctive words. My mind gets caught up on those words someone is saying, and completely forgets its goal. I prefer working in complete silence, although I am not always lucky to find a moment when people around me are quiet. If there is no opportunity for myself to be in a situation like this, I will probably set up some classics playing in the background. My favorite piece of music to write to is the Prokofiev's 'Romeo and Juliette'. It distracted me at first since I was too emotionally invested in the music, but after having listened to it for a couple of times, it became easier to concentrate on my writing, and now listening to it is actually helpful. The music just flows through my body and gets me working without any other noises disturbing me. However, it only lasts for half and a hour or so, and I have to put on repeat. I am not a fast writer. However, I have to note that I am only slow when I cannot just use simple language. Consideration takes time, and whenever I want to impress people who I know for sure will read my text, I usually go all in, and it takes me days to finish a paper, even if it is just one page. This is the reason I am not happy with any of my free writings. They are just so empty, mediocre and dull. Would you really want to talk to someone who cannot come up with something more interesting than, 'I am in my room. I had to open the window, because the Sun exudes more and more warmth day by day' or 'There are a computer mouse, a charger for my phone, a laptop and a toothbrush on my table.' They lack creativity, imagination, vividness, and life. I have realized that I cannot write on the spot. Does it upset me? Yes, I feel incomplete and incompetent comparing my free writings to those of my classmates. I know I should not be comparing myself to anyone else, but it still bugs me at the end of the day. I

rarely share those free writings during the classes, because I am just so embarrassed, even though I understand that no one actually cares about what I have to say (I would state this differently- nobody is going to judge you for what you share and people actually do care what you have to say). Actually, distance learning helped me solve this problem, I just feel invincible and untouchable behind the screen, and silence does not hurt as much. However, one of the huge problems I have now due to this whole pandemic situation is that my body hurts. I physically cannot spend that much time sitting in front of the computer. I used to write all of my assignments on the laptop sitting behind the desk. Times have changed, and sometimes I need a change, too. I lie on the bed, I write in the kitchen, I sit on the bed. I am just trying to do everything to make myself feel comfortable, and not get too carried away by thinking that life is never going to be the same. Writing texts and worrying about my back problems now distract me from feeling anxious about everything that is happening, and after I am done writing I actually feel relaxed. I feel as if a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders. Accomplishing something always makes me feel good about myself even if it is just an assignment I am not even sure the professor will read. Besides, it actually creates an illusion that I am doing something right when I feel as if I have never done something useful in my entire life. Writing at last proves that I can think, which I have been also doubting lately.

However, there are some tasks we have done this semester that do prove I am capable of doing something more creative than just writing an essay about my personal experience. Once we were given an interesting task to describe an ad and answer why it worked. I chose a MacDonald's ad, and I think I came up with some excellent sentences. 'Cheese melting on a wheat bun wrapped up in fresh iceberg lettuce looks palatable to most people, even to those who are aware that it is not the healthiest of the dishes,' is one of them. I tried to create a vivid image, and I think this is one of the examples of such vividness. 'Simple 'adcraft' is the key to the public,' I said make up a word I am sure people have made up before. Still, I came up with it, and I enjoyed writing about this campaign. Another assignment I enjoyed was also pretty unusual. We had some words we collected by going through our previous written tasks. I had ten words I had to work with, and I think I produced a pretty amusing piece of writing. I was describing a hypothetical situation happening to me on a Tuesday morning, and the way I began writing about it was already, in my opinion, on point, 'Although the concept of time is nearly dead due to the pandemic, it was a bright Tuesday morning', it was relevant to our days. There was a cat in the story, and I really appreciate those charming animals. 'To isolate myself, I looked at my cat and saw the disappointment and resentment in her hazel eyes', the sentence seems rather strange, we do not expect our pets to look at us with the disappointment and resentment in their eyes, do we? I like grotesque and exaggerating matters, and I want to use these two things more in my creations. Besides, I am proud of myself for that paper, even though I did not receive a mark or a grade. I am proud because I had

certain restrictions and there were words I had to incorporate into the text. Those words did not make sense at first. How could I put ‘Sensibility of European romanticism’ and ‘avoid eye contact’ together? Somehow, I did. I think I also benefited from this assignment, as it challenged my creativity and adaptiveness. Time spent on it was not wasted, and creating this text was one of the spotlights of this semester.

However, there have been some texts that I consider let downs. Basically, I struggled with some written assignments because I did not understand the assignment itself. Such thing happened to the Letter to the Editor, and Points of Contention. Due to governmental holidays, Monday was often left out, and we did not have a few English classes. As a result, we did not have enough time to discuss the task in the class. I did not enjoy writing that text, because I felt I was doing a half of the actual assignment. I did not like the way I constructed my sentences nor the opinion I chose to express. I actually wrote two versions of the same paper, the first one was horrendous, so I had to come up with another one. ‘Overall, there is nothing more I could add or disagree with,’ is an indicator that shows that I had nothing in my head at that time, because I did not understand the topic we were given. This is the main reason I might fail a task – I just did not get it. Another problem (and this is a real struggle for me) comes from the Internet. I have become accustomed to expressing my emotions in a certain way applicable only to the online communication. It does not work here. Emojis, acronyms are not acceptable in academic essays, and I wholeheartedly agree with it, but it requires some willpower and control to keep my urges to use the Internet slang at bay. Sometimes I catch myself thinking of what emoji to use in a letter to a professor. In addition, the most repetitive problem I experience is finding the right word that would express the slightest layer of the emotions I am trying to describe. The dictionary and the thesaurus I have installed on my computer are my best friends, and I could not imagine writing a text without them. They help me find the most exquisite words I could never think of on my own. However, I rely too much on both of them, which sometimes puts me in a difficult position whenever I forget the simplest words because my mind is not trained to remember things anymore. (This is a struggle for everyone, managing the balance of online communication and formal communication. Ultimately, I think this is a great brain exercise, you have to force yourself to switch between the two)

The most troublesome thing I am experiencing as someone who writes is the writer’s block. Whenever I am writing something, eventually I am stuck. I am looking at the yellow brick wall in front of me without any idea how to break through. I have no solution to this problem, but I developed a practice to just keep going, and continue writing everything that comes into my head. If I just stop, I will never finish. I will get distracted by social media or other homework I have to do, and will never finish the paper. This is the worst. Not only poor grades come with this, but also disappointment, resentment, and, in the end, low self-esteem. I think to myself, ‘I can always edit out everything I have written, I just have to finish.’ It works, and I also use that method in many

different spheres of my life. Just keep going, or as Gary Gilmore said minutes before his death, 'Let's do it.' It perfectly applies to writing. Even if I am not a writer in my own eyes, I can surely create something with a help of this practice. I do not enjoy writing very much, but the feeling I get after receiving praise for my texts is immensely delightful. If writing does make me feel good about myself, it is worth developing, and it is worth enriching my own vocabulary and coming up with new ideas every time I sit behind my desk in front of a blank page on a screen of my laptop. Even if I am not a writer, writing will always be a part of my life.

Irina,

I would argue with you in that you are not a writer. Just the opposite, you are a writer and this autobiography proves it. You produced 7 pages of excellent reflection that touch upon stages you passed through and works that you have completed. Furthermore, you write very well, and this was demonstrated in some of the more creative tasks like the essay on fear. I am very pleased to hear that you feel comfortable and safe as this helps one to truly share your thoughts and be yourself as a writer, and furthermore as an individual and student. You have next to no grammar mistakes and a have a strong command of the language, the thesaurus and dictionary on your desk will only continue to help you as you explore new genres and topics. I would encourage you to keep taking risks as a writer, and please know there are many who want to hear your voice and opinion.

Elizabeth Gilbert gave a very inspiring TedTalk on creativity and pressure put on creators such as writers, dancers, etc. In her 18-minute speech she spoke out about her worries as a writer and suggested a way to protect oneself from despair and grim. Her main idea is that one must do their job no matter what the circumstances are. In order to do that, she prompts such a thing as having a genie, a mysterious disembodied creature that “came to human being from some distant and unknowable source” and “who spoke wisdom [to the creator] from afar”. From her point of view, the concept of having such a genie created the psychological construct “to protect [oneself] from the results of the work” and in order not to put pressure on the creator. Her main point can be shared by another famous writer, Neil Gaiman, who wrote: “You write. That’s the hard bit that nobody sees. You write on the good days and you write in the lousy days”. As far as I can see, both of the writers give us, readers and those who aspire to become a writer one day, too, a caring gesture as to help understand the ups and downs of their job, and also, more importantly, to help those feeling doubtful and sorrowful about themselves. No matter what happened before or after one must do their job and put everything they have into this. I think both of the writers present the idea of committing to the job one is doing.