Julia Garcia

9/9/08

WRIT 510

Dr. Jo Koster

My Research Process

If I were assigned a research paper on William Blake's poem, "The Garden of Love," I would start by making an outline of my possible process on loose leaf paper. After organizing my thoughts, I would do a search of the poem on Google.com. It always helps to read a poem before you write about it. I did this search and found the poem here:

http://quotations.about.com/cs/poemlyrics/a/Garden_Of_Love.htm. The next step in my research process would be to read the poem several times, trying to grasp it's meaning. After my third or fourth reading, I came up with my own interpretation. I decided the poem was about love being dead, possibly for religious reasons. I surmised that the speaker had been unlucky in love due to the church trying to govern love by making new laws about marriage, courtship, or pre-marital sex.

To prove my hypothesis I did an online search for a biography of William Blake. I did this to learn more about him and the time period in which he lived. I found that his bitterness was not because of a new law made by the church but of his own making. According to my research Blake was against religion, but not the idea of religion. My interpretation after learning this was that, through his poem, he may have been expressing his frustration with religion. (My source for this was:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Blake.)

I also did a search of the Dacus Library catalog for books about William Blake. After a quick perusal of my search results, I found a book that looked like it would help me with my imaginary research paper:

William Blake: A Literary Life, written by John Beer, found at Dacus Library. After finding out that

William Blake lived between the years of 1757 and 1827, I did another Dacus catalog search. This time I

looked for books about the 1700s and the 1800s. I didn't find anything that looked like it would

definitely help, but I did see some books that might give me something to work with. All of this would

be done within a day or two of getting the assignment.

Were I actually doing this paper, I would have written down the "maybe's," walked to Dacus the

next day, found those books, and pulled them off the shelves for a closer look. These books didn't give

me anything obvious to work with, so I returned to my online sources. I did a Google search for: "life in

the late 1700s to early 1800s." I thought if I started with a broad search, then I could look through the

search results until I found something more specific. I didn't find exactly what I needed but I did learn

that the literary period that William Blake lived in was called the Gothic Period. Now that I had solid

keywords to work with, I did another Google search and found a page that provided a basic description

of Gothic Literature: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gothic_novel. (I was a bit frustrated about Wikipedia

being the first search result almost every time, but I soon learned that wiki had the most information

out of the other sites. Not for the first time, I wished that Wikipedia.com were a viable college source

for research. After thinking this I realized that this was another example of how we as a culture had

moved from literature on paper to literature on the web.) From this new source I learned that two of

the characteristics of Gothic Literature were romance and horror. I did a quick reread of Blake's poem

and concluded that the work contained both of these elements. This was extremely gratifying for me.

This meant that I was on the right track with my research. It was like pieces of a puzzle fitting together

correctly. At this point, I would formulate my thesis which would probably be something like this:

William Blake's poem, "The Garden of Love" is a typical example of Gothic Literature. It exemplifies

several elements of this literary period, including romance and horror. Were I actually writing this

paper, I would continue my research into Gothic Literature and draw other parallels with the poem. In all, I would probably spend about a week or two working on it.

In the excerpt from *Is Google Making Us Stupid?,* Nicolas Carr describes a new type of reading that has developed recently in people that do a lot of reading online. He called this "power browsing." I read this excerpt before beginning this paper and again before I wrote my conclusion. After reading it a second time, I saw a lot of myself in the term "power browsing." In my review of my Google search results, I did indeed "skim" the first few words of each entry before clicking or rejecting. The same was true with my search results on Dacus. In fact, it was worse. Because I'm used to how tedious it can be to find books on the Dacus catalog, I was already dreading having to use it. I find that I have to very precise and specific with my keywords because the catalog's search engine seems to produce two types of results: very specific or extremely vague. I much prefer Google for my searches. Google is much better at finding what I need based on my keywords. This seems to prove that we as a society are moving further from the written word and closer and closer to the typed.

I did not identify with the first part of the excerpt as well. Unlike the author, I can still pick up a book or find an interesting article online and read for hours. I still find pleasure in prose. There is just something about curling up next to a fire on a cold evening with a good book and a hot cup of tea that just doesn't compare to doing the same with a laptop. To start with, a laptop is a lot harder to replace if tea gets spilled on it. But, I digress. Although our culture is moving away from printed books and towards online materials, it is my hope that we will never let go of our books. There is nothing quite like sitting in bed and reading before falling asleep at night or standing before a shelf full of books waiting to be read-each one looking more inviting than the next. It is difficult to picture a kindergarten teacher reading to her students from a laptop. It would be much harder to turn that book so the little darlings can see the pixellated images on the digital screen. Let's hope the future is a bit brighter.