

Rhodes Scholarship
Personal Statement

I have stepped back far enough from the picture so as to be able to view the frame. There is a unity visible in what I have done, am doing, and wish to do: I place my trust and energy in the art of connection. Within literary study itself, as an intellectual in a much larger community of citizens, and as a woman in a community of women, I dedicate myself to the construction of bridges between the center of cultural institutions and the periphery. I see such bridges as working to the mutual enrichment of what has been excluded and what has not, and I believe they are worth a lifetime of crossing.

I want to be a professor—both a scholar and a teacher—because I want to take part in the development of a better understanding of literature's ethical, intellectual, practical, and imaginative implications for our lives. I hope to recognize as vital—in both social and aesthetic terms—literature that has yet to be given the attention it deserves. I have learned that all too often what we think is silence is in fact simply something that is spoken too softly. One of the most invaluable, and indeed beautiful, qualities of the university is its capacity to amplify these sounds. My most serious passion as an undergraduate has been for contemporary Irish women's literature, a body of writing that is acutely attentive to questions of tradition and exile, language and selfhood, poetry and its possible influence on the world. My study of this poetry began with the work of Belfast-born Medbh McGuckian, and the Norton/Modern Language Association prize I was awarded was for a close reading of her work. In a graduate seminar in Northern Irish Literature last year, I developed a critical and historical context for my study. This past summer I was awarded a grant to travel to Ireland, where I interviewed over a dozen female poets on issues ranging from the literary tradition to the healing capacity of art. This collection of conversations will be considered for publication by W.W. Norton & Co. and Oxford University Press. My honors thesis will examine authority and politics in the poetry of Medbh McGuckian. When I enter a graduate program, I will solidify my grounding in more traditional texts as I build bridges to the canon's outskirts.

My concern with boundaries by no means ends with the literary canon. Many contemporary universities are isolated from their surrounding communities, and that isolation is as dangerous as it is limiting. I have tried to do my part in overcoming that disconnection. This past year, I founded ArtsReach, a project to teach conflict resolution, prejudice reduction, and AIDS/sex education through the arts (currently creative writing and theater) in Atlanta city schools and juvenile detention centers. I appreciate the great deal of physical and intellectual vigor it has demanded of me. I know that language does not always serve us; sometimes we just have to get up and move. Therefore, I am working to incorporate my dance background into the project, giving students opportunities to understand and express themselves through their bodies. I believe initiatives such as ArtsReach frame learning in a new light: they demand that we seriously consider our place in a society much larger than the one that occupies university-owned land. When we say *campus*, we should understand it as a starting point, not a limit. When we say *learning*, we should dare to mean something more than demonstrating proficiency in a certain field of study. The walls we build do not only exclude a crucial ethical sense of accountability to our world; they also limit the range of what we can discover about ourselves. I want to admit responsibility and possibility into the university; I want to make it move.

In addition to ArtsReach, I have established the Emory Women's Alliance, a network of mentors for women faculty, staff, and students. With well over one hundred women representing every academic department and including the Vice President and the Provost of the university, this network offers women both a visible sign of inclusiveness and a community of support. Though I cherish these projects, in preparing to leave Emory I have arrived at the next step: passing the torch. In order to offer something lasting, we must all abdicate our authority to something larger than ourselves. We must be willing to give away what we have created.

I have passed on what I can; I want now to accept the torch from elsewhere. At the University of Oxford, I hope to pursue an M.Phil in English Studies. The English faculty at Oxford is one of the very few communities in the world that offers the combination of vigorous interest in contemporary poetry and solid grounding in the English-language poetic canon that I need in order to carry out my research. My work in Irish literature in particular will find a useful and challenging home there--indeed unlike any

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I became a thief at the age of eight. In third grade Mrs. [redacted] instituted a totalitarian rule over her classroom that would have made Stalin blush. Library time remained our sole refuge of liberty—until I dared to upset the balance of her regime by attempting to checkout an adventure novel from the fifth grade section of the library. The towering despot seized the text and cackled: "This book is too advanced! You can't check it out!" Enraged by this injustice, I later crept back into the library and absconded with the thin volume.

In this single act I discovered the two greatest passions that have guided the direction of my life: a zeal for social and political justice, and a deep, unshakable desire for knowledge.

Later in life, however, I realized that larceny might not have been the best strategy for realizing these passions, and even though I eventually returned the adventure story, my newfound appetites persisted. In college I took up the sash of the activist; my passion for justice manifested as a deep commitment to human rights. As news of the crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan grew, I joined together with two friends to create an NGO devoted to political action and humanitarian relief for the victims of the conflict. We raised nearly \$15,000 for CARE's refugee camps, spearheaded a media awareness campaign in Atlanta, brokered a deal with the Emory administration to divest from oil corporations sponsoring weapons trafficking in Sudan, and even created an award winning documentary short. In an effort to provide more opportunities for students to work for non-profits I helped found the Student Coalition for Empowering Nations. This organization trains students as research analysts and partners them with NGOs doing work to advance ethical development abroad; so far we have completed major projects for the Malaria foundation, a rural health clinic in Mexico, and micro-finance investors in Uganda. As a [redacted] intern I had the privilege of assisting senior staff on international election observation projects for the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cote d'Ivoire. Through these experiences I had the opportunity to examine the effectiveness of political advocacy.

Yet each of these attempts to pursue justice in the world grew out of my desire for knowledge. I owed the inspiration for, and I would argue the success of, my advocacy to the great books. I believed in compassion because I treasured Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha*. I organized protests to criticize the

International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda because I had studied the insights of Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. I was naïve and lucky enough to believe that I could align my passions and pursue both politics and philosophy without sacrificing one to the other.

At Emory I was able to test this hypothesis. I combined my interdisciplinary study of the philosophic tradition with practical courses in public policy and international relations. I viewed my work in political science as providing the necessary complement to my study of philosophy: to borrow from Kant, I needed knowledge of the international system to provide substance for my philosophic inquiry, and I needed philosophy to provide a vision for my political advocacy.

Thus my research interests concern not only political philosophy but also the role of philosophy in politics. To this end I have worked with the *[redacted]* serving as an editor and also publishing articles about human rights and political philosophy. As a *[redacted]* research fellow I have studied and presented multiple papers on political theorist Hannah Arendt. I find her work to be the most compelling modern analysis of the relationship between philosophy and politics. Spending time at her archive has allowed me to lay the foundation for my honors thesis in philosophy: I intend to use Arendt's theoretical criterion to examine the role and influence of French and German 20th Century philosophic discourse in Western politics.

There is a problem, however: while my college experience has allowed me to avoid compromising either of my passions, it has not necessarily reflected the harsh realities of the post-graduation world. Politicians, after all, are rarely philosophers; in fact, I learned from Socrates that political authorities often kill nagging, gadfly intellectuals. Yet for me though there is no alternative: a life without philosophy would fail to satisfy my deepest desire to understand, and a purely academic existence devoid of civic participation would leave me feeling impotent and isolated. I am determined to follow my own path, guided only by the footprints of others who have rebelled against popular attempts to isolate the academy from the polis.

Applying for the Rhodes is a further attempt to follow this path. I intend to pursue a BPhil in philosophy with a focus on philosophy of international law and human rights. The program's focus on the history of philosophy, ability to specialize in political thought, and access to specific scholars all make it an ideal destination. At Oxford I would seek to work with *[redacted]* as my primary

advisor. [redacted] scholarship addresses the ethics of international law, human rights, and global justice. In my research I would focus on the philosophy of human rights and its potential to influence policy concerning the development of institutions like the International Criminal Court. In this way the program embodies a perfect synthesis of my interests: examining the applicability of human rights philosophy to the international system would serve as an excellent test case for the compatibility of philosophy and politics.

After returning from Oxford, I'll continue my education by enrolling in a joint JD-PhD program in international law and philosophy. In this regard, I view my time at Oxford as the necessary prerequisite for my future studies; only after understanding the philosophical foundations of international law will I be able to embark on a rigorous study of the practice of law. In my career I will seek to practice human rights law and to produce key philosophic works that inform and challenge the creation of policy for an increasingly "globalized" world. My hope is that at Oxford I might continue to test my hypothesis about the union of knowledge and justice and outline a path for my future that preserves both my passions.

I certify that this essay is my own work,

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