**Applicant: XX   Program: The British Romantic Poetry in the 19th Century**

The Romantic Period in British literature, whose advent was marked by the publication of Lyrical Ballads in 1798, represents a unique era of literary development. Paralleling the turbulent social and economic transition from a primarily agricultural society dominated by landholding aristocracy to a modern industrial nation, the literary arena also underwent drastic changes. When Wordsworth declared in his Preface to Lyrical Ballads that good poetry was “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, he reversed the earlier neoclassic aesthetic theory of poetry as “a mirror held up to nature” by locating the source of poetry not in the outer physical world but in the individual poet.

Coleridge, on the other hand, introduces into English criticism an organic theory of the imaginative process and the poetic product. He conceives a great work of literature as a self-originating and self-organizing process which begins a seedlike idea in the poet’s imagination, grows by assimilating the most diverse materials of sense experience, and evolves into an organic form in which the parts are integrally related to each other and to the whole.

Wordsworth, Coleridge, De Quincey, Byron, P.B. Shelley, Keats, the great names can go on and on. The hurly-burly from the confrontation in both poetic theory and poetic practice between neoclassicism and romanticism is sufficient to hold me enthralled. And when Thomas Love Peacock asserts, ironically, in his The Four Ages of Poetry that the poet remains “a semi-barbarian in a civilized community,” it is virtually impossible for any student of literature to suppress the impulse to explore WHY.

Yes, I am interested in English literature. That is something I am quite definite about. As a student in China, the development of an interest in a foreign literature is not a spontaneous process. But as a student majoring in English, my interest in English literature, once formed, has remained strong. And I am fully convinced that this interest should be extended by my pursuing a more advanced program in this field. However interested I am in English literature, my education heretofore in China is rather rudimentary and limited. Only a very limited number of courses related to Anglo-American literature are offered in a standard curriculum of an English Department in any given Chinese universities. When such courses do become available, they are all to cursory and general as they are almost all historical surveys in nature as one-semester courses. To investigate the complicated relationship between a work of literature and the larger society, the artist himself/herself, and the audience, or to examine a work of literature in relation to itself as an ontological entity, those are the tall orders that can only be fulfilled through an education at the graduate level. I am further convinced that English or American literature can be most profitably studied in an English-speaking country.

In studying the 19th English literature, I have found The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (1953) by M. H. Abrams most illuminating in elucidating some of the key concepts concerning the origin and the language of poetry, the role of poet in society, emotional spontaneity and nature as the subject matter of poetry. Nevertheless, romantic literary theory and practice came under heavy attack in the 20th century, particularly by T. S. Eliot with his theory of impersonality and his aversion to sentimentality and to romantic biographical criticism of using poetry as evidence of the details of the poet’s life. Different critical approaches lead to wholly different judgment of a work of literature and it would be interesting to examine the 19th century English poetry in the context of different critical orientations.

A junior student from School of Foreign Studies, China University of XX, I have prepared necessary foundations for a Master’s program in English literature. My undergraduate program has followed a general pattern of foundational courses in English language skills training for the first two years and more advanced specialized courses for the last two years. In the first phase, I received the greatest input in writing and reading comprehension. My writing skills helped me win the first prize in the University-wide English Composition during the 2003 Foreign Languages Culture Festival. In improving my ability in reading comprehension, unlike other students who have concentrated on reading a limited number of textbooks, I resorted to reading a whole spectrum of representative works in English and American literature, mostly novels (prose tends to be easier for comprehension). This voluminous reading has surely made me more literate in English language and more literary in literature. I have cultivated important literary and aesthetic sensibilities.

My intellectual endeavors have ended up in concrete results. For the first three years, I have achieved an overall GPA of 83.4 and a major GPA of 84.5, which puts me in a top 10 ranking among a total of 200 students. My love for English and American literature motivated me to make special efforts in those two courses, winning the highest scores of 95/100 and 88/100 respectively. Even my extracurricular activities are closely connected with the use of English. During the academic year from 2002 to 2003, I served as the director of the English Oration Division of the English Club of our school, organizing speech contests during the university’s English Culture Festival. Contrary to most students who wish to use English as a money-making tool in a country where English becomes an increasingly important means of doing business with the western countries, I am bent on an academic career and on perfecting my literary cultivations.

Even though undergraduates tend to have few formal research experiences, I have tried to acquire such experiences by undertaking my graduation thesis. Entitled Lord Byron and His Don Juan, I will attempt at an in-depth analysis of the duality of Byron’s poetical sensibility—the poignancy of his irony and the exquisiteness of his sentiment. Byron is not only a poet of his time but also a poet that this world will always need—a person who satirizes the foibles of humanity (sham, hypocrisy, complacency, oppression, greed, and lust) but exalts what is sublime. Byronic hero is the product of the conflict between society and the individual and embodies the temperament of the poet himself, with all his inherent flaws.

The Department of English of XX University offers graduate study in English literature in a dynamic department in the most internationally recognized university in Canada. It is your prestige and your proven quality in literature education that have drawn me irresistibly to your program. I am convinced that through your program I can be instructed and trained in literary studies and criticism in a systematic and in-depth manner. I am particularly excited to have found out that the teaching and research interests of a number of faculty members like Prof. XX and Prof. XXF match those interests of my own. By the end of my proposed program, I wish to master the standard methodologies of scholarly work so that, together with my in-depth in literature as a whole, I may be well-qualified for a teaching and research career back in my home country.