

I have been writing fiction for nearly ten years and have recently started to publish my work. I was elated when one of my pieces was published in *The Southern Review* last fall, and it was the indication I needed that I was capable of writing literary fiction at a publishable level. Having worked on my craft alone for some time, I feel that I have a reasonable degree of competence in crafting a story, but I stumble with basics that I think could be partially addressed by actual instruction and guided study.

I'm entering this program with a specific goal in mind: I want to write (which is to say, complete by graduation date) a collection of linked short stories, largely inspired by travels I made in my late twenties and early thirties. I lived for several years in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, specifically in Ukraine and in Turkey, at a time when both countries were undergoing political upheaval, and the experiences I had during this time remain vivid and continue to serve as an inspiration for my work. My writing resembles, or at least I am trying to make my writing resemble, the work of Christopher Isherwood or Paul Bowles, both known for writing very closely-observed novels that are based on the expatriate experience. In the creative writing program at Vanderbilt, I'm looking for the same things that every writer wishes for, a community and a space, both physical and psychological, where I can devote my efforts to writing and get feedback on it.

After graduation, to support myself financially, I intend to teach creative writing and work as a freelance writer. I have several years of experience as a teacher (of English as a foreign language when I was abroad, as an after-school tutor when I was first out of college). I know it's very difficult to get a teaching post at a college or university, so I intend to teach creative writing online. I think that the pandemic has shown us all that online classes are an effective delivery method for the teaching of

creative skills. I've also been earning money as a freelance writer by writing book reviews for online publications and will continue to do so during and after my MFA. I believe having the MFA can help me in this aspect of my career as well. I worked for several years as an actuary and later as a software engineer and believe that the lessons I learned entering and advancing in these careers can be applied to my writing career.