



HISTORY AND ENGLISH PERSONAL STATEMENT WILLIAM

DUKES EDUCATION

It seems to me that English Literature and History are linked inseparably. Even mediocre writing reflects the culture and society from which it has sprung and some – not necessarily the best of it – can exert an influence over the evolution of that society; it can influence the passage of History. Evidently, reading is a major passion and Graham Greene has become a particular favourite. His characters and the claustrophobic, imperfect worlds they inhabit manage to create an atmosphere within the countries he writes about with an authenticity that is truly remarkable. *The Quiet American*, gives a superb insight into French colonial Vietnam in the 1950s and *The Comedians* paints a vivid, nightmarish picture of Papa Doc's Haiti. Even the relatively familiar anxieties and insecurities of England between the wars come through strongly in *A Gun for Sale*.

Such literature is often an expression of the social condition in which it was written but comes with the added weight of creative imagination and specific detail applicable to the time of writing. This seems not only to be true in the English Literature that I have studied but also in my other language-based A Level subjects – French and Latin. Whether it is in Camus' treatment of Meursault's extreme actions in *L'Étranger* or Virgil's portrayal of the origins of Rome in epic terms in *The Aeneid*, the social statements are clear. It seems to me, therefore, that there is no better way of becoming acquainted with other cultures than by starting with their linguistic and artistic core. I have always pursued my historical studies with great relish and find the challenge of interpreting sources (perhaps relating to the First and Second World Wars at GCSE or to differing interpretations as to the success of Mary I's counter-reformation) fascinating. Last year I focussed on the Italian Renaissance and found the notion of the political conditions of Renaissance Italy's influence on the artistic development of the period intriguing. Machiavelli's *The Prince* is an enthralling exploration of political competition and manoeuvring during the Italian wars, which marked the end of the Renaissance in Italy. In a similar vein, having studied the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI and Mary I, I look forward to gaining an understanding of Elizabeth's astonishing achievements this year. Reading Susan Brigden's *New Worlds, Lost Worlds: The Rule of the Tudors* alongside Stephen Greenblatt's *Will in the World: How Shakespeare became Shakespeare* has further allowed me to see the influence of Elizabethan England on Shakespeare's works. I am currently researching my Independent A Level Investigation on the Spanish Armada in which I am focusing on the effect of bad weather in securing English victory. I have studied and seen *The Tempest* alongside Brian Friel's influential play, *Translations*, where the concept of history repeating itself, generation by generation was memorably explored. This year, studying *Hamlet*, I intend to see *Titus Andronicus* at the globe to further my understanding of Shakespearean tragedy.

I am fortunate enough to live in an area in which much of our nation's and world's history has been made. However, having had little opportunity to travel and explore historical sites (beyond that of the First World War battlefields) and literary locations, I have elected to defer my application. I intend to spend a month in Florence and Rome in the autumn, examining first hand some of the art which has so fascinated me from the Renaissance period; the contrasting architecture of Alberti's flamboyant *St Peter's* in the Vatican with the more conservative, classically inspired *Foundling Hospital* in Florence is something which I long to see at close quarters. Having read Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and *The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver, I am keen to go to Africa. I plan to secure a TEFL qualification in the January of 2008 before spending four months assisting with the teaching of English at a rural secondary school in Malawi – a tremendous opportunity.

Outside the classroom I spend much of my time acting; enjoying in particular the roles of Hortensio in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Stanhope in *Journey's End*, numerous characters in an ensemble cast in *The Visit* by Dürrenmatt and of Don Diego in the *Last Days of Don Juan*. A keen writer, I attended a creative writing course run by the Arvon Foundation last December under the tutelage of the poet, Peter Sansom and recently both co-wrote and performed in *Solitary Man*, a play about the life of an autistic. I have recently been appointed a School Prefect and Head of School Drama and am a member of the editorial team on my school magazine. I also captain my school's French debating team, winning an inter-school competition at Whitgift last summer, and enjoy my sport. I run for my school and have represented the English Southern Counties at water polo.

Commented [WH1]: This is a strong opening sentence and cuts to the heart of interdisciplinary study – often so crucial in any joint-honours degree. Look for what it is that draws the two subjects together and address this in the statement

Commented [WH2]: Casting this sort of judgment on the "quality" of literature is risky

Commented [WH3]: Similarly – this is immature writing – there is nothing here to demonstrate why it is that some literature may be better than others

Commented [WH4]: These problems are saved by a rounded, flourished conclusion to the paragraph, drawing the reader back to the inseparable link between the two subjects

Commented [WH5]: It is worth demonstrating how you've gone beyond the syllabus first before demonstrating your interest in the syllabus itself. Find an author that you like and read everything you can both that they wrote, and any biographies/accessible criticism on them – looks impressive and shows passion and interest in the subject

Commented [WH6]: This is fan-writing; it has little analytical or critical merit

Commented [WH7]: Ditto

Commented [WH8]: Although far from sophisticated, this para at least shows what a novel tells us about the history from which it derives, once again showing the links between the subjects

Commented [WH9]: Good - demonstrating the relevance of your other subjects to the course you're applying for

Commented [WH10]: This is a key element of the History and English course at Oxford and this sentence demonstrates an attempt to get some of the background reading underway - impressive

Commented [WH11]: Not the finest of paragraph transitions here

Commented [WH12]: This paragraph doesn't do much to improve the statement

Commented [WH13]: If you're applying for deferred, it is important to justify it from an academic perspective

Commented [WH14]: I never actually did this, but it is justified from a literary standpoint

Commented [WH15]: Keep this final paragraph brief and don't delve into too much detail. It's mainly for the other universities to get a sense of you – Oxbridge don't care much