

## Modern and Medieval Languages, Pembroke College, 2017

Growing up with Hungarian speaking parents and ethnic German grandparents taught me about the beautiful and funny process by which words gain meaning in relation to their context. During my exchange year I was struck by the way Costa Rican Spanish adds the suffix -ito to the end of every word - things are not just pequeño but pequenito, not just delgado but delgadito. Similarly, Costa Rican school children speak to one another using the formal tense of usted, which makes for seemingly serious exchanges. While the former is connected to the relatively small size of the population (making a lot of the ticos related to one another), the latter bespeaks the still prevalent social caste system. I want to study Modern Languages to find further connections between sign, signifier and signified.

I started studying English and German at age 7, and at 14 also took up French, while I learnt Spanish during my year abroad. Developing my skills through academic competitions, I am most proud of coming 7th in the National Olympiad in English. I prepared for university by enrolling in the Milestone Institute's talent programme, where I immersed myself in academic topics. In courses on Nations and Nationalism, Post-War Debates and the EU, I became interested in how nation states and national identities were formed, and the function languages have in the process of unification or division. In the writings of René Appel and Ludo Verhoeven I found contrasting examples regarding the role of language in attempts at nation-building after decolonisation and the effect of coexisting native and colonial languages in former colonies. On this topic Benedict Anderson's argument about the significance of 'national print languages' seemed to be reinforced by Eugen Weber's take in "Peasants into Frenchmen", explaining how dissolving local dialects into one standardised core language was crucial to the birth of a unified French identity. In a social anthropology class I was fascinated by the connection between language and symbolic meaning in Clifford Geertz's work on Balinese cockfights. The various expressions of manhood in Balinese culture are intrinsically tied to the word "Sabung". Sabung literally means cock, but it's also metaphorically used as "hero", "warrior", "champion" and can even stand for "political candidate". Tracing how social status and symbolic meaning are intertwined with language use is what makes translation particularly difficult. When attempting to translate the works of symbolist poets such as Baudelaire and Rimbaud into Spanish, English and German I came to see the puzzle of interpretation as an essential element of the process, as some concepts exist only in one language. Walter Benjamin's idea in the "Task of the Translator" of allowing the 'pure language' to shine through the translation seems a beautiful resolution to this problem, but remains difficult to master. I am similarly fascinated by the notion of ineffability, an idea I explored in an essay on Jorge Luis Borges's "The Mirror and the Mask". I argued that the protagonist's renewed attempt to represent the battle is essentially a gradual deconstruction, a demonstration of the limits of language when it comes to transmitting human experience.

Besides academics, I am also a member of a feminist society and help run a film club at my school where we've covered classics of European cinema, including influential Spanish directors such as Buñuel and Almodóvar. For 12 years, I've played the violin and I actively participate in organising concerts for my orchestra, with our first independent charity concert last year at Christmas. At the Snétberger Summer Camp I taught English and other languages to musically talented Roma children for the last two years. Given my fondness for Spanish and French languages, culture and literature I decided to pursue my passion at undergraduate level, and I believe the best place for doing so is a competitive and inspiring university in the UK.