Homeric scholarship is an opaque filter, an enormous lens through which we not only gain much of our understanding of the *Odyssey*, but through which our understanding of the text becomes distorted. It is a tradition of commentary and criticism that goes back two and a half thousand years. From Xenophanes, Plato, Aristotle, and the Greek scholiasts, down through the establishment of Classical Philology and the various schools of textual analysis today, we have maintained a fairly unified Homeric tradition. Despite the differing concerns, questions, and approaches to the Homeric texts, Homer’s preeminent position as the first great poet of the West has remained undisputed. However, there have always been clues that this tradition was imperfectly understood. In the republic, Plato talks about an ancient feud between philosophy and poetry. Perhaps alluding to Xenophanes’ earlier criticism, Plato takes Homer to task for creating lies that are harmful to citizens. Plato’s basic problem with Homer is that much of his poetry illustrates bad behavior, especially on the part of the traditional Greek gods, that sets an inappropriate moral example for the audience.

I investigated the political philosophy of Plato during my studies at Temple University. I expanded my study of Plato by majoring in Philosophy, with an emphasis on Ancient Philosophy, at West Chester University. Finally at Boston College, I enrolled in the M.A. program in Philosophy, with special concentration on the history of western philosophy. My findings led me to a better understanding of Plato’s complexity. He admires poetry and fears it, writes in dialogues and is critical of writing, holds back tyranny with one arm and embraces it with the other. At the same time, my study of German philosophy and literature, and entrance into classics at Boston College made me question many of the assumptions behind the western intellectual tradition. The philosophical writings of Heidegger had posed critical questions regarding the nature of western metaphysics, particularly in the subject area of Ontology. Poetry had its own claims on truth that had been covered up by the epistemological demands of a western philosophical tradition going back to Plato. “The essence of truth as aletheia was no through out in the thinking of the Greeks, and certainly not in the philosophy that followed after. Unconcealment is, for thought, the most concealed thing in Greek existence, although from early times it determines the presencing of everything present.” (Martin Heidegger, *Origin of the Work of Art* in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, pg. 176) Heidegger’s hermeneutical analysis of the Pre-Socratic philosophers, although controversial, yielded much discernment into what I had already suspected, that Plato and Aristotle had established and solidified a set of philosophical concerns that affected the status of poetry. After taking several “Classics in translation” courses and following this up with courses on the *Odyssey* in Greek, I concluded that the former were inadequate. I would have to learn more of the original language of Ancient Greek, and read Homer and other pertinent ancient Greek authors myself. In this endeavor, Professor Edwin Floyd has been my guide from the very beginning. He opened the door to a whole new of possibilities for my research: the world of comparative Indo-European linguistics. While Latin had been of some use, it was an unexpected source, Sanskrit, that became my chief ally. Sanskrit, what I thought was an “oriental” society outside the scope of the western intellectual tradition, and, consequently, of my project, provided me with something so different that it allowed me to see the western tradition outside of itself for the first time. Once I gained this objective distance, business really picked up. I observed patterns of relationship between Homer and the Sanskrit text of the *Rig Veda*, patterns that suggest that
Homer actually had much in common with an earlier Indo-European poetical tradition and its themes.

As a means of cultural comparison, I had chosen the field of religious studies, with a focus on ancient Indo-European polytheisms, as a concentration that would allow me to compare ancient Greek and Vedic religions. I extended my studies to include Medieval and renaissance certificate programs, with my course of studies focusing on the Jewish-pagan synthesis of early Christianity. I thought that the interaction between the monotheism of Judaism and the paganism of gentle polytheistic "religions" would answer some of the questions regarding the overall religious syncretism that took place in ancient Greece and Rome. What part did Hesiod and Homer play in this development? For example, was the establishment of the Olympian pantheon itself part of the movement towards monotheism as some have suggested? Did Homer and Hesiod, "the fathers of Greek religion" according to Herodotus, provide the impetus for a single unity of being by their logical division and classification of deities?

My work with Professor Fred Clothey, who recently retired from the Religious Studies department, but who has continued to make himself accessible for consultation, has dealt with such transformations, especially regarding the polytheistic Vedic religion. From its possible origins in proto-Indo-European and its connections with the warrior soma ritual and the domestic hearth rituals, to the animal sacrifice under a priestly class of Brahmins, to monistic Vedic interpretations of the Upanishad period, the Rig Veda was the foundation. Different periods emphasized different aspects of the Rig Veda, but, from the modern academic perspective, these are, in fact, re-evaluations of the Rig Veda. An interesting parallel exists between the Vedic religion and the Upanishads (the latter being the basis of Indian philosophy) and Homer and Plato. Plato and the Upanishads come about with the rise of urbanism. Both are attempts to restructure polytheist traditions to the demands of city-life. They do this by attempting to transform the rural influences of a pervasive Indo-European poetic tradition into a new educational program of monism and individualism. In other words, the polytheisms are undermined by developments in philosophy. However, one crucial difference between the Greek and Indic traditions lies in how they regarded their poetic past. Plato openly declares that he will replace Homer and establish a new education based on city-life. In contrast, the Upanishad gurus of the Vaidika tradition linked their philosophies to the Vedas. The monism of the Upanishad was based on interpretations of the Vedas, and the connection between their projects and the Vedic tradition was critical. At this time, teachers such as Buddha and Mahavira, who did not connect their new teachings with the Vedas, became the founders of other religious movements, Buddhism and Jainism respectively. Only the new teachings that found a link with the Vedas and the Indian religious authorities were accepted into the canon of the Vedic tradition. In other words, they were connected or linked to the oral tradition of the Vedas.

My program of study has demanded a lot of extra time and rigorous study. I have taken a calculated risk to acquire much of my graduate school skills and research formulation during my undergraduate studies. By putting off my graduation, I hope to obtain from my interdisciplinary approach a much broader perspective. In taking upon myself the challenge of the B. Phil. and its thesis requirement, I am eager for the opportunity to formulate a thesis that will serve as a point of departure, providing me with the opportunity to embark upon a course of study that will continue into graduate school. I argue that the Hindus have inherited a conception of time that indeed does differ from the western model, but in some ways not from the ancient Greek model. The nexus of the relationship between Rig Veda and Homer, between East and West, is the Indo-European poetic patterns and
formulae. Not only is it fascinating to see similarities between two supposedly
different traditions, but my thesis proposal also affords me the opportunity to
examine how Homer and Hesiod interact with this tradition and how their interaction
leads to a new understanding, the seeds of the western intellectual tradition. At this
stage in my development, I have acquired enough exposure in the various subjects
related to my thesis idea. Perhaps even more important that my textual studies has
been my slow but steady acquisition of methodology. I have spent extra time
putting together a methodology, drawing upon many fields in the humanities and
social sciences. Durkheim, the Cambridge Ritualists, Dumezil, Burkert, Jung, and
Marx are the theorists I have studied in depth. I am currently in the process of
learning several languages: Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit, along with the modern
languages of German, French, and Italian, which are vital to the study of the
scholarship in my field. I have taken courses in Anthropology in order to better
understand the inherent difficulties that are present when comparing diverse
cultures. I also have studied hermeneutics and phenomenology to acquire a working
method on how to encounter a text.

Now, the time is ripe to take an in-depth examination, a specialized approach
to Homer. I am applying for the B. Phil. With its thesis requirement in order to
show that I am committed to rigorous research deep within my area of
specialization, while, at the same time, employing knowledge and skills acquired
from other disciplines.