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Faculty Mentor: Brad Pasanek, English
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Semester Studying English Literature at the University of Oxford

Even putting it in its tersest terms — that I’ve gone to England, studied at Oxford, and have now returned — still, to me, reads like the stuff of fantasy. And yet every time I find myself trying to describe how I spent those four months, and how I feel about them now, I fail spectacularly. So, acutely aware of the limitation of my abilities, I will not in this outcome report attempt to summon the intensity, fullness, and detail of my experience, at least not in a way that can properly vivify my gratitude. Instead, I will create a blank where that description would otherwise have gone, and circle it with a wholly insufficient “thank you.” To the ISO, to the UVa English department, and to the Miller Arts fund: thank you.

Setting aside, then, such central peripheries as candlelight dinners in medieval halls, blustery red-mauve moors at sunrise, the white walls of Bath, the anxious patter of London, the breakfast teas, the train rides, and the countless libraries, museums, and marvels — friends and teachers among them — I will try and address only those concerns I had when writing my proposal, and indeed when applying to the program: academic work. (Don’t worry, pictures will follow.) In that proposal I cited I. A. Richards as a sort of muse, or at least a scapegoat for the reason of my wanting to run away to the UK and study criticism. His 1929 book, *Practical Criticism*, was my first real foray into the kind of English education that I’d somehow managed to miss in my first two years at university, and I think — I hope — it’s safe to say that I’ve now found it. Not just at Oxford, but at UVa, too — one of the most important things I learned abroad, and continue to learn, is how to look for what I am looking for.

Enough generalities! What did I do over there, aside from amass a repertoire of images and experiences I’ve already refused to put into words? Well, for one, I worked on my thesis. This was a surprise: not only because, at the time of writing my proposal, I’d not even gotten it into my head to pursue a distinguished major in English, but because I’d already filled out my paperwork to take two distinct tutorials on relatively unrelated topics. Of course, there was some flexibility there, and after consulting with the program director, I decided to try and tailor my secondary tutorial to the matter of Marianne Moore, with my primary tutorial now being on the Romantic Poets. Fast forward past my boarding an airplane, cabbing from Heathrow to Oxford (with not a little calamity in between), and a month of settling in, traveling, and attending the September Seminar (meant, I think, to acclimate us Americans to both the British weather and schooling system), to my finally meeting my two tutors. Immediately I knew that I was beyond lucky, and would have studied anything with them if given the opportunity. And yet, when I told them about my thesis woes, they were immediately *in* — I mean, they wanted to help see me through it. So while my secondary tutorial remained on Marianne Moore and her contemporaries — I read, over and above Moore’s *Observations*, William Butler Yeats’ early poems, Wallace

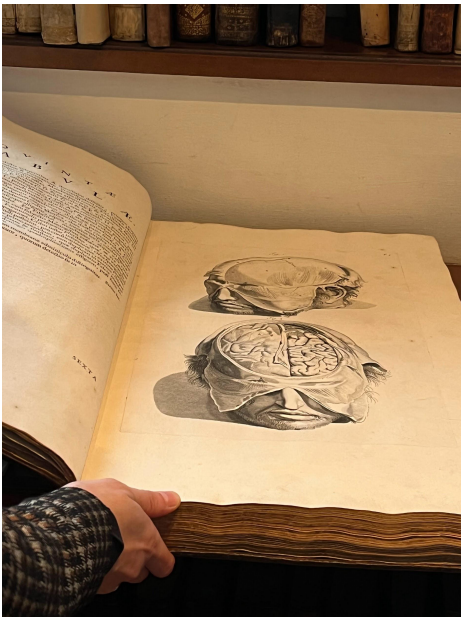
Stevens's *Harmonium*, William Carlos Williams's *Spring and All*, and several other supplementary texts — my primary tutorial morphed from Romantic Poetry, to 20th Century Criticism on the Romantics (after an hour of rambling my amorphous, half-formed, yet full-hearted enchantment with the likes of Richards to my tutor), to 20th Century Criticism on the Romantics Plus a Large Dose of Marianne Moore.

Every week, then, I would produce an essay or two — or perhaps half of what could become a longer essay, or what might be generously called an extended meditation — and present it to my tutor for insight. These “essays” were almost always written with an eye towards that terrifying and yet undecided thing, my thesis. For although I knew I wanted to write about Marianne Moore's *Observations*, I had no idea what on — aside from, perhaps, a vague dissatisfaction with the way that critics and scholars have described her work, as well as a desire to celebrate a book that, as I was amazed to learn, I never seemed to get tired of. I must have produced at least a hundred pages of writing at various levels of finish, not counting the copious note taking, annotating, and source-gathering that took over my document folders. My tutors were always gracious and enthusiastic — they, along with my UVa advisor¹ with whom I also frequently consulted, often knew what I was trying to say before and better than I did, and made me feel as though I was getting somewhere — even when my progress felt circuitous at best.

Indeed, it wasn't until November that I hit upon something that made all three of them go “Yes, that's it!” — a response that, not only was I not expecting, but took months for me to settle into and figure out what it really meant. It was bleary and raining, and I had sunk into one of the chairs in the Hertford “Middle Common Room” in the four p.m. dark. Delirious from not yet having written anything for that week, I remember grasping for something to put down while drawing minimally from my (at that late hour) diminished mental stamina. I remember then vividly remembering a cover I had seen, way back in September, in a bookstore in Bath — it caught my eye not because of any prior interest on the subject, but simply because I liked the title: *Index, A History of the*. By Dennis Duncan. And then I remember remembering, wait. *Observations* has an index. Not only does it have an index, but it has an index written by its author — composed not merely of titles or first lines, but of words and phrases and quotations drawn directly from the poems. And that this index, though many scholars of Moore have commented on its utter uniqueness, has not, to my knowledge, been subject to any real study.

I needn't get into the weeds of how I latched onto and presented this problem to my tutors and my advisor — nor how, after countless starts and misstarts and research and rethinkings, the idea finally came into its own — nor how, five months later, I am still in the grip of this thing, trepidatious but with the end finally in sight. What I will convey, instead, is a single moment: upon showing the first of my tutors what I had come up with, he grinned at me — as though I'd already written the whole thing — and said: “Yes, that's *it*.”

¹ I should note that my thesis advisor is not the same as my faculty mentor. The former is the wonderful Brian Teare, while the latter is the wonderful Brad Pasanek. Both were hugely formative to this experience, simply on different ends: Professor Teare I interfaced more with contents and questions on my thesis, while Professor Pasanek, among other aid, helped me in identifying what I wanted to do with my time abroad and how it fit into my other goals.



Because the itemized costs for the program are the same as when I wrote my proposal, I have simply reproduced this information below.

Study Abroad Itemized Costs	Amount
Tuition and Fees	\$ 23,425
Books and Supplies	\$ 278
Housing/Room	\$ 2,550
Dining/Board	\$ 1,354
Airline Tickets	\$ 1,200
Transportation to and from Airports	\$ 100
Personal Expenses	\$ 1,258
TOTAL ESTIMATED COST	\$ 30,165

Scholarships/Awards	Amount
IFSA State School Grant	\$ 2000
UVa ISO Scholarship	\$ 2000
Miller Arts Award	\$ 3000
TOTAL AWARDS	\$ 7000

TOTAL ESTIMATED COST - TOTAL AWARDS	\$ 23,165
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