

Colin Leath

Statement of Purpose

30 September 2004

Purpose: (1) To earn an MA in English with a specialization in comparative literature and (2) to practice and prepare for teaching composition and literature.

Of Shakespeare Danby wrote, "His art expresses and illumin[es] the field of choice" (17). Studying literature and responses to literature broadens my experience. I want the guidance of professionals and the structured requirements of a university program. Whether or not I continue to teach, I want significant experience with English and Spanish literatures.

I lack undergraduate credit in either literature. I took Latin in sixth through ninth grade, French in sixth through tenth, and I chose the respected literature teachers in tenth and eleventh. There I tired of being guided in and graded on my responses to literature. In college on my own I printed and read Shakespeare, Wilde, James Joyce, and others. From these I collected words, names, images, and even a subplot. After dropping computer engineering I did take a course called "Journalism and Literature" and some Spanish. My work in philosophy and communications led me to psychology and to my research on the experience of meaning in life. I then clarified a trial-and-error and artistic/design approach to life. This led to dance. Dancing all day left me wanting time to read and write. Now, since January 2004, I have taken nine semester credits of upper-division English literature. This fall I am taking seven credits of Spanish.

My transition from avoiding literature courses to now paying for them myself has taken several years of unschooling. Inspired by Thoreau and Helen and Scott Nearing, I rarely worked more than 20 hours a week for others. I did this to give myself free time to see what I would do with it, or, in other words, to unschool myself. I will review what I did in that time as it relates to teaching, culture, and long-term projects.

Teaching activities: Briefly and in approximate order, I taught windsurfing and sailing to youth and adults; I taught computer and typing skills to fourth and fifth graders; I founded and facilitated the *being* group and Meaning-in-life Forum; I tutored Spanish-speakers for their citizenship exams; I volunteered at a community counseling center; I became certified to teach swimming; I taught English at summer camps in Italy; I started an Integral Transformative Practice group; I evangelized on transitioning to carfree living and environments; and I facilitated challenge course team-building.

Literature, language, and culture activities (excluding computers, dance, and primitive skills): After college, I took a non-credit course in Spanish at the University of Texas, Austin; I went on a three-day service project to Rio Bravo, Mexico; I started reading Gabriel Garcia Marquez novels in Spanish; I bicycled from Italy to Sweden, on the way visiting libraries and dance studios, looking for a city to live in; In Manhattan I worked for Hal Sedgwick (husband of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick). We talked of more than literature. I learned from his precision, his *negative capability*, his interest in China, his way; I lived with two francophones; I studied sociological theory and considered graduate study; I started *Swann's Way* and a found copy of *À la recherche du temps perdu*; I lived with three Spanish-speakers from the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico; I bought my own copy of *Cien años de soledad* and began working through it with a Spanish dictionary, without using a translation, using a Spanish-English dictionary only as a last resort; I began to study the violin; I sung in the volunteer choir at St. Bart's on Park Avenue; I read *Encounters with Chinese Hermits*; I attended the "Toward Carfree Cities III" conference in Prague; I bicycled from NYC to DC, then to Earthaven Ecovillage, where I lived and worked for two months, then to The Farm, then into Mexico at Acuña / Del Rio, and through the desert, and as far as south as Manzanillo, before riding buses to Tijuana.

Long-term projects: My goal in May of 2000 was to create a website for individuals to

describe themselves and their approaches to experience. This led to my collecting and creating texts by and for me on what is now experienceart.org. Feeling imbalanced with too much focus on myself, I began again to make a place where I and others would write for each other. This became carfreeuniverse.org. Trying to write what others would read led me to look to the world's great authors to learn how.

January of 2004 I settled in at my grandma's house near San Diego State with Goethe and Joseph Campbell. What originally pointed me to the formal study of literature was considering the possibility that Goethe's *Faust* came at such a time that it had a significant effect on how the German people thought of themselves. And to return to Danby, "bits of behavior" are "animations of an idea" (18). The potential for compelling art or propaganda to alter people's ideas about themselves and then their behavior fascinates me.

Joseph Campbell got me to question my unschooler's distrust of the elite and the institutional and to more fully embrace studying and teaching humanities. Contemplating beginning a large-scale investigation into the relationship between literature and individual and societal development by myself, and realizing the benefit of working with others who share related interests, I looked in to taking courses at SDSU last spring, and here I am.

Finally, I see the potential for my study of literature to lead to a socially valued career doing something I personally value—either as a literature and composition instructor at the advanced high school or junior college level, or depending on my interest and aptitude, as a professor or writer. At the PhD level, quite possibly I would focus on composition studies. For now, though, I want to study literature.

Works cited:

Danby, John F. *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: A Study of King Lear*. London: Faber and Faber, 1949.

Notes:

subplot:

that of Vanamee and Angele, from Norris's *The Octopus*:

<http://experienceart.org/cleath/docs/oldhome00/octopus>

meaning in life research:

Leath, Colin. "The effect of participation in the Meaning in Life Forum on participants' experiences of meaning in life." 10 Aug. 1999. 16 Sep. 2004

<<http://purl.oclc.org/net/cleath/writings/effect.pdf>>.

---. "The experience of meaning in life from a psychological perspective." 10 Jan. 1999. 16 Sep. 2004 <<http://purl.oclc.org/net/cleath/writings/meaning.pdf>>.

being group:

"The purpose of this group is to discuss and create experience."

<http://experienceart.org/cleath/docs/effect.htm#being>

<http://experienceart.org/cleath/docs/being>

negative capability:

& at once it struck me, what went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason. (Keats 889)

Keats, John. "To George and Thomas Keats." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Vol. 2. Ed. M. H. Abrams. New York: Norton, 2000. 889-890.