

ESSAY #5: "Library Floors and Literature"

Personal Statement

It happened two years ago as I lay sprawled out on the floor of the library lounge at the Université de Grenoble in Grenoble, France. I was working on an explication du texte of Guillaume Apollinaire's poem "La Loreley" for my Poemes at Proses du XXe Siècle class when I suddenly put it together: this was my approach to literature. Close reading, formalism. Staying close, very close, to the text. I was certain.

Certainty, however proved rather unstable. I knew I was important not to close myself off from other approaches to literature, so when I returned to Swarthmore from Grenoble, I took two courses which I knew would be highly theoretical – Women Writers 1790-1830 and Feminist Literary Criticism. These courses brought me around to a

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by the theme of war literature, and my work on one project gives me new ideas for the other. I feel fortunate that this has worked out, and at the University of Colorado-Boulder I want to continue studying twentieth-century literature. However, I am also ready to start widening my base, casting out in some new direction. I have found over and over that if I have a long-standing gut-level enjoyment of some kind of literature I almost invariably have a wonderful time and do a particularly good job taking an academic approach to that literature. Old English literature is in this category for me.

I have never done academic work in Old English literature, but for years I have treasured a cassette tape on which are recorded in Old English the stories of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Caedmon, and The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dam Ragnell. And when I am feeling particularly harried, I often go to the Swarthmore library and treat myself to an old scratchy recording of a reading of Beowulf, following long in the Old English text and in modern English translation. By imitating the voice I hear and following in translation, I have taught myself a tiny amount of this language. I want to follow up on this interest.

My interest in studying at the University of Colorado-Boulder had grown out of conversations I have had with numerous people, including Prof. Laurie Langbauer who had a lot of specific information since she taught there one summer. When I spoke about my interests with Abbe Blum, another professor of English at Swarthmore, she recommended that I call Prof. Margaret Ferguson. I did so, and had a wonderful conversation which helped me to confirm that I would feel very much at home in the department. I am especially excited about the department's strength in twentieth-century, Renaissance, and Old English literature.

I am also genuinely pleased about the distribution requirements, since they will help me to explore areas that I did not or could not at Swarthmore. Only by doing that will I continue to learn new things about myself as a student of literature. I do not want my experience in the Université de Grenoble library to be a unique blimp in my development. I want to continue changing, refining, playing around with the ways in which I approach literature. The ever-changing, ever-learning approach will help me to be a lifelong scholar and lover of literature.

These paragraphs show the depth of specific interest this student has in this specific graduate program. Be sure to customize your essays to this level of detail. Also note the use of professors' names both at the undergraduate alma mater and the targeted graduate program.