

Statement of Purpose

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My literary study had a dramatic start. Being good at science since ~~a~~ tender age, I followed the typical track of an aspiring scientist. Successes in entering a certificated program for ~~ten~~th-graders gifted in math and physics, and later, in applying ~~to~~ the highest-ranking physics department in Taiwan (NTHU) seemed to have guaranteed a promising career. However, a gnawing feeling that I wasn't doing what I really loved had been growing ~~in me~~ as soon as I started college. Literature, which began as an interest of a self-dubbed Renaissance Man, had been taking up my time and energy. After lengthy and excruciating deliberation, I transferred to the English Department in my current college. I knew I did the right thing right away. Physics was my first love, but literature is my true commitment. I excelled in every subject and worked harder than ever without ~~having to~~ force myself to. Aware of my late start ~~as a student in the~~ humanities and haunted by a sense of urgency, I made the best use of my time and took the maximum number of ~~courses~~. As demonstrated ~~by~~ my GPA, I did not sacrifice quality for quantity.

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In my junior year, I discovered literary theory. I was six pages into the Introduction of Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism when I found my literary vocation. Born a voracious reader, I had meandered through a wide terrain of literature, devoting special attention to the Classical and Shakespeare; however, as much as I loved the works, I was uncertain about specializing in a certain period. The insatiable desire that had driven me into literature study in the first place seemed to drive me into the middle of everywhere. I ~~immediately~~ vigorously pursued the study of theory. I read introductory books by prominent scholars in addition to excerpts in the Norton Anthology, and then proceeded to original works, especially focusing on treatises of cultural studies by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. Realizing that a significant portion of them is in the French language, I hastened to work on my French. Within one year, I have achieved reasonable reading proficiency, which enabled me to read the originalsⁱ.

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~~In~~ hindsight, literary theory is the obvious choice. My penchant for reading widely, which precludes period studies; my training in science, which entails logic and the need to theorize; my long-held concerns for ~~the~~ human situation outside literature, which had urged me to take political science as my minor; and my ethnic and linguistic background, which provides a unique perspective in critical thinking, all fall into place, and form the ground where theory can take root.

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Growing up in Taiwan, a society decidedly full of unsure identities with lingering influence of Chinese culture and Western-style market economy and democracy (which developed so recently that I, as a precocious child, witnessed its triumphs and disillusionments), I learned to see things beneath their face value and not to subscribe to a certain belief system. Having spent a decade in vigorous study of science, I am not confined ~~to~~ the studies of humanities and regard the perceived “gap between the Two Cultures” (in Charles Snow’s ~~words~~) ~~as~~ unfortunate and gratuitous. By choice, by character and by chance, my life experience has accorded me a perennial position of periphery. I am shaped less by external environment than by internal struggles. Everything that I read becomes me, and I strive to sculpt my life according to my intellectual growth.

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This is what I am doing. I am determined to study literary theory, which is still a vast land to cultivate, and your flexible program with your faculty members in diverse fields is where I need to start. Should I be granted the opportunity to join you in this discourse, I believe I will make original contributions.

ⁱ To be honest, I’m writing in future tense.