

Personal Statement

Student #1

As an Austen scholar I am always asking, "Was Austen a product of the British master narrative?" This question triggered a string of countless others regarding Austen and whether or not she was "written" by her time. My original inquiries into the subject have become dogged determination to read Austen from a cultural and historical perspective to explain her popularity from an academic point of view. In the spring of 2007 I began my first independent study of Austen. I focused on reading Austen in a cultural context and a new hi

As an undergraduate I have studied numerous areas of literary history but I am focusing that knowledge on how Austen's work was shaped by and shapes the culture in which she existed and in the chronology of Western literature. On a larger scale, where does Austen's work fit in relation to other novelists in Britain and in America? We know Austen read popular fiction of her time by Samuel Richardson, Francis Burney and other shapers of the novel form. At this point in the late 18th century, however, American authors are creating their own variation of the novel. American novels such as Charlotte Temple and The Coquette drift from the British focus on manners and social critique toward sentimentalism. From a new historical perspective, how is the literature of these two nations speaking to each other? At the graduate level, I want to answer these questions through a transatlantic study of literature in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This knowledge can then be carried into the classroom, exploring Austen's modern cultural phenomenon and how the study of literature is affected by it.

In familiarizing myself with the intricacies of Washington University's English program I have been thrilled to discover the work of William McKelvy on Victorian literature. I believe my focus on late 18th and early 19th century literature will make a valuable contribution to the cultural-historical dialogue between these periods. While Austen has been my focus in recent years I hope to focus on transcontinental literature of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, examining the communication between British and American literature from a New Historical perspective.

I am greatly interested in Washington University's distinguished faculty because of their work in British and American literature. I would very much like to study under such direction and engage in an exciting discourse between the branches of Western literature and Austen's place within them!