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**PERSONAL STATEMENT – COURSE IA #2**

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## Personal Statement ~ Classics IA

With classics, what captured my attention was the breath and wealth of the subject. Instead of just being a study of a language it embraced history, culture and literature. I felt both challenged and fascinated and when I had the opportunity to take Latin and Greek at GCSE, I leapt at it.

As the only student in my school taking Greek to A-level I have developed my independence and curiosity in the Ancient World, in particular human interaction with the Gods. I entered the St. John's Essay competition on 'How do Gods and Fate help the development of the Epic Plot?' for which I was highly commended. In this I enjoyed comparing the more traditional epics to Lucan's 'Pharsalia'. I was struck by Lucan's rejection of 'divine machinery' in contrast to the more theistic style. I was intrigued by Lucan's own apostrophes questioning the Gods in Book I and his directly 'anti-Aeneid' approach. I read Conte's chapter on Lucan which reinforced my understanding of Lucan's anti-imperialist interpretation of Rome's history. Subsequently, I have done further reading into the origin of the Epic by reading 'Gilgamesh'. To try to develop a better comprehension of the source of divine interference and its influence on the 'Epic' and 'Hero Cycle'. At the end of LVI I began to work on unseens from Ovid's 'Metamorphoses'. These were provided a meticulous testing on my own knowledge of the language. I found this pleasurable and satisfying along with other hard tasks such as composition in both Latin and Greek. The 'Metamorphoses' also conveys an 'anti-Aeneid' message and this dismissal of authority greatly interested me, as like Lucan Ovid jettisoning the conventional 'Epic'. The Cambridge Classics Masterclass opened my eyes to a whole depth of questioning into the Epic cycle as I attended lectures on 'Homer: the Bible of the Gods' and 'Metamorphosis'.

I was also drawn by Lucan's depiction of Cato as the stoic upholder of 'libertas' and a refuser of oracle. I went to see a production of 'Imperium' by Robert Harris and I was gripped by Cato's efforts to protect the Republic. This idea of spiritual freedom intrigued me and led me to read Seneca's letters, Lucretius 'De rerum Natura' and Marcus Aurelius' 'Meditations'. Seneca's letters particularly 57 caused me to consider the effects of literature as a moral guide but additionally as a tool to highlight contemporary issues. The philosophies struck me as still being extremely pertinent now and this led me to enter another two essay competitions, one of them on whether ancient literature



is timeless. I really engaged with the Stoic philosophy for happiness and found many of the ideas very topical such as in Aurelius' advice for practices such as daily reflection and affirmations. The Stoic influence on Christianity was also fascinating to me as I investigated how Ancient teachings impacted modern day religious values such as the concept of 'Apatheia'. Following on from this, I read Tim Whitmarsh's 'Atheism in the Ancient World' and was gripped by the apparent scepticism prevalent in Ancient Athens. This made me question how the reception of religious universalism has altered beliefs surrounding the Ancient world. Learning about these different philosophies gave me greater insight into the works and a greater appreciation into the approaches of other stoic and epicurean writers.

Learning A-level German has helped me to appreciate more about the depth and complexity of Latin through its similarly logical grammatical structure. To increase my learning I organised extra lessons with a Cambridge postgraduate in my own time in both Latin and Greek and read parts of works such as Cicero's 'De Natura Deorum' in the original text. I attended the JACT summer camp to broaden my experience of Classics. On the camp I looked into unseen primary sources such as Euripides' 'Herakles' and attended lectures. I found this really engaging since I could get to grips with the original texts and I especially found Sarah Harden's lecture on Euripides' portrayal of Electra incisive. I compared Euripides' use of mundane characters and restricted use of 'deus ex machina' with the works of other tragedians such as in Seneca's 'Medea'. Euripides' realistic characterisation of Electra fuelled my interest in Euripides' portrayal of strong women. In this I specifically enjoyed the self conscious parody to Aeschylus's 'Electra'.

I volunteer at the Museum of Archaeology in Cambridge, which has afforded me the opportunity to study classical artifacts. As part of my Art a-level coursework I have been following the purpose of masks in Ancient tragedies and funeral rites. I was drawn to Agamemnon's funeral mask with its controversial history and beauty. Outside Classics, I have completed my Gold Duke of Edinburgh and play in the 1st team for school netball. I am an 'Audience Leader' for the Financial Times and have spent the last year working for them as a correspondent for young people.

