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"There and Back Again:" The Importance of a Study Abroad Experience

Honors Project

In fulfillment of the Requirements for
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By

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*"I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
Gleams that untraveled world whose margin fades
Forever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!"*

—Alfred, Lord Tennyson

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"THERE AND BACK AGAIN:" THE IMPORTANCE OF A STUDY ABROAD

EXPERIENCE:

by,

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ABSTRACT

During the fall semester of 2014 I studied abroad at Bangor University in Wales. From all possible perspectives—academic, cultural, personal, social—it was the single most beneficial semester of my academic career. My study abroad adviser, Dr. Laura Dobson, suggested that I keep a journal during my time at Bangor. I at first reluctantly followed her advice, but soon realized how beneficial a journal would be to my future self. I recorded almost everything I did at Bangor, from the painfully mundane, like walking to the grocery store or going to class every day, to the more exciting, like going to Manchester. I have worked closely with my mentor, Dr. Scott Hicks, to transform the journal that I kept as a bilateral exchange student at Bangor University into a work of creative nonfiction. With the goal of eventually publishing this work, I hope that "*There and Back Again: The Importance of a Study Abroad Experience*" will be both humorous and informative to students intending to study abroad, and that seasoned travelers might find my experiences relatable.

PART I

To study abroad is to embark on a journey of immense personal, academic, and cultural growth; it is to face challenges and overcome them; to meet new people, to see new places, and to try new things; to exist for a short few months in a world of experiences that are different and yet the same. All of this, I think, is mocked by the inescapable irony of privilege. I faced challenges while studying abroad that, to some, would hardly be challenges at all. I squandered time like I frequently squander money. Times of indescribable awe, appreciation, and joy were punctuated with a sophomoric sadness that, as best I can deduce, was a product of the facile nature of my middle class existence. A study abroad experience is a deeply personal one, inextricably connected to each student's identity and past experiences; still, I will try my best to relate my experiences to those of others.

To study abroad is to recognize the need for relentless self-improvement, and spending time in a completely foreign place is a good way to accelerate self-improvement. In retrospect, there is a disparity between what I actually experienced at Bangor University, Wales, and the potential experiences that I could have taken advantage of. To quantify such a statement is not easy. Much more difficult though, was to admit in the first place that my study abroad experience was a mosaic comprised equally of successes and failures. Realistically, my study abroad experience was half successful; I would estimate that I took advantage of approximately 50 percent of the opportunities available to me while I was at Bangor. For example, I went to Manchester but not to London; I went to Chester but not to Conwy; I tried British food but never learned to cook it; and I made many good friends but never any great ones.

None of this is to say that my study abroad experience was unsuccessful in the long term, or even totally unsuccessful in the short term. Looking back on my time in Wales now, two

years later and very near the completion of my undergraduate degree, I finally can see my study abroad experience for what it really was: my first time being significantly away from home, a time that was—in hindsight—simultaneously exhilarating and disappointing. Regardless of any regrets I may have, it is undeniable that my study abroad experience has influenced and continues to influence almost every aspect of my life.

The influences of my time in Wales on my life in general are wide-ranging. I would not spend so many pages discussing influences if I did not suspect that the same effect could be observed in others who have spent any good length of time in a place vastly different from their normal climate. There are trivial influences for me, such as the joy of finding Aero bars in a grocery store or of rediscovering my hatred of Jammie Dodgers. Jammie Dodgers, one of the vilest snacks imaginable: tasteless jam sandwiched between two stale shortbread cookies. Then there are major influences, and it is to those that I believe I owe my current success as an undergraduate. Upon returning from Bangor, I have enjoyed a noticeable uptick in my productivity and my motivation to succeed, as well as my autonomy and ability to handle what I deem to be stressful situations. My summer internship experience at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, benefitted intensely from my regrets regarding my study abroad experience. While in Charlotte I explored the areas around me almost daily, and I almost never suffered an unproductive day. In that way, the failures of my study abroad experience paradoxically resulted in an outcome that was eventually positive.

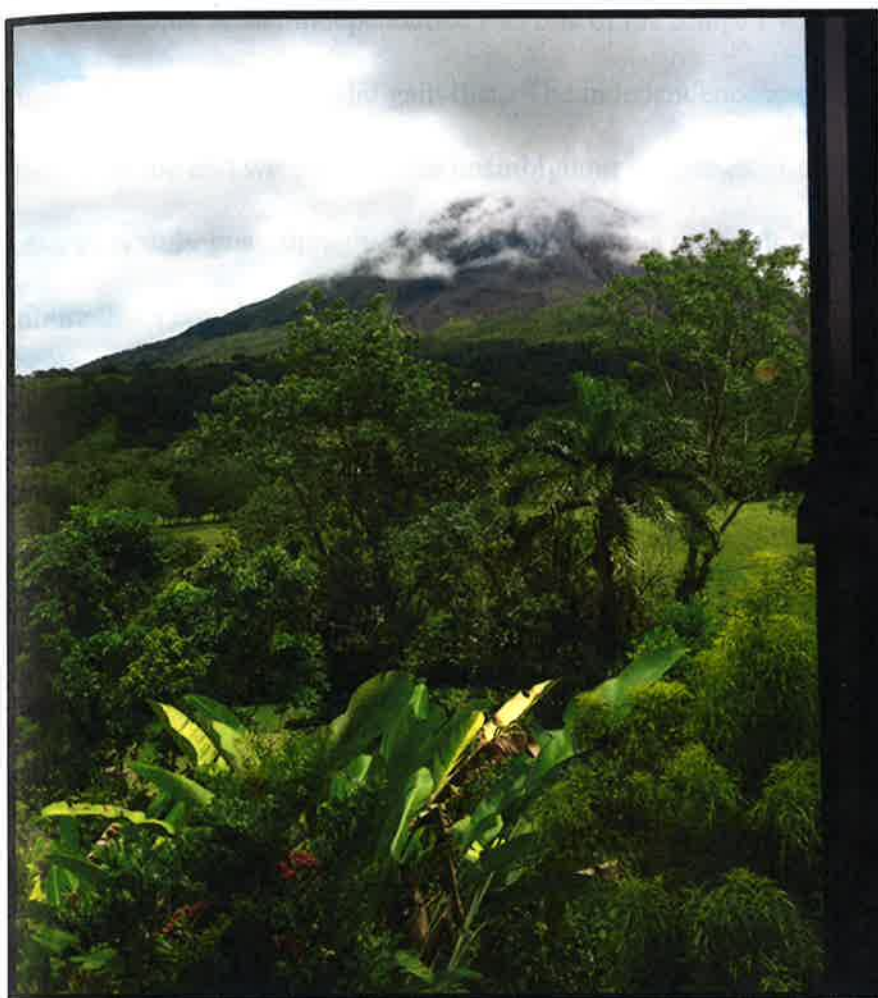
It is not easy to write an abridged version of one's experiences as an exchange student while maintaining a slavish attention to detail. My main goal after all is to explore the larger truths behind my time in Bangor and not to bog readers down in the minutiae of every nook and cranny of Bangor University, though I would very much like to do that. Both my successes and failures abroad have had far-reaching effects on my every-day life and decisions. In this

narrative, I intend to recount my study abroad experience more or less exactly as it happened, and to include my retrospective opinions on individual events—to analyze those events and dig at the truth underneath them, both for my own benefit and, I hope, for the benefit of others.

This journal was, I admit, not originally undertaken as some autonomously noble decision to preserve in writing the events that occurred during and preceding my time at Bangor University in the county of Gwynedd, Wales. In fact, I initially had very little intention of recording any of the events occurring during that transformative three month period of my life at all. In the admittedly brief narrative of my life thus far it has rung true that the best moments of it have gone unrecorded, most likely to the detriment of myself and others. My excuse of choice is that I usually am too wrapped up in the experiencing, but my reluctance to write more likely is a result of my lackadaisical attitude toward ungraded writing; the prospect of receiving an unsatisfactory grade is—at least for me—a major deterrent of indolence. I was convinced to write this journal because of persistent recommendations from my study-abroad adviser, Dr. Laura Dobson, my parents, and my grandparents, all of whom predicted the future value of a journal. It would be inaccurate to say that I failed to foresee the benefit of recording my experiences; it is just that I also foresaw that a diligent effort would be required to construct a written account of good quality. In other words, I needed a little extra motivation from my support network.

I made the decision to study abroad for an entire semester at some point during fall 2013. Before travelling to Wales, my experiences abroad were limited to two brief forays to Bermuda and Costa Rica. I went to Bermuda for a week during summer 2014, and I went to Costa Rica for two weeks during summer 2013. Though both of those experiences also occurred through my undergraduate institution, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, they were faculty-

led and very structured. Many of the challenges I encountered as an exchange student were completely different from those that I faced while participating in faculty-led trips.



The specific details surrounding my decision to study abroad for a semester have been obscured by the inevitable vagueness concomitant with the passage of time, but I do know that my experience in Costa Rica was a major driver of my decision to live and study abroad for three months in Wales. I was desperate to explore another culture. As an English minor, one of my main literary interests has been British literature. My literary interests in part influenced my decision. In hindsight, in choosing to go to a country in Britain, I was essentially making a safe choice. I wanted desperately to be placed in the ranks of those lucky few who dare to leave home and experience something new, but my inexperience hindered me. Wales, I knew, was

different and yet the same. It was close enough to my own culture so as not to be frighteningly new, but still sufficiently foreign to justify spending an extended period of time there.

In some sense, independence was one of the things I wanted to gain by going abroad; above all others, I think, I did gain that. The independence and self-motivation I acquired have stuck with me and were one of the unambiguous successes of my adventure. Independence wasn't my only goal, though. I wanted to explore a new culture, even if it wasn't the most exotic culture that I could have chosen. I wanted to make new friends, though maybe that was one area where I was less successful. I wanted a new landscape and new scenery; Wales was very beautiful—of that statement I am exceptionally confident. Very often I miss the chilly air, the rolling hills rising gently up to scenic Snowdonia, the ancient architecture, and the quaint little High Street of Bangor.

As much as I would have liked to have snapped my fingers and conjured my exchange experience into existence with no further effort, it turned out that a lot of effort was required to actually bring it about. Once I had a goal in mind, I stopped fantasizing and aggressively pursued the goal, not the idea of it. My goal-seeking attitude has been influenced, in part, by an obscure little book titled *As a Man Thinketh*, by James Allen which I discovered at the end of a list of motivational books published online by Technology, Entertainment, Design (TED). In it, Allen argues many things; most, I feel, are painfully dated. It is difficult to ignore the sexism inherent in a book whose title implies that only men have the capacity to think. Still, there are a few sections within *As a Man Thinketh* that are rich with goal-seeking advice. One of my favorite passages posits, "Man's mind may be likened to a garden, which may be intelligently cultivated or allowed to run wild; but whether cultivated or neglected, it must, and will, *bring forth*. If no useful seeds are *put* into it, then an abundance of useless weed-seeds will *fall* therein, and will continue to produce their kind" (Allen 8). Allen seems to suggest that in order for a

person to begin walking the path of success, then that person's innermost thoughts must reflect their aspirations. I see this passage as extolling the effects of confidence, preparedness, and a positive demeanor. In the spirit of Allen's advice, I directed my thoughts early on in the preparation process to matters of logistics and practicality.

I planned for my trip relentlessly, and in many ways my planning did not cease until after a harrowing twenty-four hours of travel I placed my jet-weary feet happily on English soil for the first time in my life. (To say British soil would be inaccurate—I had been to Bermuda previously.) Now, looking back on my study abroad experience, I sincerely hope to find reason to travel to the United Kingdom again in the future.

To prepare to study abroad is an undertaking both mental and tangible, one that involves considerations both significant and trivial. "What is the climate like?" I knew that the weather would be different and most likely colder. "What will I wear?" Surely the British have different tastes in fashion than Americans, leading of course to the question, "What do *they* wear?" Another, more important question: "What should I do in case of an emergency?" Luckily I never had to answer this question but, seeing as how I never purchased a SIM card for my phone and couldn't use it when not connected to a wireless network, I suspect I was not prepared for a true emergency. "Should I pack shampoo or should I buy it once I get there?" Oh, what a dumb thing to worry about. It seemed like it mattered then. "How will I manage the currency conversion—are my finances going to last?" Excluding the time my card got frozen, I managed my finances very efficiently. Knowing only how to cook pasta will, it turns out, save you a lot of money on grocery day. I asked myself all of these questions and many more before I even received my visa in the mail, and anyone else who seriously considers her or his participation in an exchange program most likely will have a similar experience.

Though I asked myself many practical questions and tried to get practical answers, I took care to not acquire too much information about where I was going. I wanted only a cursory understanding of my destination. The thing I least desired was to ruin the magic of this new place, or to become so infatuated with the ideal of it that its reality could only result in disappointment. Instead, I tried to channel my nervous energy into efficient preparation. Studying abroad is perhaps one rare case where the destination matters most, not the journey.

By far the most grueling element of all my preparations was the visa process, which took approximately three months from start to finish. As a potential recipient of a UK visa, I had to complete pages of online forms. Some of the questions seemed quite logical: "What is your date of birth?" comes to mind as a question that would yield actionable information. Financial information also seemed pertinent to the visa process and not a waste of time. By contrast, "Have you ever willingly participated in an act of genocide, or committed human rights violations?" is an example of a question that could have been left out of the visa application. Of course my answer to that question was a "no." I suspect any other answer would have had disastrous consequences for my travel documents. I also suspect that any person who has participated in an act of genocide or willingly committed crimes against humanity would probably not mind lying about their participation in such events. Once the online portions were complete, there was an extended period of radio silence. Then, I had to travel two hours to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services office in Charlotte—a rather austere gray brick building—to have my biometric information recorded, a process less tedious than I expected. Finally I was able to mail my passport to the British consulate in New York, which was somewhat discomfiting, being familiar as most people are with the occasional unreliability of the US Postal Service.

now is apparent that I made the right choice. It would have been academically detrimental and financially taxing to stay in the UK for a full year.

My study abroad preparations included one additional consideration not applicable to the vast majority of college students, especially juniors and seniors. When I studied abroad in the UK I was seventeen years old, meaning that I was 14 when I became a fully enrolled student. By the time I was ready for a longer-term exchange experience my age presented some issues. As a minor in the eyes of the law, I lacked the legal authority to sign most of the forms from Bangor without a second signature from my parents. Moreover, I did not possess power of attorney (what that term means, I still do not fully know) should something go wrong abroad. To have my parents travel with me would have been impossible, to mention a very unattractive option, as being separated from my parents and family was instrumental in gaining the independence and autonomy I craved. To circumvent the age issue, I contracted a third-party agency in the UK to appoint me a legal guardian while I was studying at Bangor.

The prospect of having a legal guardian abroad initially was cause for some concern. As I have mentioned, gaining some degree of independence and autonomy was one of the goals of my study abroad experience; to have a guardian constantly looking over my shoulder would interfere with that goal. Luckily, £130 per year does not afford very much third party guardianship at all. My legal guardian was located in Manchester, as best I can remember. I never even met my "guardian," nor did I have any contact with her whatsoever. Most importantly, my guardian did not interfere with my life day-to-day in Bangor.

The process of preparing to study abroad was not limited to the hellish process of applying for a visa, but also included many other more trivial preparations to which I have alluded but have not described in detail. Acquiring new clothes was something that I spent more time on than I probably should have, especially given the relative triviality of the task. A warm

and waterproof winter coat was one unavoidable purchase, and it was a purchase that would serve me well both on my short walks to class and during my excursions with the mountain walking club. The value of a good pair of waterproof shoes cannot be overstated; I quickly realized how uncomfortable cold, wet feet could be when I found myself lacking a suitable pair of shoes in Wales.

Paperwork is an unavoidable task when you are to become an exchange student. During the six months preceding my departure, and indeed all throughout my time at Bangor, I was buried under a mountain of it. From my initial study abroad application, which then was followed by an independent application for admission to Bangor, to the last-minute forms that UNCP sent to me prior to my return, paperwork was an element of my life that remained constant both abroad and at home. When occasionally I pined for the comforts of home, paperwork—yes, even paperwork—was a comfort.

Irrespective of any trepidation I may have felt regarding my departure, I considered myself well-acquainted with travel, having previously studied rainforest ecology in Costa Rica and marine biology in Bermuda. Those two experiences prepared me in the sense that I knew how to get my tickets at the airport, board a plane, and eventually claim my bags, but they offered little help in the way of preparing me to live for an extended period of time in a foreign country. In both Bermuda and Costa Rica, carefully planned excursions dominated my schedule. There was little downtime in either case. Entire itineraries were carefully structured, and at least two faculty members were there to chauffeur my group around. Prior to my departure, I was under the generally correct impression that in my entire life I had not yet embarked on anything quite so autonomously liberating, vast in scale, or intimidating. What I could not predict, though, was just how significant an impact my study abroad experience would have on my life when I returned home to the United States.

There were several domestic considerations, too, that were new to me. I didn't live on campus at UNCP prior to studying abroad, so buying groceries was not a task that I did often or alone. I of course knew how to wash clothes, but what a convenience it is to have a washer and dryer in one's own home! In Bangor, I had to walk nearly a quarter of a mile—often in the rain—to get to the launderette. Then there is the unexpected otherness of a country like the United Kingdom. In a place where there were so many similarities to the United States, there were equally many differences. Unrefrigerated eggs? Madness!

Though I have spent the last few pages recounting the struggles I encountered in preparing to study abroad, and though in the introduction of this journal I discussed at length my regrets, I would be remiss if I did not also describe the positive aspects of the experience. From its inception, my plan to study abroad filled me with a kind of anticipatory excitement that is rarely encountered in our day-to-day lives. It was the kind of excitement one experiences when choosing where to go to graduate school, beginning a prestigious internship, or by being on the threshold of some other major milestone in one's life. That excitement persisted, too. During my time in Bangor I often reflected upon the series of positive outcomes that put me in Wales, reflections that would often invoke the kinds of excitement that I have mentioned. Now, almost two years later, I still think fondly back upon my time in Wales, though my excitement is now tempered with experience, having acquired the maturity necessary to engage in reflection with a healthy dose of self-criticism. The whole experience of planning for and arriving in Wales was not wholly blissful, nor was it wholly terrible. The same statement might be applied to studying abroad as a whole; life as an exchange student is a rapidly changing series of stratospheric highs and abysmal lows that nonetheless trend unambiguously in a positive direction. While there may exist a tiny minority of students who have been totally unsatisfied with their study abroad experience, I have not met anyone at my institution who holds that view.

As my departure day loomed, I packed, and I packed, and I packed some more. I packed for what seemed nearly two weeks preceding my departure, taking almost daily trips to the local supermarket for more supplies. When it would seem that I was finished packing, inevitably I would think of some small trinket that might be of some use to me, and I would go out and purchase it. In a way, it was fortunate that I took such great consideration in packing, as I very seriously doubt I could have so efficiently endured the initial stress of my arrival had I found myself wanting some of the household necessities like soap, toothpaste, toiletries, and stationery. After all, I owe most of my academic success to sticky notes. My room in Wales, like my room back home in the United States, was covered in sticky notes. If I had the opportunity to repeat the experience, however, I would be far stricter with the packing of my suitcase. While it is true that I saved myself some time by packing things like soap and toothpaste, I paid greatly for it. To be exact, I paid \$200 for my overweight bag when I could have easily walked to the local shop in Bangor and purchased most of the items I required during those first few days. One of the great dangers of studying abroad is to allow fear to influence one's decision-making—and, looking back on it, I packed out fear. An irrational fear of a new place makes a routine task—like locating a nearby grocery store—seem insurmountable. I certainly allowed such fears into my head those first few weeks in Bangor, and I intensely regret it now. Unfortunately, travel is a skill like most others in life that is of more-than-trivial difficulty. To become a proficient traveler, one must first be woefully inept and flounder at even the most basic of tasks.

My departure from Charlotte, North Carolina and my subsequent arrival in Manchester was stressful in the way that airports are invariably stressful, but I was otherwise insulated from the realization of my isolation by the almost surreal atmosphere of that first day. I don't think I fully recognized my distance from home and initial loneliness until the night of September 17. That realization was sparked when I used Google Earth to map the distance, in miles, from

Bangor, Gwynedd to Hamlet, North Carolina. It was about 3,600 miles. It was then that I realized I was not going to see my beloved family or friends for quite a long while.

Before I embark upon the very lengthy description of my actual time in Bangor, I first should describe my flights from Charlotte to Newark to Manchester, as well as my layover time—airports, after all, being so interesting and international travelers being so cheery. My flight to Manchester was not a direct one; instead, as I have described, I flew from Charlotte to Newark and then finally to Manchester. Manchester, a city that I would later visit for a day, was the second largest metropolitan area in the UK. My first flight was before noon, but it was not so early that it was any huge inconvenience. I left my house, as best I can recollect, around 6 in the morning. It was not as if I had managed to sleep a wink the night before anyway.

Both my mother and my father went to the airport with me to see me off. At that time I did not yet have a driver's license, so I gazed out of the window of my parents' practically bus-sized 2001 Ford Excursion—and enjoyed my view of the Charlotte skyline as it passed. I have always been fond of the new South aspirational aesthetic of Charlotte, even if the city itself fails to impress me. American cities, it seems, are more vertical than European ones. Even in Manchester, the second largest city in the UK, I found the skyline to be surprisingly tame compared to the cities I had seen in the United States.

There were tears when I parted with my parents at the airport. They were sad that I was leaving, and though I was excited to finally be travelling to Wales, I could not help shedding a few tears as I saw them in person for the last time in three months. As J.R.R. Tolkien wrote in his famous novel *The Lord of the Rings*—one of my favorite works of fiction, “I will not say: do not weep; for not all tears are an evil” (Tolkien 1030). The title of this narrative, after all, was inspired by Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. I knew, of course, that I would see my parents again. And I knew, of course, that three months was not a very long time at all. Perhaps it was my lack of

sleep that made me emotional, or perhaps it was my nerves—my anxiety about the next three months. Or perhaps this moment in the airport was a watershed one; it was a moment that foreshadowed what was to come. In just a couple of short years I would no longer be under the same roof as my parents, and then there is the inevitable separation that occurs in death that we all must face.

One of the most significant annoyances during my air travel, which I brought upon myself, was my decision to bring two laptops with me to Wales. I did so because I did not have Microsoft Office on my personal laptop. So, instead of spending just a few extra dollars I decided to bring with me my Esther G. Maynor Honors College loaner laptop. I not only caused myself much unneeded stress by doing this (two laptops are both heavy and fragile), but I also annoyed my fellow travelers in Charlotte with my two laptops, as TSA regulations require that laptops be unpacked and placed in individual bins. Altogether, I had five security bins lined up: one for my Honors College laptop, one for my personal laptop, one for my watch and pocket items, and two for my carry-on bags. I'm sure it was quite a spectacle. I tried to unpack and repack everything as quickly as possible, but my haste only caused me to fumble and waste even more time. That day I learned a valuable lesson, that in the future I would limit myself when packing my carry-on luggage. I apologized to the austere, business-looking types who were in line behind me and who predictably formed the majority of the crowd at Charlotte-Douglas International Airport that morning.

My American Airlines flight departed Charlotte-Douglas on-schedule in an older model Embraer commuter jet, one of the most dilapidated I've encountered during my travels. I can recall only one plane that was in worse condition than the one I flew on that day. I did not seriously fear for my plane's structural integrity—I found comfort in assuming that the U.S. aviation safety standards were among the best in the world. The interior of the plane, however,

was a wreck. All the plastic was discolored from what was probably a pleasing shade of light gray, and it was now a ghastly shade of tan. The upholstery on the seats was decaying, and the windows, our eyes in the sky, had cataracts. Still, I felt giddy with excitement as the small jet departed the runway and ascended into the late-morning sky. I have flown a lot in my life, and I have flown many times since Wales. I do not think that giddiness, that fascination with airplanes, will ever leave me.



The plane's descent afforded me a great view of the New York skyline. The nearly finished One World Trade Center was by far the most prominent building in my view, and I could not help but be overcome with an intense sense of patriotism as it passed. I had a long layover in Newark, and I was incredibly tired at this point. I tried desperately, and barely succeeded, in not falling asleep in some corner of the airport. In the time preceding my long flight to Manchester I bought a slice of New York style pizza, and explored the airport. It is never too early to start exploring new places, after all.

On the seven-hour flight to Manchester, I flew business class. Though slightly better than coach, the long flight was by no stretch of the imagination an enjoyable experience. In the future, I decided, I would save money and fly coach as the amenities available in business class did not seem worth the additional expense. For a short person like myself, extra legroom is not a major selling point. I received a complimentary pillow and blanket, but I later learned that the same luxury was offered in coach. The flight attendant offered a complimentary newspaper, and I requested a *USA Today* as the intelligentsia in first class had already depleted the plane's supply of the *Times*. As I recall the front page story detailed the atrocities committed by the terrorist group ISIS. What a very comforting piece of journalism for an international flight, I thought. Two complimentary meals were served: dinner and breakfast. I missed dinner because I was asleep, but the breakfast consisted of a light but satisfying croissant and mixed fruit. Perhaps I am in the minority in thinking that in-flight meals are actually quite tasty.

I arrived in Manchester around 7:15 a.m., greeted with just the kind of foggy, chilly weather that I had expected coming to the UK. On the ground again, I proceeded through customs with minimal struggle. In fact, I was surprised at how lax the customs procedures in the UK were. Customs was busy that morning, and as I prepared to step up to the kiosk I unpacked my documents from my bag. In addition to my visa I was required to have a copy of my CAS letter, a document confirming that I was an incoming student at Bangor University. I presented the security officer, a large English man, with my Tier 4 student visa and my CAS letter, claimed my overweight bag (for which I had paid the additional \$200), and set off to find the Bangor representatives. After roaming the airport for around an hour with no success, I became understandably worried.

At last, having walked all around the airport, I was actually within visual range of where the Bangor team was supposed to be. Unfortunately, I found myself a story above my intended

destination. Normally, finding myself slightly above my intended destination would not present any great issue, especially considering the elevator a few yards from where I stood.

Unsurprisingly given my luck thus far, the elevator was out of order, and the stairs were fitted with small barriers intended to convey pedestrians—but not their luggage—safely to the lower level. In an act of brazen defiance against Her Majesty the Queen, I hoisted my 58-pound bag over the stile-like barrier and proceeded to the lower floor. Though the Bangor team had not yet arrived to set up their table, I loitered there, worried, for ten minutes or so before eventually they arrived. We traded introductions, they provided me with a coach ticket to Bangor, and I sat down on the floor nearby. At this point I was exhausted from carrying my bags around.



Soon, more international students arrived. There was a guy from Thailand whose name I cannot recall (like so many others), a French girl named Clara, and a fellow American from Arkansas. The Arkansan was wearing a shirt similar to mine, and hiking shoes. I wonder if, just by looking at us, the other students knew we were from America. My guess about the nationality of French girl certainly turned out to be correct, and I knew the guy from Thailand was certainly

from somewhere in Asia. I eventually became distant friends with Clara through our mutual membership in the Bangor University Mountain Walking Club. She confirmed many of my stereotypes about the French: she was very fond of cigarettes, wore a scarf, and complained about how terrible British food was.

But nowhere did I spot the two UNCP students Dr. Dobson had told me were travelling to Bangor as well. I distantly knew one of them, Sara, and I was happy to see her arrive an hour or so after me. Though I barely knew her, one can scarcely imagine the morale boost I experienced upon seeing a fellow North-Carolinian in a sea of foreigners. Unlike me, Sara brought her mother along for the first week to help her adjust to the new environment, which I imagine was a great boon to her initial level of comfort. The two were signed up for a later coach ride, and I would not see them for a few days.

Before I boarded my coach to Bangor, I managed a short conversation with Sara and her mother about their travel to Manchester and other things. Once I was on board, I enjoyed the coach. Having never seen castles or other medieval fortifications before, I gazed in awe out of the coach windows at the ancient architecture that we passed on the way to Bangor. Seated beside me was a graduate student from Uganda, named Solomon, on his way to Bangor to study conservation biology. Thus it was further revealed to me that Bangor University cultivated an extensively multicultural academic environment. The coach arrived on Ffriddoedd site around noon, and I disembarked safely but incredibly fatigued.

In the personal statements that accompanied my graduate school applications that I would write after my experience in Wales, I often would mention my “appreciation for the global nature of academic discourse” that I acquired by studying abroad. By this phrase, I was referring to two things. First, I was referring to the opportunity I had at Bangor to participate in an academic environment that was distinct from the academic environment in the United States. The overall

pedagogy employed by the British university system, while similar in some ways, diverged surprisingly from what I had experienced in the US. I was also referring to the fact that Bangor University is very much an international university, and while I was there I had opportunities to interact with students from all over the world, all with their own distinct ways of participating in academic discourse and their own distinct cultural identities. About 25 percent of the students at Bangor are foreign exchange students. By comparison, UNCP would need to have an international student population of 1,625 students to be as multinational as Bangor University.

PART II

I arrived in Bangor on the 17th of September by bus, or by coach in British terms. We international students were taken to Bar Uno on the Ffriddoedd site for orientation and other preliminary activities. Pronounced "Frithoyth", the residence site is colloquially called Ffridd. Ffriddoedd translates to "sheep pasture" in English, and it is so named because, before it was a residence site it was a sheep pasture. We disembarked; my legs were stiff after the long bus ride, not to mention the long plane ride. I retrieved my luggage from the bus. Why, I wondered, did I have to pack so heavily? Though I did not know the geography of Fridd at the time, we had been dropped off at the bus stop behind Bar Uno, the very popular bar located on Fridd, available exclusively to Bangor University students.

Ffridd site is the main student residence campus at Bangor University, and acts almost like a small self-contained village for first-year and international students. Bangor students who are not first years—known colloquially as "freshers"—and are not internationals must seek lodging elsewhere. Thus, Fridd is a strange mixture of highly mature, international upperclassmen and British freshmen oblivious to the struggles of university life. The significant number of mature upperclassmen did not instill in the British freshmen any wisdom beyond their years. No: the party bug, it turned out, was contagious.

The Fridd campus is fairly large, and at a brisk pace it would usually take me around seven minutes to walk one end to the other. The buildings on site were built at three different points in time. This is made clear by the three distinct architectures that are visible. The oldest residence hall, Neuadd Reichel, is located on the periphery of Ffridd site, on the side leading away from College Road. This is significant because College Road leads to the local grocery store (called Morrison's) as well as most of the major academic buildings in Bangor. Reichel, therefore, is the furthest distance from most campus activity. The building itself is built of dark

brown brick. Square and austere in its construction, Reichel is both the cheapest accommodation on campus as well as the least comfortable. The second-oldest series of halls is located near the middle portion of Ffridd site, near the security lodge. These buildings are probably the most numerous and they are more inviting than Reichel Hall. Built of light pink and grey brick, they look more like apartment buildings than dorms. Some of the international students live in those halls. For several weeks early in the semester, an ostensibly eastern European student proudly displayed the flag of the former Soviet Union from his window. I found such a display of patriotism both amusing and thought-provoking. While the flag highlighted international tensions that have persisted since the Cold War, it also reminded me of similar issues back home. Like the confederate flag, the flag of the former United Soviet Socialist Republic was a stark reminder of tyranny and a misguided worldview. The most modern series of halls are located between Reichel and the security lodge and principally around Bar Uno by the exit to Ffriddoedd Road. These halls are unmistakably modern and colorful. I ended up living in this type of residence hall. All of the halls, regardless of when they were constructed, have Welsh names: Crafnant, Glyder, Peris, Enlli, Alaw, and Glaslyn, for example.

In addition to the residence halls and the popular Bar Uno, Fridd site contained a few other amenities. There were car parks, which in the United States we call parking lots; there was also a large and very hideous inflatable indoor tennis court which apparently malfunctioned and deflated frequently. Though I did join the tennis society, I unfortunately never participated in the society's events. There was a small store on Fridd, too. The Fridd shop sold the necessities: ramen noodles, pasta, microwave meals, milk, cleaning supplies, toilet paper, and cold medicine. Much to my surprise as an American, they also had an impressive supply of liquor in stock; unsurprisingly, the contraceptives shelf was located right beside the liquor shelf.



After disembarking the coach and observing what would be my home for the next three months, the other internationals and I were greeted by a number of peer guides and study abroad ambassadors who assisted us in carrying our luggage. We were taken inside Bar Uno, where Alan Edwards, a member of Bangor's very friendly international support staff, welcomed us to Bangor. He described the campus, the day's itinerary, and our responsibilities during those first few days. Two Ph.D. students took me to the Halls Office located on the ground floor of the Idwal residence building, where I was given the key to my room. The Halls Office is responsible for ensuring the smooth operation of all of the facilities on Fridd Site. The room keys for the newer halls are not keys at all, but instead plastic cards embedded with a magnetic chip. My two incredibly friendly Ph.D. student helpers showed me to Peris Hall, where my room was located. In what would turn out to be the beginning of a long streak of minor misfortunes I discovered that my room key did not work and would not open the doors to Peris Hall. I then had to go back

to the halls office and get another keycard made. Unfortunately my Ph.D. student friends had left me, and I had to carry my luggage down and then back up the hill to my hall. Fortunately the second keycard was functional. I later learned, embarrassingly, that my first key most likely did work. I simply tried to enter the front of the building; because my flat was located in the rear of Peris Hall, my key only worked on that side and not on the front. I told no one.

After resolving the problems with my keycard, I walked into the building and proceeded up the stairs to my room, B226. The British, I should mention, use a different floor numbering system than do Americans. They include a ground floor in all of their buildings, which meant that my second-floor flat was actually three floors up. I was quite happy about this; being on the third floor meant that I would have a better view. I arrived in my flat but it was unfortunately deserted, as the British students wouldn't arrive for a whole week. Kyle, the warden—essentially, the British equivalent of a resident adviser—was there, but I did not meet him that first day. There was a student from China in my flat, too, but I did not meet her for a while. I began unpacking some of my things and was assailed by a crushing feeling of hopelessness and loneliness that persisted for the remainder of that day and the next. My depression, I knew, was a result of both jet-lag and the shock of my new environment, but the knowledge of this fact did little to improve my mood. Indeed, my recollection of the first week is clouded by my distraught mental state and intense jet-lag.

I found my way down the hill to Morrison's, the shopping market located about ten minutes from Peris Hall. Morrison's reminded me of Food Lion. The merchandise that they sold was not premium quality, but like Food Lion was not Wal-Mart quality either. Additionally, the store was no supermarket; it was similar in size to Food Lion and busy on the inside. It was the closest of the five grocery stores in Bangor (the others being Aldi, ASDA, Lidl, and M&S) to Fridd Site. I sometimes wondered whether my comparisons were accurate, or if instead I was

grasping at straws, trying to remind myself of home. Bangor's other four supermarkets were comparable to Morrison's except for M&S, which was more expensive than the other shops and reminded me of Whole Foods. During the first couple weeks, I stayed close to home and did not explore my other shopping options. I ended up spending more money during my first few shopping trips than I intended because I was so intrigued by all of the strange new food available to me. Though nothing was incredibly exotic, I thought some of the differences were amusing. For example, the "Share a Coke" campaign in the UK included phrases like "Share a Coke with your mates." A lot of the candy, I noticed, seemed to be in gummy form. One such treat is the deliciously sour Haribo Tangfastics, which come in the strangest shapes. To this day I have no idea what the gummy candies are supposed to be in the shape of—one shape seemed to be an alligator, but I cannot be sure.



I attended a number of compulsory as well as optional international meetings in the hopes of allaying some of my fears. The meetings did improve my condition, but time more than

anything else would be the salve that ultimately cured my mental woes. Though my first week was not all bad, it was mostly bad. I was tired, homesick, and overwhelmed by all of the new responsibilities that I had acquired by moving to Bangor. I am extremely glad to say, however, that my situation rapidly improved as the effects of jetlag, homesickness and culture shock slowly melted away. Only then was I able to embrace this new and wonderful experience. The first week, as I mentioned, was not all doom and gloom. I made a few new friends who comprised a more diverse cross section of people than I think I have ever had the pleasure of calling my acquaintances. Over the course of three days I met fellow students not only from other parts of America, but from France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Columbia, Uganda, Brazil, Slovakia, Thailand, New Zealand, Australia, Sweden, Denmark, Singapore, China, and Vietnam as well, to name just a few. The international diversity I had observed at UNCP paled in comparison to the cosmopolitan learning environment that is Bangor University. I may regret the things that I did not have the time or motivation to do, but I certainly am proud of how I broadened my cultural horizons and learned to embrace new cultures that were vastly different from my own.

During my second week, I enjoyed a noticeable improvement in my condition, though I was still afflicted by intermittent but less severe bouts of soul-crushing despair. During this time I met my flatmates, who were all British (except for one Asian international student) and quite enamored of my American nationality and faint but discernable southern accent. In a fully occupied flat in the newer buildings, there were eight people in total. Everyone had her or his own room and shared a kitchen with seven flatmates. Though I in no way won the flatmate lottery, I did reasonably well. I got along well with everyone, though unfortunately I never made any lasting friends in the same way that I did during, for example, my National Science Foundation-Research Experience for Undergraduates internship the following summer. My

stronger bond with my summer internship friends was not due to them being somehow better or smarter than my flatmates, but instead due to us all having very similar interests and life goals.

My seven flatmates were Ing Sun, Kate, Kim, Kyle, Liam, Reece, and Stacey. Kyle, the Warden of our floor, was a third-year studying sports science. Liam was also a sports science major, but he was in his first year. He was hilarious. Stacey was a first-year social work major from Buckley with a lot of incredibly petty friends whose frequent visits to our flat ensured that there was no shortage of drama. Because the legal drinking age in Britain is 18, Stacey brought with her six liters of vodka to start out her first semester in university. Kate was a first-year primary education major and was a good friend of Stacey's. Of the two, she was the more responsible. Ing Sun was a Chinese exchange student and music major who asked us to call her by an English name, Nicole. She spoke very seldom, but she frequently surprised us with her talents such as cooking and playing the violin. There was Reece, a first-year computer science major from Birmingham who initially was reluctant to interact with us. Though I became friends with Reece, Stacey and Kate's personalities were incompatible with his, and they frequently got involved in explosive arguments. Finally, there was Kimberley, a first-year geography major from Yorkshire who lived in the room adjacent to mine. Her long-time boyfriend, Dan, would drive to see her frequently and became well-known around our flat. His incredibly thick Yorkshire accent kept me constantly amused when he was around.

Classes were to start on September 29, but before the start of classes was Serendipity, the Student's Union fair. In many ways the event was similar to UNCP's Pembroke Day, but on a larger scale and more tailored to the interests of the student population than to the local community. I joined a number of different clubs and societies, including the mountain walking club, the mountaineering club, the tennis club, the marine science and scuba diving club, and the library society. Unfortunately I regret to say that the only club that I ever participated in was the

Mountain Walking Club. There were—and this is no exaggeration—societies relating to almost every possible interest. There was even a pole dancing society, for which so much of the female student population displayed interest that tryouts became necessary for entry due to a lack of membership availability.



Serendipity was located in the Main Arts Quad and in Main Arts, the iconic humanities building of Bangor University. Built in the 1890s, Main Arts looks like a building taken straight out of one of the *Harry Potter* series of books. Interestingly, there was in fact a quidditch society on campus. Main Arts was beautiful inside and out, and fortunately for me all but one of my classes was located there. Walking through the grand old corridors of Main Arts never bored me; the beautifully constructed stained glass windows depicting classical scholars never failed to

draw my gaze, and the Main Arts library was unparalleled by any of the other libraries on campus.

After Serendipity I began to feel sad once more, but I had an encouraging conversation with Mr. Andrew Griff-Owen, who helped allay my concerns and fears. Mr. Griff-Owen was the director of International Programs at Bangor University. During Week 2 I received my schedule, and unfortunately was unable to take biology courses due to scheduling conflicts. The final courses that I decided to register for were:

- QXE-1006 Exploring America: an Introduction
- QXE-2020 The Romantic Period in Britain
- QXE-2027 Literature and Modernity

The Saturday before classes started I participated in my first meeting with the mountain walking club. Sara, the other UNCP student, also had joined the club and went on the first hike as well, an ascent to the top of Snowdon. The hike was pleasant. Because we were the only Americans present, Sara and I were bombarded by questions about America, questions I found to be amusing. One freshman hiker was under the hilarious misconception that moose were similar to unicorns. That is to say moose did not actually exist, or so he thought. I corrected him and confirmed that, yes, moose did actually exist in both the northern parts of the United States and in large numbers in Canada. I learned as many things about Britain from my British acquaintances as they did about America from me. In general, the exchange of trivial cultural discrepancies lessened the strain of the hike, and, likewise, in many ways lessened the strain of the past week and a half. It is safe to say, I think, that humor and lightheartedness make for a very effective coping mechanism.

The hike up Snowdon—the highest mountain in Wales, with its peak reaching just over 1000 meter—was enjoyable. The highest peak in the Snowdonia range, and although it may be

considered diminutive compared to the mighty Alps of continental Europe, Snowdon's scenery was impressive. Snowdonia offers a hiking experience similar to mountains of Appalachia that run through my native North Carolina. The only difference, and although it does not alter the difficulty of the hike by much, is that there is not a single tree in sight on the slopes of Mount Snowdon. Instead, as one ascends the mountain, weathered crags of rock protrude from the ground, creating visibly precipitous overhangs. From the ridge that our medium group crested, I could discern the town of Bangor, a sliver of the coast of Anglesey, and the sea, stretching cerulean blue into the distance until it met the cloudy horizon. At one point, the ridge we were navigating became enshrouded by a low cloud; as the wall of vapor approached, I was hit with a sudden recollection of a section of Wordsworth's *Prelude*:

I found myself of a huge sea of mist,
Which meek and silent rested at my feet.
A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
All over this still ocean, and beyond,
Far, far beyond, the vapors shot themselves
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes,
Into the sea, the real sea, that seemed
To dwindle and give up its majesty,
Usurped as far as sight could reach. (385)

The vapor did not dissipate even when we reached the peak of Snowdon, so we were ultimately unable to experience the view from the top of the mountain. There was a visitor's center on top of the mountain, and the café inside was incredibly crowded, so I forewent the high-altitude cup of coffee that I so fervently desired after a long hike. After roughly a half-hour

at the visitor's center, we descended Snowdon and went back to Bangor, arriving back at the Student's Union around 6. By all measures, Sept. 27 was a very enjoyable and productive day.



Classes started on September 29, and though the British university system differs from the one in the States, I was not shocked. Learning, after all, is my passion. I like to think that I would be capable of succeeding in any learning environment in the world. UK “modules” are similar to American classes, except there is a noticeably increased amount of reading and independent study expected of the student, which is something that I feel I was well-prepared for by the Honors College at UNCP. Still, I was surprised by the amount of reading that we were expected to complete in just a second-year course; I was further surprised by how independent our reading assignments were. My professors made no attempt to ensure that their classes actually completed the reading assignments. Having been given that trust, I of course felt doubly guilty when I actually failed to complete a reading assignment on time.

QXE 2020, “The Romantic Period in Britain” was of some interest to me because it redefined what I thought I knew about the Romantic period. Previously my only experience with the Romantic period was in a second-year literature survey course at UNCP, where the chief focus was Wordsworth, Coleridge, and nature. In Bangor I learned, to my surprise, that elements such as the French Revolution and the American Revolution played heavily into the literature—and particularly the political literature—of the period. QXE 2027, “Literature and Modernity” was about what I expected, and dealt with the literature from 1890-1950 and its reaction to the rapid changes associated with modernism. QXE-1006, “Exploring America: an Introduction” was very interesting in that it offered a perspective on America that was distinguished from continental America, perhaps more objectively critical of the nation in a way that classes in the United States might not be. It was interesting to be in an American literature class in the UK, where to all of my fellow students America embodied an otherness—the same type of otherness that the UK embodies when, in America, we study British literature. The West and westward

expansion was particularly fascinating to the British students, and I am not sure that they fully understood that the days of cowboys, Indians, and saloon gunfights were far in the past.

During my second week in Bangor I became acutely acquainted—and had to deal quickly with—the reality of domestic chores that inevitably had started to accumulate as I became more involved in campus life. Despite an initial, perhaps irrational fear of the public laundrettes, I discovered that doing laundry was actually quite easy. For a wash, the charge was £2.70; for a dry, the charge was £1.50. Shopping was also something that became a responsibility as I started to cook more at home rather than eat at the restaurants around town. The distance from Peris, where I lived, to Morrison's, where I shopped, was a half-mile up a very steep hill. Without a car—none of my flatmates had one, either—I found out that it was not in my best interests to try and carry an entire week's worth of food such a long distance. Instead, I found that it was more efficient to make a shop stop every two or three days. When classes finally started I could easily stop by Morrison's on my way back to Peris from Main Arts, as the path that I took to Main Arts passed directly beside Morrison's on College Road.

The Humanities resided in the old and beautiful building called Main Arts, but the other fields were dispersed throughout the town of Bangor, and some were even further away. The layout of Bangor University was quite a shock to me, and I imagine other Americans would feel the same way. American universities, or at least all of the ones I have been to, are typically quite compact and self-contained. At UNCP, for example, it was abundantly clear where the campus begins and where it ends. When I was a student at Bangor, though, I was less sure at times whether I was on campus, in town, or both. Some buildings are located further from central Bangor than others. Sports science majors come to mind, who had to walk all the way to a place called Normal Site for their classes, a brisk thirty-or-so minute walk. The biology and chemistry departments were located downhill from Morrison's, nearer to the city center, and the law

buildings were located around main arts. The marine sciences were located further down the Menai Strait. To travel there every day without a car or a bike would be nearly impossible.

Early on during my third week in Bangor my bank, BB&T, locked my debit card, erroneously suspecting fraud despite my having told them before I departed that there would be charges coming from the UK. I found out about my card being locked during one of my biweekly shopping trips, and embarrassingly I had to leave my groceries and my dignity behind. Food was pretty scarce in my cupboard for the next few days as I worked on getting my card unlocked, and I survived by bumming pasta from my flatmates and eating Jaffa Cakes, cheap, disgusting, quintessentially British soft cookies covered in tasteless chocolate with an equally tasteless orange jam filling.

In Week 3 I received the books that I had ordered for my classes during the previous week. I chose to buy my books online because the local shops were overpriced and were already sold out of most of the required reading. As a recovering English major, I am usually not intimidated when I find myself behind a seemingly insurmountable pile of literature. How I would ever read even half of what I had been assigned to read for that twelve-week semester, though, I did not know. I suspect that I would have had a more enjoyable study abroad experience had I chosen to take biology or chemistry classes, rather than English classes I did not need for my minor. The workload of a biology student is simply less than that of an English student, especially for someone like me who has an inherent knack for the sciences. To say that I wish I had taken biology courses is not to say that my English courses in Bangor were unenjoyable, they were simply a lot of work.

On the third Saturday, I hiked Moel Siabod with the Mountain Walking Club. By this time I had managed to buy a pair of real hiking boots, and that meant I no longer was relegated to "easy group." For liability reasons, the club required that students brought along proper gear

for more difficult hikes. The first time I went hiking with them my boots were deemed unsuitable for medium group, but I managed to sneak in anyway. Sara was sick this time around, and unfortunately I did not recognize many people from the previous hike. Thus I had to make new acquaintances, something that luckily is not too difficult when walking ten or so kilometers with strangers. I would had to have been socially inept to not engage in small talk of some kind over the long periods during which we traipsed over boggy expanses of grass and mud. During one such slog not even halfway through the hike a German girl misjudged the location of solid ground and ended up waist-deep in muck. I can only applaud her resilience, as I know that I would have been much crabrier than she was after enduring that kind of discomfort for the remaining four hours of our hike. After traversing the bog, we were introduced to "scrambling," which is a type of rock-climbing without a harness. I quickly realized why a sturdy pair of boots was a requirement. I do not wish to say that scrambling is more dangerous than rock-climbing, though, because typically scrambling involves only a steep grade and not a vertical rock face. On a Grade-1 scramble, it is expected that a climber will need to maintain three points of contact with the rock face at least forty percent of the time. Scrambling was somewhat tricky at first, but I enjoyed scrambling more than I did any other part of our hike that day. It was a refreshing break from the monotony of walking over desolate expanses of bog. And although it was cold on the peak of Moel Siabod, the views of Snowdon and the surrounding Snowdonia Mountains were so stunning that I temporarily forgot about the numbness of my fingers and the achiness of my feet. The valley below us was illuminated by rays of sunlight, and the peak of Snowdon was darkened by a lingering cloud. Though I knew that at that very moment there were people upon Mount Snowdon climbing it as I had just a week ago, it seemed as likely then that instead of people it was dragons that were to be found among the crags of that distant mountain.



As I settled into my classes, called “modules” under the British system, my life in Bangor began to more closely resemble the one I had left. That Tuesday, I had two classes that occupied me from 11:00 to 1:00. Both were subsections of QXE-1006: the 11:00-12:00 period was the lecture section of the class, and the 12:00-1:00 period was the seminar section. The lecture was taught by Dr. Steven Price, one of the British lecturers overseeing the module. He offered an enlightening view of American capitalism, one that seemed to me both objective and highly critical. The students, being British, were more open to the criticisms that he presented, which to me was a refreshing change. Too often, I think, people confuse criticism with anti-Americanism especially in a predominantly conservative region like the South. The seminar went well, too. We had read Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown” in preparation for our class that day, and for some reason the short story reminded me of Langland’s *Piers Plowman*, though I am unsure if the comparison was widely accepted within our seminar.

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I did not have any plans for the remainder of that day or the night, other than getting caught up on the mountain of reading that already had begun to accumulate that week. One of the disadvantages of student accommodation that became instantly apparent when returned to Peris that day was that, when eight young adults occupy the same space, things tend to become very messy very quickly. Our kitchen almost immediately developed into a repository for dirty plates, utensils, and bottles of both alcoholic (I did not partake) and non-alcoholic liquid at varying stages of depletion. The alcohol of course would be fine, but occasionally I would find cartons of milk that were so disgustingly curdled I could hardly handle them without gagging. The condition of the kitchen stayed about the same during the semester, though occasionally Stacey and Kate would make vain attempts to improve the squalor of our flat. Though they put forth a valiant effort—angry sticky notes, threats of retribution, and compulsory flat meetings that neither Reece nor Kyle refused to take seriously—their efforts ultimately failed, and by the

end of the semester we all began eating in our rooms most of the time. I did not have the same dirty dish issue as everyone else though because I only had one dish, one bowl, one pan, one pot, one fork, one mug, and one glass. Had I let my dishes accumulate I simply would not have had anything to eat off of.

Each Wednesday I had two classes, again occupying my time from 11:00 to 1:00. On those days I would go to both the seminar and lecture sections of QXE-2020. The primary lecturer for QXE-2020 is Dr. Maureen McCue, a red-haired professor who came to the UK from California. Dr. McCue was clearly very intelligent though she had not been teaching long and stuttered a lot during lecture. The leader of my seminar group was an Irish PhD student named Rebecca who had a very intense Irish accent. Surprisingly, I met fewer Irish people in Bangor than I had expected. Ireland, after all, is only a short ferry ride away.

The English classes I took in Bangor were much more conceptually challenging and contained more spirited and intelligent discussion than those at UNCP. A grade of 70 on an essay, for example, is considered to be an A in the UK grading system. A grade above an 85 is exceedingly rare, and we international students were given a short orientation before classes started where we were warned that grades above a 90 are nothing short of a miracle. Whereas Bangor University students excelled in intelligent discussion, however, they fell amazingly behind UNCP and all other American institutions in attendance. Never have I seen a cohort of students who so frequently lay out of class, and with such little concern from their teachers. The new attendance norm was one of the most significant academic shocks for me. Still, the Bangor students seemed more engaged in the material when they did attend class. I think that the education system in the UK valued an actual pursuit of knowledge and placed emphasis on the material being taught. In the United States, more weight is given to assessment. Not once while

I was in the UK was there a test review session or an essay writing session during class time. All of our time in lecture and seminar was spent learning about our readings and discussing them.

Though my classes ended that Wednesday with no complaints, the day as a whole did not go well. I awoke with a severely irritated throat, due to some sickness that seems to be spreading around the place, and not due to dryness of mouth as I had hoped the night before. I later learned that the affliction was colloquially referred to as “fresher’s flu,” and is essentially impossible to avoid. The irritation persisted throughout the day and did not cease during that night. Then, my attitude in addition to my throat became irritated when Dr. Scott Hicks in UNCP’s English department forwarded to me his correspondence with Dr. Miller, the new chair of the English department after the late Dr. Kay McClanahan, regarding her refusal to substitute my Bangor coursework for relevant classes at UNCP. Though I had and still have absolutely no doubt that Dr. Hicks, Dr. Dobson, and Honors College Dean Mark Milewicz did all that they could to resolve the situation I was in regarding credits at Bangor, I was shocked and interminably frustrated by Dr. Miller’s inflexibility. If I were anything less than a stellar student of the humanities, my request might warrant her resistance, as the possibility might exist that I was attempting to swindle the department out of its precious credit hours. But given my perfect academic record in English—and my perfect attendance—I could not help but feel slightly entitled to my small request for assistance from the department for whom I have worked the hardest. Dr. Miller’s cold lack of understanding and empathy for my dilemma annoyed me endlessly; surely she too was once a student.

My terrible mood was improved when Liam, Kate, Stacey, and I kicked a football around in the common hall of our flat for a while. At the time I was simply but entertainingly passing the time; what I would come to realize though, was that this and other events later in the



semester would reveal how useful my friendship with my flatmates would be in improving my overall study abroad experience. Living with other students was a new aspect of the college experience for me.

Thursday 9 October 2014: Christopher Heely, a Bangor student who studied at UNCP during the spring 2014 semester, was not stretching the truth when he warned me that it rained sideways in North Wales. The horizontal rainfall is due to the strong winds that constantly buffet the North Wales coast. The wind made the rainfall difficult to deal with not only because of its

sideways direction; it also destroys umbrellas almost immediately. I was soaked by the time I made it to Main Arts, for the rain, coming down in sheets from all directions, rendered ineffective all rain protection, even my bulky waterproof coat. Today's classes were both the lecture and the seminar for "Literature and Modernity," and both sections went well, with one exception. The plastic chairs in a few of the Main Arts lecture rooms are not exactly well constructed and they come apart easily. One of these substandard desks did exactly that as I was furiously recording notes about W.B. Yeats. My desktop fell apart and clattered to the floor in the middle of lecture, resulting in an unavoidable interruption. Fortunately Professor Webb had a sense of humor, but I was still mortified as I tried to reassemble my desk in the middle of a class of thirty people. My intelligence was useless in this case, and defeated, I moved to the empty desk adjacent to me (thank god for the terrible attendance in Wales). My persistent good fortune continued and my new desk also fell apart, but this time I caught the desktop before it interrupted class again. I had exhausted my nearby supply of empty desks by this point, and for the rest of the class I had to use my lap as a writing surface.

Hoping to calm my nerves, I purchased a box of Earl Grey tea from Morrison's on the way home that day, and it helped my throat considerably. The British actually prefer to add whole milk to their tea, something that I had never before considered as an American. I had no idea what I was missing, either. Since then I have not drunk a single cup of hot tea without milk in it—the addition of milk completely changes the flavor and consistency of the tea. With milk, tea is transformed from a hot, low-flavor drink into a calming, velvety refresher.

The day ended on a sour note with my laptop ceasing to respond for no apparent reason at all. Because of this, I had to factory reset the machine, meaning that everything was wiped from the computer except for the core Windows files. During my flight to Manchester I had to hurriedly stuff the bag containing that particular laptop into an overhead bin, and I think that it

may have been damaged then. Because it was my Netflix laptop and not my work laptop, the factory reset was but a minor annoyance. I did not lose any important files except those that I had backed up elsewhere, such as my collection of pictures from my Costa Rica and Bermuda trips. I would be remiss, however, if I did not mention Dell's superb customer support team who, upon discovering that my warranty was expired, refused to assist me whatsoever. To cap off the day, I went to bed with a high fever, shivering for most of the night. I fiddled with my heater for a few minutes and, unable to get it to turn on, climbed back into bed. Fresher's flu was really taking its toll, on both my body and on my positive outlook.

Friday 10 October 2014 I slept in until around 11 o'clock on Friday. After I woke up, I groggily dressed myself and made the 10-minute walk down to Morrison's. I walked in, grabbed a shopping basket, and got some toiletries and candy. Both the walk there and back were pleasant. The weather was on my side for a change, and as I walked I took great care to enjoy the small things about the country I was in. Even then I carried the distinct—and correct—impression that when I was gone it would be not just the major events that I would miss the most. Major experiences were the ones that I would remember regardless of whether I recorded them in my journal or not. Minor things though, I would forget over time, like the way the foliage covered the ancient wall beside Ffridd Road—and these were memories that I would miss equally much.



Despite my troubles and misfortunes the first month, I loved it in Bangor: I loved the scenery, I reveled in the day-to-day experience of the place, and I enjoyed the time I spent among British people. Their cheeky sarcasm and friendliness toward Americans never ceased to entertain me. The pleasantness of my experience thus far did not ignore, however, that lately an absurd quantity of small misfortunes had befallen me. I do not think I had ever experienced such a prolonged streak of bad luck. That being said, I do find that typically the good events in my life are eventually brought into equilibrium with misfortunes of the kind that I have mentioned. When I recently was accepted to Cornell University's Biochemistry, Molecular and Cell Biology Ph.D. program, for example, I damaged my car while parking. Every day while in Bangor though, I tried to remind myself of where I was and how lucky I was to be there. I also reminded myself not to let extraordinary things, such as having a pocket full of British coinage, become mundane. Unfortunately I fear that I did in fact let the everyday wonders of my study abroad experience become mundane.

Indeed, I would caution anyone who decides to study abroad in the future that one of the biggest dangers is not taking time to appreciate the small things in life while abroad. Now, nearly two years after Bangor, I find myself missing those small things. I frequently miss British currency, just as I missed US currency when I was in Bangor. I miss novel things like the difference in the size of their printer paper, or the fact that in Wales, every road sign is written in both Welsh and English. I miss saying "diolch" instead of thank you to local shop owners, and I miss walking down to the Bangor pier on weekends and enjoying the feeling of the sea air upon my face. There seemed an endless supply of these experiences in Bangor, and I grew to take them as something other than an extraordinary privilege. I regret that now.

By the end of the day my condition was noticeably improved, so much so that I planned on going hiking with the Bangor Mountain Walking Club the next day, provided that my cold

did not worsen during the night. The current incarnation of the hiking agenda that was sent to me that night indicated that we were hiking up Tryfant, a steep and rocky mountain with a lot of scrambling opportunities in its ascent.

Saturday 11 October 2014 I went on the hike, despite substantial aggravation from my sinuses. Instead of hiking Tryfant, the same peak that the Everest team trained on, we hiked up to a gradually sloping mountain known as Llewelyn, another prominent peak in the Snowdonia range. The previous evening's rains were the main reason that we were unable to conquer Tryfant that day because the lingering moisture rendered the rocks too slippery to be safe. The hike up Llewelyn was long and arduous, though very enjoyable, and with less technically challenging scrambling than the hike up Moel Siabod the previous week. Sheep were ubiquitous on every hike, but on the way up to Llewelyn we were fortunate enough to encounter instead a group of Welsh mountain ponies, which roam wild among the hills of Snowdonia. The walk down was rough, for it involved walking through dense patches of gorse, carefully treading over bogs, and crossing rusty barbed-wire fences meant to contain sheep.

On the hike, I met some new friends with whom I would stay in intermittent contact for the remainder of the semester. I made the acquaintance of Andrew, who was then club president and a reasonably knowledgeable third-year computer science joint-honors student, whatever that title meant. I also made the acquaintance of James Kelly, one of the officers in the club. We became decent friends by the time my stay was concluded. James had a very British sense of humor, and a similarly British attraction to pubs. In addition to the officers, I became acquainted with my fellow hikers. For example, I met another American, AJ, and Oregonian who was trying way too hard to ditch his Pacific northwestern accent and acquire a mid-Atlantic one. This tendency was not an uncommon trait among Americans studying abroad though. I too picked up a few words for which I preferred the British pronunciation. I also talked for a while

with a British first-year medical biology student named Emma. I would later discover that she was somehow friends with my flatmates Stacey and Kate, though I should not have been too surprised, as Stacey and Kate were very gregarious. I comfortably finished off the day at "The Harp," a popular local pub, with the mountain walking society.

Sunday 12 October 2014 By all accounts, the food situation was dire in Peris Hall that morning. My card had not been locked this time; instead, my reading workload and my enjoyment of all of the new things around me made me unaware of the fact that I was quickly running out of food. There were no breakfast items available, and nothing was available for my lunch either, except for a single orange that I ate for breakfast. I went to Morrison's and purchased as much food as I could carry (as I have already stated, never a good idea), in the hopes that it would last me through the week. Walking nearly a mile uphill on an empty stomach with such a burden of food was not a pleasant experience, and I was completely drained after it.

Monday 13 October 2014 I might have been in a totally new and fascinating environment, but that reality did not mean that I should have to relinquish my hatred for Mondays. On Mondays I had a 9 a.m. class in Main Arts, which as I have said was a fairly arduous walk away. That Monday, all of my scheduled meetings were lectures, though I preferred the other days of the week when my seminars were scheduled. I enjoyed my seminars because these smaller classes encouraged more lively discussion. Each class I took in Bangor had both a lecture and a seminar component. The lecture component of my classes consisted of my professors dispensing knowledge to the class via PowerPoints or handout. In seminar, we were divided into smaller groups where we would discuss that week's assigned reading. In seminar, my teachers guided the discussion when necessary, but the students took most of the initiative. The rumor that particular Monday was that essay topics would be issued next week. Interestingly I had not written anything other than my journal thus far because of the way that

assessments are handled in the British university system. There are no short writing assignments whatsoever; in fact, most of the assigned reading was only fodder for the in-class discussions. In some classes a single term paper served as the only basis for one's grade, though none of my classes was thus. In all of my classes, two 2,500-word papers were the basis of my grade: one paper due at midterms, another due during the final week of class. The prospect that my entire grade was based off two papers was frightening. Participation would not matter, nor would attendance. Should I earn a failing mark on but a single paper, most likely I would fail the entire class. In addition, should I make less than a B on a single paper, my chances of an A would be completely obliterated.

I got back to the flat around 3:30 p.m and had some pot noodles. Pot noodles are essentially the UK version of ramen noodles. They come in a tall plastic cup instead of a plastic bag, and the only preparation needed is to add boiling water. Pot noodles, like ramen, come with a flavor sachet. The pot noodle sachet is a concentrated liquid though, instead of a powder. The "Original Curry" was sinfully good and came with a mango flavor sachet. If Original Curry was sinfully good, then Beef and Tomato was something else entirely. Pot noodles were simply too good for me to care about the complete lack of nutrition, and I ate them more often than I should have. Like most food items with preparation times that are under 60 seconds, pot noodles were a guilty, unhealthy pleasure.

That night I remembered that I had to give Laura Postlethwaite, the secretary of the mountain walking club, eight quid before the end of the following day if I were still going to join the UMWC on their camping weekend later that month. Laura, in addition to having a last name that I had never encountered before, was a petite, quiet, and bespectacled second-year chemistry student. She struck me as the intelligent type, but she was so quiet I could never be sure. I had not then entirely made up my mind as to whether I was going on the camping trip or not, but I

did not foresee having anything else to do the next weekend, and camping I knew was something that I had enjoyed in the past. But was I in for quite an experience the following week!

I ate my meal that night alone in the kitchen. Stacey and Kate were at netball, and my other flatmates were predisposed doing other things that would draw their presence away from what Liam would later dub "the kitchen of no judgment." Over the course of the semester I was amused to no end by the range of conversations that occurred within that kitchen, though such lively chatter was absent that evening. I have decided to exclude most of our banter from my recollections, not because I fear ridicule, but because I know that there is no way I could capture its charm. I made good time in cooking my chicken nuggets that night because I managed to escape the kitchen before Reece began preparing his nightly microwave meal. Even though the type of meal varied each day, Reece was amazingly consistent in that he ate microwave dinners almost exclusively the entire semester. I cannot forget, even now, the sound of Reece perforating the plastic cover of his microwave dinners with a fork. His vigorous attacks on his microwave meals probably were an outlet for his pent-up anger, I now realize. I did not know much about Reese then, but I later found out that he had overcome incredible disadvantages and had struggled with incredible obstacles to pursue his education. I bet Reece single-handedly kept ASDA's vile, microwavable rendition of beef lasagna from being torn from the shelves by their salespeople.

Though I often took great pleasure in our flat's top-notch kitchen banter, the one-person rooms were unequivocally one of the greatest benefits of Bangor's accommodation. The single rooms allowed an impressive degree of control over my level of desired social immersion. For example, if I desired to be relatively undisturbed I could, like Reece, shut and lock my door entirely. If I wanted to passively invite social interaction, I would put my door "on latch," allowing it to be opened from the outside. If I really wanted to socialize I would either head to

the kitchen or, more effectively, head to the end of the hall where Liam, Stacey, and Kate resided. These three relentless socialites usually had their doors open, and often would I hear the sound of their raucous merriment. Later in the semester we managed to pull Kyle the warden into our shenanigans, but for the first half of the semester he did not associate with us much. In fact, I rarely saw him come out of his room during the day, though I often heard him stumbling back into our flat with his elusive girlfriend after a night of clubbing. We later found out that she lived on the first floor of the back of our building; why he concealed her identity for so long, we really never knew.

14 October 2014: The lecture and seminar that I attended that day focused on, according to my notebook, “gender, authority, female consciousness, and the genre of the short story” in the context of the short story “The Yellow Wallpaper”. One of my two papers in QXE-1006 ended up being about “The Yellow Wallpaper.” Later in the class we discussed, at length, binaries in literature. Binaries are a critical point of deconstructionist literary criticism which happens to be one of my favorite schools of criticism. After classes were over, on my way back to Ffridd Site, I stopped by Morrison’s. There I purchased some toothpaste and anti-cavity mouth rinse to replenish my currently dwindling supply. They did not sell my favorite brand of mouthwash in Wales, and in fact the mouthwash I bought in Morrison’s had a strangely saline taste. In addition to dental care products, and far more important, I purchased a flu vaccine, something that I ascertained without a doubt to be worth the £8 charge. The very last thing I wanted to get while I was in the UK was the flu. Having only recently recovered from Fresher’s flu (not actually a strain of influenza virus), the last thing I wanted was to be sick again. Before being inoculated I had to complete a couple of risk-awareness forms, and afterward I was asked to remain in the store for ten minutes to ensure that I suffered no drastic side effects. I walked back to the flat easily enough after lingering in Morrison’s for the prescribed period. I read for a

couple of hours to stay current with assignments on which I was falling too far behind, and I took it easy for the remainder of the daylight hours. I did not want to put any unnecessary stress on myself or my immune system. To “take it easy” was one of many American colloquialisms—in particular, colloquialisms of the American South—that my flatmates did not at all understand. I would frequently need to backtrack when talking to them and explain what exactly it was I meant, an activity which I always found amusing.

At 8:30 I went to the Tap and Spile, the pub that sponsors the UMWC. Located close to the Bangor Pier, the pub was a good 30 minute walk away. While there I had a couple of non-alcoholic drinks while my fellow mountain-walking enthusiasts enjoyed not being underage, and I ate the free sandwiches that The Tap provides every Tuesday exclusively for members of the UMWC as part of the sponsorship agreement. The Tap also hosts a pub quiz every Tuesday, but even in teams of four and five the university students stood no chance against the locals. Unfortunately, neither I nor any of the other students had any idea which service station in Llandudno had been in operation since 1948. I paid my £8 fee for the camping expedition on Saturday.

I arrived back at Peris Hall around midnight. The walk from The Tap to the residence halls was no short journey, considering that the pub was located well past Main Arts. The walk was not terrible, though. The distance between Main Arts and The Tap was mostly a long stretch of private student accommodations, so there was very little risk of running into suspicious locals, and the distance from Main Arts to Ffridd site was a walk that at that point I had become well-acquainted with. When I arrived on college road I once again was in a definite safe zone, as the drunk college students going to and from Academi, Peep, and Revive—the three main nightclubs in Bangor—meant that there would be tons of witnesses should I have been mugged.



15 October 2014 Today, as with every Wednesday, I attended the lecture and the seminar sections of my Romantic Literature class. Both were enjoyable. Lecture was quite good because I find the Romantic Period interesting, and the seminar was enjoyable because we always had mentally stimulating discussions. Nothing passes the time quite like thinking of how best to answer a question so as to obliterate the competition. Unfortunately, though, I did not obliterate the competition as often as I would have liked—or very much at all, for that matter—because the competition happened to be a Polish postgraduate student named Paul who was both better-spoken and more well-read than I. When I arrived back at the flat I made pot noodles for lunch, yet again. It would probably be in my best interests to find a still efficient but more nutritious alternative.

For dinner I made pasta with cheese. It was not brilliant, and I made no attempts to make a cheese sauce. I simply grated cheese over the pasta and called it a meal, but still it was filling and probably less carcinogenic than pot noodles. Earlier in the day, I saw Kyle come out of his

room for a change as he went to Morrison's to buy some cider. The British, by the way, love their hard cider. That is not to say that they love beer less than we Americans, but that they love cider far more than we do. Kopparberg and Strongbow are the two most popular brands, but also the priciest. My flatmates kept the cheap stuff in constant supply for "pre-drinks" during their nights out.

A night out was something I had not experienced before, and I originally had nothing planned for the remainder of the evening. My flatmates practically begged me to go clubbing with them, and Wednesday being a particularly uneventful night for me, I obliged. I half expected to be turned away at the door because I lacked any kind of acceptable ID (I did not carry my passport that night), but the doormen were convinced enough by my student ID. The process was meticulously planned, like some sort of heist. The plan was that I would walk in front of the group, thereby projecting onto the guards my American sense of confidence, as well as to ensure that, should I be denied, we could all exit easily and find another place to spend the evening. The nightclub atmosphere was both interesting and unique, though it was about what I expected. There was music, there was dancing, and there were a lot of ridiculously trashed British people. And then there was me. Sober.

"Going for a night out" in our hall—and in any hall for that matter—was an ordeal from start to finish. The evening got its start long before anyone set foot in one of Bangor's three nightclubs. First there is the issue of wardrobe: what to wear and, more important, what *not* to wear. I had never been clubbing, and I had no clue what to wear. That inexperience turned out to be not much of an issue because the flat's fashion advice team, Stacey and Kate, was always on hand to assist me with my wardrobe. Second, pop music was essential when preparing to go out. It was in Wales that I learned to enjoy Taylor Swift's pop anthems. Haters gonna hate. Last,

“pre-drinks” are the next major component of any night out, and it is at this point in the evening that everyone—except moral, temperate, sober me—breaks out the cheap alcohol.

Entering the club was an exercise in deception—something that I try to avoid. Apparently I have a knack for that, too, because the doorman readily accepted my excuse for lacking an ID. I had never been in a club before, but I did possess a few preconceptions, holdovers from my time spent in Pembroke regarding the frequency of drug-use and stabbings. The three clubs in Bangor were nothing like my preconceptions, mostly because students were really the only people in town who ever went clubbing. Security was everywhere, especially in the bathrooms. They did not hesitate to throw people out, either. That night we went to Academi, the nightclub owned by the Bangor Student Union (a university sponsored nightclub is, I know, quite bizarre sounding to most Americans), which was arguably the safest in town. Whereas the other two clubs in Bangor were nearly all filled with students, Academi only allowed Bangor University students to enter, so crime was rare. Of course, safety was relative, and I judge the safety of Bangor’s nightclubs in relation to other dark establishments filled with intoxicated people. Prior to coming to Bangor I would not have been caught dead in such a place, and when I returned to the United States that part of me disappeared. But, while I was in Bangor “going for a night out” became a staple of my entertainment during the semester. And where initially I would absolutely not step foot on any kind of dance floor, I eventually let go of my reserved attitude and showed the world just how bad a dancer I really was. The doors closed at 2:30 a.m. when the staff herded out all of the drunk students for the night, and a wobbly procession marched their way back home. The first years and many internationals went back to Ffridd and the other students made their ways to their houses down the hill. Our flat’s group made it back around 3:00 a.m., having sung and danced our way up “Bitch Hill,” which is probably the steepest and most infamous hill in Bangor. Even faculty preferred to call the hill by

its unofficial name, rather than the actual name which no one seemed to know. When we got back we had buttered toast, which was another staple of our nights out. Everyone except me thought that it somehow alleviated hangovers, for I can come up with no valid reason why it might be true.

Though I woke up tired from the late night that I had the night before, but I made it to class on time and prepared. Of those of us that went out the previous night, I was the only person in my flat to make it to class in that morning. I miss class for nothing back home, and I planned on missing no classes while at Bangor, having only ever missed one class in more than three years of university back home. I was so very wrong.

17 October 2014 I woke up at 12 noon after a rejuvenating night's sleep. I washed my clothes for the week and went to Morrison's to pick up some food for the camping trip for which I would depart the following day. I was excited! I bought two cheese sandwiches, a bag of microwavable rice packets, and a bag of dried fruit. It was forecast to rain all weekend, which was unfortunate but not entirely surprising. I was in Wales, after all. I also picked up a few long-term items for my drawer in the flat kitchen. Among the things I purchased were things like salt, pepper, sugar, spices, and a small bottle of olive oil. The fact that until now I had none of those kitchen essentials should indicate just how little I had been eating, other than pot noodles and frozen pizza. In addition, and most excitingly, I bought a cafetiere, which provided an alternative to the instant coffee that I had been trying to gag down for the past couple of weeks. Cafetieres are fast and apparently the coffee that they produce is somehow superior to the coffee brewed with other methods. I did not find this to be true. The coffee that I tried to make was harsh and full of grounds. It was dark, too, and no matter how much milk I added, I would not take on the creamy tan color that I liked. I eventually went back to tea. Coffee was the one thing that I was glad to have when I got back to the States.

18-19 October 2014: These two days were occupied by the UMWC's "wild camp weekend." After the experience was over, and after many days spent trying to beautify the memory of the experience, I can safely say that I will never go camping again in my life. With all of my gear stuffed haphazardly inside it, my bag easily weighed 30 pounds, and on the first day we had to walk a distance well over twelve kilometers to get to our campsite. The walk was miserable, and it was unlike the previous hikes where the weather had been somewhat on our side. My legs ached and my clothes were soaked by a combination of wind and incredible humidity that somehow both was and was not rain. I could not feel the droplets, but somehow water penetrated my waterproof jacket constantly, and my boots were caked with the glue-like Snowdonian mud. The wind too, was absurd, easily the strongest wind I had ever experienced in my entire life. It was so strong, in fact, that it actually knocked people over on several occasions. My feet were indescribably cold. It took me nearly six hours wrapped in a tiny sleeping bag to warm up, during which time I got not a wink of sleep. As if the experience could not have been any worse, there was sheep shit *everywhere*. It was caked on my shoes, it was on the bottom of the tent, and unfortunately I sat in piles of it on more than one occasion. The only thing that could have worsened my experience would have been the misfortune of having terrible tentmates. I did actually have terrible tentmates, though. In my tent were a stupendously immature Scottish girl and an intensely annoying Londoner who made the crudest comments imaginable. He thought for some reason that because I was American, I had without a doubt an affection for cocaine, and despite my protests and disapproval kept trying to talk to me about it. Even worse than us being tentmates, he somehow left with the impression that we were friends, and from that weekend until the end of my time in Bangor I had to repress my distaste every time I saw him and pretend that we were on good terms. I went to bed that evening with a *severe* sore throat and sinus pain, neither of which, unfortunately, improved. I woke up in even more pain,

exacerbated by the lovely prospect of a five-kilometer walk to the extraction point. Indeed, I had never been so happy to see a pub. So happy, in fact, that I paid almost £5 for a half-pint of Coke.

The pub we stopped at was in a small town, and it differed very little from any other pub in the UK. Its similarity to other pubs was not a negative quality, and in fact the similarity is quite the opposite. The pub atmosphere is both unique and charming. I loved the oldness of those places and the people in them. Of pubs and their local patrons I would choose to use the word "weathered" or "well-aged." I wish I had the chance to hear what fascinating stories of adaptation and hardship those old pub-goers might tell if asked.

We hikers were all exhausted when we got to the pub, but the conversation was as enjoyable as usual. I was particularly amused by what was an unexpected moment of coordination between me and the French exchange student named Clara, with whom I had at this point become more acquainted. The annoying Londoner had just made an annoying comment that I cannot recollect, to which I replied "That's why we won the revolutionary war, asshole." There was a pause, after which Clara added "With a little help from the French." We both turned and engaged in an anti-monarchial fist-bump.

When I returned to Bangor, I slept almost the whole day of the 19th, yet I still felt worse. I decided that I would go see the doctor the following morning because whatever affliction I had might actually have been something serious that needed medical attention. Though it turned out I was still suffering from the lingering effects of fresher's flu, I felt really bad and was legitimately worried. Though I do not and hold the camping trip totally responsible for my sickness, I still vowed that I would *never* camp again. So far, that promise has held true. Whenever the thought of camping might enter my mind these days, all I need to do to suppress it is to think back to the trauma of that cold, wet, and windy weekend in October. How there exist people who actually enjoy that kind of needlessly self-inflicted hardship, I may never know.

20 October 2014 I had to miss my 9 a.m. class because I was so ill that I could barely drag myself out of bed. When I finally managed to do so, I felt so weak and my throat and sinuses ached so much that I became genuinely worried about my health. I went to the Bodnant medical center down the road from Ffridd site and made an appointment for the afternoon. Bodnant was a small house that had been repurposed into a general practitioner's office, and that day they were not under much pressure. I went on with my day and got through classes all right, though I was miserable. I had never had a sore throat quite that bad. My suffering was probably worsened by my self-imposed isolation. I did not want to spread my sickness to the entire flat, so I stayed confined to my room. When my appointment came at 3:40 p.m., the nurse informed me after a short examination that unfortunately I was still suffering the effect of fresher's flu, that it was a battery of viral infections, and that there was nothing that they could do about it. They advised me to seek symptomatic relief in the form of ibuprofen or paracetamol, the UK version of Tylenol.

I got in my bed around 10:00 p.m., feeling absolutely horrid, and woke up around 2 a.m. with such severe congestion that I was unable to breathe through my nose and unable to sleep at all. I was unable to sleep, and I was depressed and frustrated. It felt as if this flu was simply determined to put a damper on my study abroad experience. I called my grandparents at 2 in the morning, which meant that it was 7 a.m. in the States. I knew they were asleep before I skyped them, but they still picked up within the first couple of rings. I cried irrationally to them, and they understood. Unlike parents, grandparents do not jabber on about things getting better or any of that sort of nonsense. Instead they just listen, something far more useful. This journal is probably not the place to write at length about how important my grandparents are to me. No journal is, because I cannot express in writing just what they mean to me. I also cannot express in writing the crippling fear or the soul crushing anxiety that I feel when I think about their age,

their inevitable nearness to the end of their lives. After his nearly fatal aortic aneurysm, my grandfather said "Old Pepa will probably still be kicking thirty years from now." Yet we both knew it was a lie. I knew that he said those words only to make me feel better, a recognition that only amplified my sadness. I do not, and never will, deserve the way that my grandparents love me unconditionally, or the way that they always make time for me, or the way that they have always been a crucial part of my life. I always will be grateful for the way that they always would always answer my Skype calls from Bangor, regardless of the time in the States.

I finally fell into a light sleep around 3:30 a.m., only to be awakened by the shrill beeping of a fire alarm at 6:30 a.m. The fire alarm was not totally unexpected; Kyle had warned us that it would be one night that week, but he would not know what night it would be until the senior warden rang him the night of. I was hoping that the drill would be at the end of the week, giving me more time to recover from fresher's flu, but I had been preparing for the worst all week, and I kept a coat and a warm shirt draped over my navy blue desk chair. Of course, the drill did not happen at the end of the week. The upper half of Ffridd site filed groggily out of our buildings in the dark and made it to the Reichel car park, under the direction of wardens stationed every few feet. I was actually more amused than angry, standing out in the cold. Kyle, against the orders of his superiors, had warned our flat ahead of time, so we were all more prepared for the drill than were our friends in the flats above and below us and in the buildings adjacent to us. The other students clearly were not given any sort of advanced warning. Some were still drunk, and some had drinks in hand; all were in various stages of undress; and I guessed, rightly, that some overnight guests were inconvenienced as well. After standing out in the cold for a few minutes, Kyle informed us that the back block of Peris had passed our drill, and would not have another until next year. The requirement for passing was to evacuate every room in a certain block in under three-and-a-half minutes. I was very glad the drill was over, glad that I would not have to

repeat the process. Many of the students from the other halls were not so lucky. If a group failed their drill, then they had to suffer through another one between 2 and 5 a.m. at a future, unscheduled date. The misery would have to be repeated until everyone was evacuated in under 210 seconds. Rumor had it that the record for failures was eight in a row. I did not envy those people!

21 October 2014: By October 2, I had been given all of my essay questions, with a minimum of 5,500 words to write in the space of about three weeks, as well as a ton of novels to read. I feared that my days of regular journaling were at an end for a while, and I did not record much during those days where I was locked in my room reading journal articles and critically reading my primary sources. I wrote three essays for midterms. For QXE-2020 I wrote a well-constructed essay titled "Natural Beauty and Sublimity in the Poetry of William Wordsworth." For QXE-1006, a first-year class where expectations were relatively lax, I wrote a shoddy paper titled "A Vindicated Woman: The Emancipation of Female Discourse in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper'." For QXE-2027 I put together a very well done analysis of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* titled "'Overwhelming Question[s]': Conrad's Use of Modernist Devices in Heart of Darkness." Quite obviously I had drawn inspiration from my previous readings in making catchy titles for my essays. As I have said, there was little essay guidance offered to me or my peers at Bangor. The lack of any kind of in-class essay review was one major difference between Bangor and UNCP. Another difference was the lack, even in my first-year module, of any kind of guidance where grammar or citations were concerned. We were given a short handout detailing what not to do in a scholarly essay and another handout detailing MHRA citation conventions. That was all. My writing did not change significantly, though; I feel that, had my classes in Bangor instead been offered to me at UNCP, I would have produced similar work.

22-30 October 2014: During this time, I was absolutely swamped with work. I had three papers to write, and an incredible number of books to read on top of those papers. Just because we had papers to write did not mean that our reading load was lightened. Being a humanities major in the UK requires no small amount of work.

On an administrative note, I decided by late of October to stay only one semester, and I am fortunate enough to have had the support of my international advisers both at home and in Bangor. My reasoning for coming home early was that, first, I would be putting myself about nine credits behind if I stayed the whole year, and second, that it would not be financially justifiable to spend an extra semester in Wales without making academic progress. I am absolutely confident now that I made the right academic decision as well as the right personal decision. It would be foolish to spend so much money and time to only be picking up electives. Whether the decision was the right one in terms of what I truly wanted in the moment, I still do not know. I suspected at the time that I would regret the decision once I was back home, but I kept reassuring myself by saying that I would return to Europe in the future. I did know that I would miss my flatmates when I left; they were sadder than I expected them to be when I told them that I was leaving in December instead of in May.

For a while after I returned home from Wales, I was sure that I had made the wrong decision, but I am now sure that when I decided to spend only a semester abroad I had just made the single most important decision of my academic career. Had I stayed in Bangor for the Spring semester, I would not have taken cell biology. Had I not taken cell biology in the Spring of 2015, I would never have been given a flyer by Dr. Woriak for the UNC Charlotte BITURE REU summer research internship. I would not have been competitive for RISE, a research program at UNCP. Ultimately I may never have even applied to Cornell University, and I certainly would never have made it to the interview stage. Now, as I prepare to move to Ithaca

in the Fall to pursue my PhD in cell and molecular biology, I realize that my decision to leave Bangor was the right one.

Thursday I participated in one of the most interesting English lectures I have ever had the pleasure of attending. Stephen Price, one of the lecturers for "Literature and Modernity" was lecturing on T.S. Eliot's *The Hollow Men*, a modernist poem about Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Plot. What made the lesson interesting was that Stephen turned it into a drama in which the whole class could participate. The class read the italicized bits of the poem (meant to be spoken by a crowd), and Dr. Price read the parts spoken by the Guy Fawkes effigy. As if an in-class poetry recital wasn't interesting enough, Stephen pulled a Guy Fawkes mask out of his briefcase and wore it while he read his lines. He read on:

Between the conception

And the creation

Between the emotion

And the response

Falls the shadow

And our class of around 20 people read together, "*Life is very long—*" Dr. Price continued:

Between the desire

And the spasm

Between the potency

And the existence

Between the essence

And the descent

Falls the shadow

The class joined together to read the next line, "*For Thine is the Kingdom.*" Dr. Price read his final three lines: "For thine is / Life is / For thine is the," and the class finished the poem's final chilling lines together:

This is the way the world ends

This is the way the world ends

This is the way the world ends

Not with a bang but a whimper. (Eliot 70)

31 October 2014 Initially, I did not have any plans for Halloween, but my flatmates convinced me to go out with them. I saw no harm in this, and no harm came of it. I was mostly done with my essays by this point, and I figured that I had plenty of good reasons to celebrate. I did not have a costume, nor did I have the time to go out and buy one. It was already after 6 p.m. when they asked me to go out, and most shops close at 5:00. I did, however, have a labcoat from the biology department that I used to make a hasty doctor/scientist costume. My quick costume was not going to win any awards, but Halloween clothes were not among the many things I packed before coming to Wales. Kyle was dressed as a ninja, Liam wore a skintight orange Lycra bodysuit, and basically every girl in Bangor was either a nurse, a cat, or a witch. My flatmates initially wanted to go to Peep, an older nightclub in upper Bangor. Despite having a name synonymous with strip clubs and vile Easter confections, I assure you that it was just a generic nightclub. That night, there was a two-hour long queue, and we were at the back of it when the doors closed at 1 a.m. In front of us in the Peep line was a student in a dinosaur onesie—how unique but odd, I remember thinking.

After leaving Peep we joined the throng of disappointed partygoers and walked downhill. To say that we ended up in Revive, a small nightclub with a reputation as the place where people went when all the other clubs were full, would be very accurate—our flat's motto on nights out

was that we would “see where the night takes us.” Despite having to spend our night out in the third-choice spot, we still had fun. I had never seen so many variations of nurses, cats, and zombies in my life. Fake blood and cleavage was the name of the game for these people. Kyle, dressed in his ninja outfit, disappeared almost as soon as we got in. I left early with a few of Stacey’s friends and went home for the night. Everyone else came home around four, making all kinds of racket, except for Liam and Kyle who did not make it back until the following morning. They were both “occupied” in different parts of town, they said.

The entire next day I was totally useless. I was in another one of my temporary but frequent slumps, where I was stuck between two distinct reasons for being sad. I was homesick, but I was also now reeling from the realization that I was already halfway through my time in Bangor. My depression was relieved that evening when Kim, Kyle, Kate and I went to a flat party on the first floor of our hall that ended up being a good time, and a good way to forget my sadness. The students there had repurposed their kitchen into a dance floor by covering the light sensors on the ceiling, adding a few strobe lights, and using a Bluetooth speaker to provide the music. As warden, Kyle technically had a responsibility to shut down such a party. It was definitely too loud down there, and the maximum occupancy of the kitchen was definitely exceeded. He did not shut them down though; his only commission was that he could drink what he wanted of the first floor’s alcohol. Perhaps it was not what he should have done as warden, but in some strange way I respected him for his willingness to bend the rules to have a good time. He was good to have around. He was more mature than the first-years who comprised the majority of Peris, and yet he did not rule with an iron fist like some of the other wardens.

The next day I actually managed to get a small amount of work done. I was still feeling terribly behind, but that feeling was not new to me. Basically every semester I have spent as an undergraduate I have felt more or less this way. My workload situation was starting to look less

grim. As I thought about the 5500 words I had been required to write for my first set of papers, I realized that 5500 word was not much at all. By the beginning of November I had already written almost 10,000 words in my journal alone—put another way, nearly double what was required for the essays in my classes.

November 4 marked another successful Tuesday Social and pub quiz at the Tap and Spile with my now good friends from the UMWC. There were, as I have already mentioned, a lot of good people in the club. Andrew the president was a nice guy, as were the other officers with whom I had become quite friendly by this point. Had I stayed in Bangor another semester I probably would have applied to be an officer myself. It never failed to amuse me how my British friends and I could talk seemingly endlessly about the trivial differences between our two home countries. That night, it was candy bars that Andrew and I talked about. He fervently disagreed with me over the contents of Mars Bars in America, while I bashed the Aero Bars that are so beloved by the British. Aero bars are made of aerated chocolate and are absolutely overrated.

Andrew and others approached me two or three times now about leader and navigation training. Unfortunately, I had to continue to turn down their invitations, and I would not have the opportunity to lead any hikes now, as I would be leaving in December. I must admit I was not too broken up about that. Frankly, leading a group of clumsy students up the rocky side of a potentially slippery and danger-ridden mountain sounded stressful. On the other hand, I was told by Freya, another of the officers, that people in the UK did not have the same affection for litigation that people in the US do. For the rest of the night at the pub I talked with James and another officer, Amish, about American television. Amish was, it turns out, a huge fan of my favorite show *Frasier*. James had not seen it much, but like all British people he was a huge fan of *Friends*.

In some ways I regret not spending more time with the Mountain Walking Club. They were definitely more my speed, and I got along more naturally with them than I did with my often immature flatmates. Raymond B. Huey, a professor at the University of Washington, writes in his essay *On Better Science* that, "First and most importantly, spend time with people who are excited about what they are doing and who are productive... excitement and productivity are infectious" (297). Though my study abroad experience did not teach me how to do a Western Blot or to use a centrifuge, it did teach me autonomy among many other important life lessons. I think that those lessons would have been better learned—more efficiently learned—had I spent more time among productive and mature friends. My friendship with my flatmates, though it was fun at the time, ultimately yielded few long-term benefits. To future study abroad students, quoting Huey I suggest that one avoids "people who are... complaining, and unproductive" (297).

It was raining heavily on the way home, and I got drenched. As I heard the door to my flat click closed, the thought crossed my mind that perhaps I made the wrong choice in deciding to come back to the United States early. I liked that click, just as I liked living in Bangor, but even then I knew academically it would have been a terrible decision to stay. I steeled myself. There would be no going back now; I would have been absolutely mortified if I had to reverse my plans on Mr. Griff-Owen again. Instead of embarrassing myself and making myself out to me a total flake, I resolved to enjoy the time that I had left in Bangor.

On November 5, the British celebrate Bonfire night, which marks the day that they foiled Guy Fawkes's gunpowder plot. The fireworks were not nearly as explosive or spectacular as what I was used to in America. Even my tiny town of Hamlet, North Carolina, puts on a fireworks show twice as explosive as the one I viewed that night. Still, I enjoyed the show and I was in good company with the UMWC, except for the loud freshers who had shown up in large

numbers for the party and yet had been mostly absent during our hikes. I realized then that I should reign in my criticism of the first years. Who was I to point out their immaturity? After all, I was probably younger than most of them.

We viewed the fireworks from Roman Camp, a hill near Main Arts that turned out to be a well-hidden gem of a vista that afforded spectacular views of Bangor and Anglesey. The fireworks were being set off from all the way over at Bangor pier, but we got a decent view from our elevated position. Andrew bought sparklers for the club with his own funds, but went for the quantity-over-quality approach. The sparklers were the cheapest available and unfortunately barely fizzled, much less let out any kind of sparkle. One of the officers, Dan, discovered that four of five of them together burned brightly. Another officer, Rhodri, seeing that everyone was disinterested in the fireworks, bundled up the remaining sparklers, set them all off, and chased Andrew around the perimeter of Roman Camp, much to the amusement of us all.

Some of us core members went down to the Tap and Spile after the fireworks ceased, and found that it was jam packed with locals. We found a free table near the back after some searching around, and I made small talk with a fellow English major named Peter who was in one of my classes. I am not in the habit of taking things, but I could not resist nicking a Guinness pint glass from The Tap that night. Now *that* will be a nice souvenir to return to the States with, I thought. I got back to the flat from the Tap after a brisk walk home. I was alone and there were probably lots of locals out and about that night, so I walked quickly. I went in my room, put down my wallet and my coat, and I walked into the kitchen to wash my prized new glass. My larceny did not go unpunished for long. I left my key in my room and, thinking that I put my door on its latch, turned on the sink and began washing. Only then did I hear my door click closed; I was locked out, again. I had to call security to open my room door, as I did every time that I locked myself out. Kyle has been around most of the times I have locked myself out,

and though he always had a good laugh with the security guards who he knows from his appointment as a warden, I never received a discount for being his acquaintance.

6 November 2014 Another successful day of classes. Though I neglected to actually read *Mrs. Dalloway* due to time constraints like flat parties, fireworks, and other obviously very important duties, it turns out that the points I raised in our seminar were well-received. I cultivated some familiarity at UNCP with Woolf's life and work, and it turned out that I had enough information to make it appear that I did actually read *Mrs. Dalloway*. I was actually one of the few people who answered any of Dr. Price's questions that day, and I suspect only a couple of people had touched the book.

The day stopped being good when the halls office informed me in no uncertain terms that no, I couldn't nullify my residence contract and that, yes, I would have to pay them in full whether I was in my room or not. The only way I could get out of the deal would be to find a private tenant for my room and defer payment to them. In British terms, the situation really took the piss. As it turned out, though, Rachel Pilkington, a friend of Stacey's, moved into my room when I left and did not leave me or my parents responsible for close to a \$3000 bill.

7-10 November 2014 Classes finished yesterday, and I had until November 17 to relax and enjoy reading week. All my essays were due on Friday, however, so the week was not exactly stress-free.

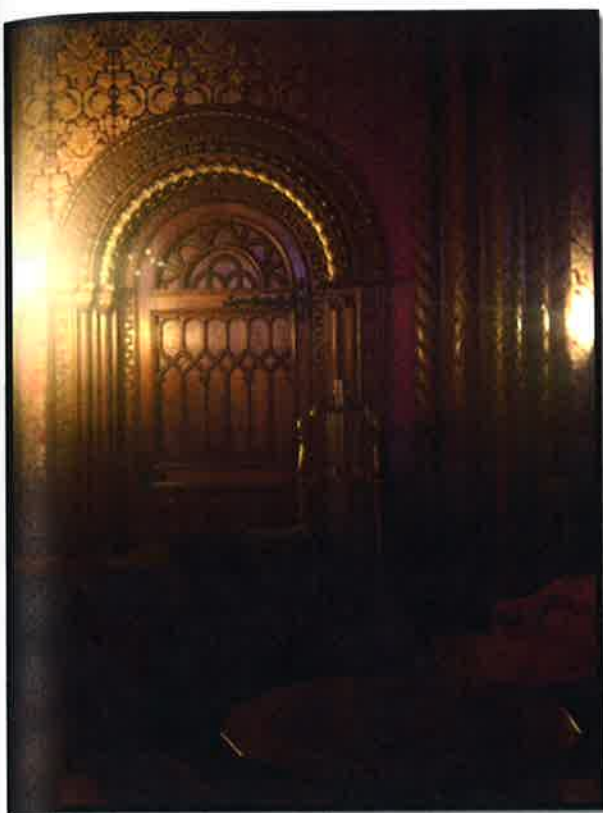
I went to Penrhyn Castle on Saturday with Sara, whom I had not seen in a while and who also wanted to get out and tour the castle. Penrhyn is not technically a real or very historical castle; it is actually a very large stately home built by a very rich Victorian on top of the ruins of a fifteenth century castle. It does look like a castle in every sense on the outside, but it is luxuriously furnished on the inside instead of being built for defensive purposes. All of the tours of the inside of the castle were booked, but luckily one of the ladies working in the gift shop was

kind enough to give to us two free tickets. I purchased a cappuccino—my coffee drink of choice—and a piece of carrot cake, which was quite good, at the castle coffee shop while we waited on the tour to start. Sara ordered hot chocolate and Victoria sponge cake, a British favorite that reminds me of cornbread with jam and cream in the middle.

The tour started around 1:30, and we entered the castle through the kitchens. Though parts of the large kitchen areas were visible, the majority of the servants' quarters were closed for cleaning and restoration. The furnishings in the areas that were occupied by the Penrhyn family and their guests were incredibly opulent, and I do not think I have ever seen such exquisite wall decorations. Every beam, wall panel, and brick was luxuriously and uniquely decorated. Apparently it took an Italian craftsman 10 years to construct the central staircase alone. Even the wall "paper" was made of French silk panels impeccably fastened to the wall. The room where the medieval castle stood was furnished entirely with ebony-wood furniture, and the floors and fireplace both were fashioned from polished black slate quarried at Lord Penrhyn's own mining operation on Anglesey. In Lord Penryhn's sitting room, there was a lovely painting of two Toulouse geese, several pieces of furniture that I am sure were priceless and ancient, and a large window that would have, in Penrhyn's day, provided him with a view of his slate quarries on Anglesey. Penrhyn made most of his money, by the way, from those quarries and also from his sugar plantations in the Caribbean. Apparently, the staff these days has to meticulously clean everything during the winter, which explained why some of the rooms were sadly inaccessible to us that day and on the rest of the winter tours. The volunteer cleaners were well trained, only allowed to dust things with cotton balls wrapped around small wooden sticks, and forbidden from directly vacuuming any surfaces. Instead, they use an extremely low-power vacuum, and then only when they first place a gauze-like cloth over the surface they wish to clean. Such meticulous cleaning practices make certain that the historical furnishings of

penrhyn Castle are preserved almost indefinitely.





10 November 2014 I woke up around 9:00, feeling groggy for some reason. Apparently my morning face was not pretty that day, because I remember Stacey remarking, when I entered the kitchen “Not looking too fresh today, Ethan.” I went back to my room and fixed my hair to make myself look less homeless and then walked down to College Road and bought a stack of warm pancakes at the local creperie. Though the business owner advertised his establishment as a creperie, I suspect the French students might disagree. I ordered pancakes with orange slices, nutella, and ice cream, and I bought a small bottle of orange juice for my drink. The pancakes were both delicious and worth the time I invested in them by walking from Ffriddoedd site. I considered going into Morrison’s because it was, after all, a short walk from the creperie. Ultimately I decided again going to Morrison’s. I did not lack anything back at the flat and it would have been a waste of money. In hindsight maybe I should have gone to Morrison’s that day. Perhaps I would have bought those Scotch eggs I kept meaning to try but never did. In

general, it is a good idea to make a habit of saying “yes” rather than “no” over the course of a study abroad experience.

11 November 2014 I almost forgot that my hair had not stopped growing when I left America, until I was reminded of that detail when my hair began to look unacceptably shaggy. So I walked down to College Road for the second day in a row and bought a haircut at “Lads and Dads Barbers,” near the intersection leading to Main Arts. The cut was only £7.50—cheaper than most barbers in the United States even with the currency conversion not in my favor—and the girl who trimmed my hair did a decent but not spectacular job. I had actually been attempting to get a haircut for the past week but, until that day, the barber shop was closed every time I passed by. I do not think Lads and Dads actually had standard hours.

Other than getting a trim, I worked on my remaining papers all day. I was very ready to get all of my papers finished so that I would have time to enjoy myself more. In reality, I was enjoying myself even with the stress of paper-writing looming over my head, but as usual I required something to complain about. In fact, I am sure that the majority of my academic accomplishments have been the result of the stress that those assignments inflict on me. For better or for worse, I have always found that I work better under a lot of pressure. Over the summers or over a break, for example, I accomplish relatively little because my workload is light. During a semester or during an academic program like an internship, though, my workload is dramatically increased, yet I accomplish more. To some extent, I learned this truth about myself while I was in Wales and since then, I have attempted to enroll myself in opportunities that occupy a significant portion of my free time. I simply like the feeling of being productive.

12 November: Another long day of working on papers. That day, I remember, was particularly rough, as I had mostly citation checking and proofing left to do, a procedure that is as mechanical and repetitive as it is detestable to me, and unequivocally the most unpleasant

stage of academic writing, in my opinion. To be frank—in the field of English, at least—most secondary research is very subjective. Combing through secondary sources for valuable quotes with which to support an argument was never a fun exercise for me. Just once, I thought as I slogged through my secondary sources, I would have enjoyed being able to execute a close reading of a book without worrying over the opinions of other scholars, even though I realize that such a thought flew in the face of everything I had learned in my English classes. The frequent lack of unambiguous empirical answers in the humanities has often conflicted with my love of the sciences, but I have learned over time to embrace those discipline-specific differences. Though at the time I hated having to drag myself through the mire of secondary literature, I would not say that engaging in critical discourse is unimportant, for secondary reading is necessary if one wants to acquire an idea of the broader scholarly context of a work of literature.

13 November I finally had finished all of my papers! What a relief; now all I needed was a printer. I did not have one, but Stacey did. I told her I needed her printer, and she allowed me to use it to print my three papers. I did not tell her initially that I needed to print close to twenty-five pages with works cited and cover sheets. She seemed annoyed, so I gave her £2.5—10 pence per page seemed like a decent rate. While I printed my assignments, Stacey and Kate were huddled together watching *Gossip Girl*. When they were not doing assignments or partying, they could usually be found in their rooms watching the most terrible shows imaginable. Atoms might be well over 99 percent empty space—a fact that truly baffles me—but the TV show Stacey and Kate were watching seemed to me to be far more devoid of substance.

For some reason, Bangor requires both a physical copy and an electronic copy of any submitted essays. The physical versions include a personalized, perfunctory coversheet printed

off from MyBangor, Bangor's version of BraveWeb. The coversheets are essentially a piece of paper covered with an unintelligible mess of barcodes that, I'm told, mean something to the essay markers. In addition, the coversheets ensure that all work is submitted anonymously, and only student ID numbers are allowed to be included on the final draft of a paper. I suppose the anonymity is meant to eliminate any grading biases.

I submitted my printed essays around noon Thursday, one day before the Friday due date. I wanted to avoid the rush of students that would inevitably swamp the small administrative building next to Old Main where we English majors were directed to submit our written assignments. Nestled in a complex of small, very similarly constructed administrative houses located to the left of Old Main facing the pier, it took me a while to find the right building. I tried several doors and wondered if campus security noticed me. When I finally found the right building, it was deserted. In Bangor, though there was an online submission form, the primary way of submitting an essay was to drop it into an old-looking wooden dropbox. Regardless of whether I got good or not-so-good marks on my essays, I thought, dropping the copies into the box took a huge burden off my shoulders. Still, I could not help but worry over the fate of my essays. I did not completely disregard the possibility of a heist, or of some as of yet unknown foe sabotaging my essay. It seemed more realistic that my cover sheet might fall off—staples can be fragile. None of this actually happened, mind you.

After submitting my papers, I began walking back toward Ffriddoedd site. The air was sweeter and where before I might have thought that the wind whipped my face, this time the wind caressed it. I saw two fellow English majors on the way home, Francesca and Eleanor, and asked with genuine interest how their day was going rather than give a distracted nod or an impersonal wave. First I passed Main Arts with the ugly English wing protruding from the older building like some kind of cancerous growth. Every time I passed the English wing, I disagreed

in my head with whomever decided it would be a good architectural decision to attach that brutalist monstrosity onto the side of such a beautiful building. I passed the linguistics department, a two-story house that was probably student housing at some point. The linguistics department was where, during our first week, we had to obtain our course registration information. I then passed the student housing on college road, where the lucky second and third year humanities majors lived. I say that they were lucky because their walks to class were but a minute or two and over flat terrain. Finally I came to the intersection where the left path went to Ffridd site and the right path lead to more student housing and a Paddy's Pub. If one followed the road to the right for a longer distance, one would end up at the Menai Bridge roundabout. Roughly the first half of the distance from the intersection to Main Arts lacks a sidewalk on the left side, and choosing to walk that path usually incites angry honks from drivers. I walked on the left anyway, as did many other students from whom I initially got the idea because it was a little bit quicker. The sidewalk on the right side of the road (facing the intersection, that is) often got congested on weekdays. Especially troublesome and hard to get around were the cliques of distracted Asian students who walked carefree and slowly to class.

For lunch I stopped at a Chinese takeaway on college road adjacent to Lads and Dads, called Ying Wah. On the inside, the place was a complete dive. I do not think the owners once cleaned it during my time in Bangor. That day was the first time I had gone there, and at first I had my doubts. From that day forward, though, I was a regular. Despite looking on the inside like it belonged in the red-light district of Hong-Kong, the food turned out to be delicious and just as Americanized as typical American Chinese food. Whenever I bought takeaway from Ying Wah I would invariably order the special chow mein with a side of their sinfully greasy spring rolls. The total, usually around £6.50, meant that eating there frequently was no great expense. I could usually make two meals out of one order of chow mein, which meant that I was

really only paying £3.25 per meal. About the only way I could beat that price with store-bought food would have been to eat something super cheap like pasta or rice. Stacey and Kate argued that they could make better chow mein themselves, and for less money, but I seriously doubt that they paid much below £6.50 for their ingredients. Their chow mein also lacked the signature greasiness and the flavor from Ying Wah that I knew was obtainable only from a well-used, not well-cleaned, wok.

I would be robbing Stacey and Kate of much deserved praise if I said that I was not impressed by their cooking. In fact, they fared much better than I did when it came to making meals for themselves. Where frozen pizza was always my staple, they made an effort to eat full, healthy meals for at least a couple of nights a week. I rarely saw them resort to the microwave meals that I would occasionally fall victim to and without which Reese would not have been able to survive. Stacey and Kate's strategy was to share the expense and the labor of making meals. They would make dinner for two, with Stacey usually handling the prep and cleanup and Kate usually doing the cooking. Stacey had a fear of being burned and refused to take anything out of the oven.

Stacey and Kate were not the only ones who fared better than I in cooking for themselves. Excluding Reece, who operated only the microwave up until the last few days of my stay when he surprised me by agreeing to assist me in preparing a genuine full English breakfast, everyone in the flat—including myself, actually—were experts at cooking boxed pasta. Never, after the first week, was a single strand of spaghetti or a single piece of shell pasta over or undercooked in our flat. Pasta was always a staple, even for Stacey and Kate. They were all British university students, and if they knew how to do two things right, those two things were cooking pasta and getting intoxicated, usually during the course of the same evening. After reading week, poor Liam ate pasta almost exclusively. He bought a giant bag of it from TESCO

towards the end of the semester. During the last month of our time at Bangor, Liam had only 60 pounds to survive on. Somehow, inconceivably, he succeeded in stretching his 60 pounds to the very end of the semester by eating a diet of entirely pasta, often with no sauce at all, and pilfering free booze from his football mates. Kyle, too, often made pasta; unlike Liam, Kyle made big batches of pasta out of laziness—he would often prepare enough to last four or five days. Unfortunately, Kyle often forgot about his large pots and pans, making them a major contributor to the nostril-assaulting aroma of our flat's kitchen.

I have to mention how unreasonably worried I was about the essays I submitted on Thursday. The teaching style was very hands-off in Bangor, and in all of my classes so far I had received at most twenty minutes of essay guidance, which was really not much at all, considering that entire weeks are devoted to essay writing and revision at UNCP. Papers are also marked, in part, based on their correct usage of the British MHRA citation style, the predominant style in the UK. MHRA was very different from MLA, totally alien to me and intensely frustrating. I was fairly sure my citations were absolutely terrible. I just hoped that my seemingly terrible butchery of MHRA would not sink my desired A grade. In terms of content, though, I was satisfied with what I wrote. My paper on Wordsworth was, in my opinion, good in both content and form. My paper on Charlotte Perkins Gilman was, admittedly, not my best work. I felt that my grade on that essay would still be good, though, because it was an assignment for a first-year class. Finally, my paper on Conrad may have been one of the best short papers I had ever written. In terms of content it was on par with a few of my other good essays from the past, but in the way it was worded it was very good. I have included the introduction of my Conrad paper below, because I still am proud of it:

Heart of Darkness, written by Joseph Conrad and first published in 1899, falls slightly outside of the time period that most scholars define as modernist. This is

perhaps a salient example of the inefficiency of literary taxonomy rather than a case of the shortcomings of the novel, however, as *Heart of Darkness* is steeped in modernist devices and language. The novel may even be thought of as a harbinger of the works of later modernist authors like T.S. Eliot in its seemingly preemptive usage of distinctively modernist tropes including alienation, the dynamic movement through space and time, imperialism and imperialist critique, and the fragmentation of narratives and language. In this essay I will argue that, through its usage of modernist devices, *Heart of Darkness* is ambiguously framed both in language and in narrative, and that the result of this framing is a novella which succeeds in capturing the wavering essence of modernity, but ultimately fails to arrive at any distinct conclusion concerning imperialism, due primarily to its somewhat tenuous grasp on reality.

Though I was confident of my paper's language, and though looking back I am less confident, it would be content ultimately that would determine my grade, and I hoped Dr. Price would refrain from thinking of the essay, in his own words during a lecture, as "a bit crap."

Originally, my flat had planned to go on a night out and celebrate the end of our first round of assignments on Friday, but we moved the occasion up to Thursday. We reasoned that a Thursday night out would be cheaper than a Friday night out, when Academi would hike up the prices of their tickets. Liam was running pretty low on funds at this point, so we did not want to make him spend all of his money. We went to Academi as we planned, the nightclub that is operated by the university. Paradoxically, Academi was the only place thus far—ever, actually—that had any reservations about accepting my student ID, but after a few well-constructed excuses for not having my passport and one confident American accent later, security ceased their questioning and let us in.

Academi was, in my opinion, an improvement over the two other nightclubs in Bangor: Revive and Peep. Revive was never anything more than a last resort, and in my experience Peep was just a little sleazy. Peep had a reputation for being unsafe on weekends because then the locals came out, but I never went there except on Wednesdays which were always a huge hit. Academi, because it was managed by the well-funded Student's Union, was frequently refurbished and about as safe as it possibly could be. Academi was by far the most popular club among students, and as an added bonus it was the closest club to Fridd—right at the bottom of Bitch Hill. Academi was always packed every night of the week—especially on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. That night's theme was inspired by the stock market; drink prices fluctuated based on demand, or something. What really was happening, I noticed, was that as the night wore on the prices simply kept increasing. Those of us from my flat arrived back around 3 in the morning. Buttered toast again. This was becoming a routine thing.

Hindsight, it is said, is 20/20. It has become increasingly difficult to rationalize my behavior in Wales. My study abroad experience was supposed to have been a cultural awakening, a time to discover new parts of the world, to go all over the UK and Europe using cheap RyanAir flights every weekend. Most weekends, though, I went on nights out with my flatmates: nothing culturally enlightening about that. While I maintain that my study abroad experience resulted in unparalleled personal growth, I do not think that those late nights of partying contributed in any meaningful way to that growth. It pains me to wonder what opportunities for personal growth I squandered. Still, I think there may have been at least one redeeming quality of partying with my flatmates every week. I felt less disconnected from college life than I ever had before; I felt as if, at last, I was just another university student. For so long I had been disconnected from that feeling, and to experience it for the first time in a foreign country amplified the novelty as well as my desire to immerse myself in university life.

I had planned to go to Anglesey the following day, but ended up waking up late due to the previous late night. I decided that Saturday was probably a better day to go anyway. I revised my plans slightly and researched the bus routes. Buses were not something that I was well acquainted with, having spent most of my life in places where bus routes do not exist. I spent the rest of the day reading. That week I was assigned to finish all of George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), and that was just for one class. Unfortunately, I never did finish Orwell's book, and I barely even reached the half-way mark. I was unexpectedly hit with sadness during a section of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, a section that reminded me how privileged I was to be sitting in my dorm room, 3,000 something miles from home. The section read:

If coal could not be produced without pregnant women dragging it to and fro, I fancy we should let them do it rather than deprive ourselves of coal. [...] It is only because miners sweat their guts out that superior persons can remain superior. You and I and the editor of the *Times Lit. Supp.*, and the Nancy poets and the Archbishop of Canterbury and Comrade X, author of *Marxism for Infants*—all of us really owe the comparative decency of our lives to poor drudges underground, blackened to the eyes, with their throats full of coal dust, driving their shovels forward with arms and belly muscles of steel. (30-31)

This new sadness was different from the homesickness that hitherto had been the primary source of my bouts of despair. I was now sad because Bangor had transitioned into a sort of new home to me as I realized painfully that reading week was over. The halfway mark of my time abroad had just ticked by, and in a few short weeks I would be returning to a home that now seemed almost as foreign to me as Bangor had seemed two months ago.

15 November 2014 I went to Anglesey on a Saturday. Sara joined me as well, and by this point we had become good friends. At the time I would have said, even argued most likely, that

travelling alone was inferior to travelling with a friend. My opinion on that would definitely change in Manchester, and it has only been reinforced as I have travelled alone more. I would not say, however, that I consider myself introverted or that I do not enjoy conversation. In certain situations I love interacting with other people. Though I very much enjoyed spending the day with Sara, I would later realize that travelling was to me a lot like reading a good book, walking alone in the woods, or standing in the halls of a cathedral. To be alone with my thoughts in an unfamiliar place, to experience things at exactly the pace I wanted to, and to cement in my mind images of my surroundings, uninterrupted, was an elevation of the experience of travel.

Following the advice of my flatmates rather than Google Maps, we took the 67 bus to Beaumaris, a quaint and touristy town located on a corner of Anglesey. Beaumaris has a view across the Menai Strait to Bangor in the east, and to the frigid Atlantic in the north. On the way to Beaumaris we crossed the Menai Bridge, an old suspension bridge reputed to be the oldest in Britain (or perhaps the world—I can't remember which). The arches of the bridge would have been an alarmingly tight squeeze for a small car, but for a large bus, the experience was terrifying. I was reminded of the roads and bridges in Bermuda, where as a pedestrian my life seemed to be perpetually in danger. We passed through the small town of Porthaethwy located directly on the other end of the bridge. Porthaethwy also looked like a nice place to shop; we then passed a several minute long stretch of hilly countryside that afforded a spectacular view of the Snowdonia Mountains with thick clouds obscuring their peaks. It was not hard on that day to understand why William Wordsworth recounted his experiences on Mount Snowdon in such sublime language in his 1805 *Prelude*.

The bus stopped at the Bulkeley hotel, essentially at the center of Beaumaris. The street is lined almost exclusively with cafes, clothing stores, and gift shops peddling local arts and crafts.

Beaumaris felt very old but also very much like a well-tended tourist attraction. I bought a few souvenirs myself, but my main interest was to explore and experience as much of Beaumaris as I could before daylight ran out. The town itself is actually older than the castle, but the castle is most likely the oldest structure in town, having been built around 1295 by King Edward I during his attempt to subjugate the indigenous Celtic people. From what I understood of Welsh history, the domination of the Welsh by the English was ultimately successful. Beaumaris Castle was our first stop. It was never completed, and is in the same disheveled state today that it was many centuries ago, especially when compared to the imposing Caernarfon Castle, another of Edward's fortresses. Despite the former's ruinous state, Beaumaris Castle was undeniably interesting, and while I walked over the ancient cobblestone pathways I tried to envision what it would have looked like in the early 14th century. Unlike Penrhyn Castle, a stately home built in the 19th century that looks like a castle only on the outside, Beaumaris castle was intended to be a functional military installation. That point was immediately apparent upon entering the gates. There was a wide and presumably deep moat around the castle that would render all methods of entry very difficult except through the retractable front gate. Should attackers make it over the drawbridge, they must first break the gate, which would be a bloody task in itself due to the aptly named "murder holes" located above. These fortified, longbow-sized slits in the wall allowed archers to rain death on their foes virtually unimpeded. In addition, there were grates on the upper floors that would have allowed the defenders to pour burning pitch on their enemies. As if one gate were not enough, an attacking force would have to brave the murder slits again upon reaching the gate of the inner ward. War, I thought, must have been pretty terrible in medieval times as it is today.

For lunch I had something colloquially called a lamb "oggie". Made fresh in the bakery from which I purchased it, it was delicious. From what I could tell, its filling was similar to that

of a shepherd's pie. Instead of the filling being put in a pie shell, however, it was contained in a savory pastry comparable to a croissant. The shape was roughly pillow-like. I also purchased a bag of ten welsh cakes—flat, locally popular pastries made with butter and raisins. The dough reminded me of biscuit dough but sweeter, and the cakes would have been infinitely more delicious to me had they not contained raisins. As I left the bakery I noticed a Maserati parked outside of one of the local shops. I am not a car person, but I was surprised to find such an expensive car around Bangor. Seeing a Maserati in Bangor was about as bizarre as it would be to see a Maserati in Pembroke.

After a lengthy self-guided tour of the castle and lunch, Sara wanted to do some shopping, and though I was not entirely amenable to the suggestion, I complied. We went to the ATM first so that she could withdraw British currency. I also got £50 from the ATM, just in case. Even after having my card locked, I usually preferred to carry as little paper money as possible. The first place we stopped was an upscale British clothing store called FatFace—a more ridiculous name I could probably not come up with. Though in recent months I have myself acquired more expensive tastes in clothing, I was not at the time very fashion-savvy and thus was bored. Sara either picked up on my boredom, or else was bored of my company, because she suggested we explore Beaumaris separately and reconvene around 3:30 p.m., or as the British prefer, at “half three.” Either way, I was glad that she suggested it because I was more interested in the larger picture, the buildings and scenery.

I went to the Bulkeley hotel first. It was very large, very posh, and I imagine was fairly pricy. Two large, wooden doors comprised the main entrance, preceded by a portico of impressive size and Victorian grandeur that extended almost into the street. Because the hotel was a historical location as much as it was a hotel, anyone could enter and tour the shared spaces, like the lobby, the ballrooms, or other social areas. In the spacious lobby area there was a lounge

for sitting, reading, or making conversation. There was a bar and a sturdy staircase leading upstairs. A hallway adjacent to the bar lead to the receptionist and the concierges' desks. A large stuffed mountain goat head equipped with a fake beard, top-hat, spectacles, and a tobacco pipe presided over the reception area. Further down the hall there was a souvenir cabinet that contained many interesting trinkets as well as a historic display about the Lusitania; at the end of the hallway were two ballrooms, a restaurant, and a café. I purchased a fine China mug as a souvenir and left the place, feeling satisfied with my use of time.

After giving myself the complete self-guided tour of the accessible portion of the Bulkely Hotel, I walked to the waterfront. Beaumaris has a great pier from which I could make out the Welsh mainland. The Menai Strait is actually not very expansive at all, and is nearly nonexistent at low tide. To my right was Bangor, and to my left stretched the North Wales coast, culminating in the Great Orme beyond which Conwy is located. The Great Orme is a large cliff that as an element of the landscape was beautiful; even the name seemed noble as well.





16 November 2014 As I recall, it was a fairly lazy and uneventful Sunday for the first half of the day. I got out of bed late and made a vain attempt to reduce how absolutely swamped with reading I was. There was the previous week's reading, which I wanted to complete to assuage my guilt, and then there was this week's reading which inevitably would suffer the same fate as last week's reading. At approximately 4 p.m. I started walking down to Morrison's, and on the way I ran into Kim and Stacey who had just finished up shopping and informed me that everything would have closed by 4, so in fact my walking down to Morrison's was pointless. I walked back to Peris with them, forced against my persistent objections to carry the majority of their groceries.

Stacey and Kim must have been feeling rather industrious because they took it upon themselves to cook for the three of us (plus Kim's boyfriend who made four of us and arrived around seven) a full roast dinner. For the American reader not well informed concerning Britishness, the roast dinner is unfamiliar but easy enough to comprehend. It is comparable to a

Sunday dinner in the U.S. South, the one difference being that Sunday dinners are, at least among my relatives, served around 1 p.m. after church, whether one actually goes to church or not. The British roast dinner is an evening thing, most of the time. The timing of our roast dinner was fortuitous for me. I do not think that I was even awake by what many would consider lunch time.

Yorkshire puddings were a compulsory part of the roast dinner, and these simple little gems of British cuisine deserve a full paragraph, in part because I suspect that I may not have the opportunity to use the term "gem" again when discussing any other examples of British cuisine. Yorkshire puddings are savory, approximately the size of a baseball, and made roughly into the shape of a bowl, yet the concave part in the middle is smaller. Their texture is rich, and the batter is made, I assume, with a lot of egg. Yorkshire puddings were an absolute staple of the roast dinner, in the way that biscuits are an absolute staple of any properly prepared meal in the Southern United States. These puddings, I should add to avoid confusion, in no way resembled what we call pudding in the United States. The best way to eat a Yorkshire pudding is to pour gravy all over it and prepare yourself for flaky, rich, eggy ecstasy. Those delicious little things are one of the few distinctly British food items that I really do miss.

In addition to Yorkshire puddings, the ideal roast dinner must contain some kind of vegetable. For us, the veg (the British prefer to shorten the word vegetable into veg instead of veggies) was a pre-packaged but still tasty mixture of carrots, parsnips, and leeks. The leek has a mild onion taste. Until the potato was introduced to Wales, the leek was their primary vegetable. The leek persists as a national symbol of Wales even into modern times, and apparently it is because of the leek that the background of the flag of Wales is white and green. Finally, the star of the roast dinner is the meat. Often this is some kind of beef roast, but we opted for the more economical option of chicken leg-quarters. Last, gravy is doused over the plate. I enjoyed the

dinner very much; it was one of the first full dinners I had eaten in Wales that I had not bought at a restaurant.

After dinner, Dan and I were forced to clean up *all* of the dishes that had been used in the preparation of the roast. It was not a fair deal. Sticking frozen vegetables and chicken legs in the oven simply was not as labor intensive as the work that Dan and I did. I never imagined that four people could produce such a mess. One of Stacey's bowls, a clear blue one, had been used to mix the instant gravy. The gravy was congealed, smelled unpleasant, and resisted the dish soap we used. When we finally had scoured the bowl, the dishwater had taken on the brown color of the gravy. Dan did not own any of the kitchenware, and none of mine was in the pile either, so we washed away without refreshing the sink. Thus the dishes were cleaned, sort of. They smelled of gravy when we finished with them.

Once the washing up had been finished and Dan's and my grievances about the whole situation were made known, we all played *Cards against Humanity*, a personal favorite card game of mine that is both hilarious and ridiculously politically incorrect. Our flat collectively had pitched in three quid the previous week to buy the deck, which came with 400 cards worth of racy hilarity. *Cards against Humanity* was and still is a hugely entertaining party game. We had been in the kitchen for a few hours and were carrying on and having a great time. The UK version contained several cards which were not present in the United States edition, such as "The bloody Welsh" and "Pronouncing the names of northern Welsh towns." The fun abruptly ended for me when I realized that, though I had come out of my room after going to retrieve my phone at the beginning of the meal, my room key did not come with me. I had to wait on security for almost an hour this time, as there was a medical emergency downstairs. An ambulance (welsh: ambiwlans) had arrived, and as I came back to the building the paramedics were in the process of carting one of the girls on the first floor out of the building. I never got the gossip on what was

wrong with her, but I did see her a few days later. It must not have been anything too serious, I concluded.

There were only seven of us in the flat for the next two weeks. Kate was doing something with her course in her hometown of Buckley, and she was staying there for a while. Stacey was particularly lost without Kate, and Liam and I only made things worse by constantly antagonizing her. Practical jokes were one of our flat's favorite past times, and they helped lighten the mood at least for me. Humor, as I have said, is important to maintaining a positive mental state both at home and abroad.

17 November 2014 Monday. Nothing particularly interesting happened that day, and that bothers me looking back as I find that I am able to use that phrase far too often. Classes went well. There was supposed to be a study group for my American Literature class at 4 p.m., but the Brits canceled, for what seemed the third week in a row. I was not at the time a huge fan of "study" groups, as it seemed that very little studying actually ever got done, if the group met at all. I would much rather have studied more efficiently while alone and then gone to a social event without trying to uphold the pretense of studying. The group meetings were technically a required part of the class, however, so I felt that by not holding regular study groups we were in a way not honoring our responsibilities as students.

My study group was made up of nice people, though they did seem to slack off a bit. One girl, Francesca, was a friend of Liam's and was in a relationship with Mike, one of Liam's football crew. "Franch" (as she was known to everyone) and Mike both were good people. Then again, that fact did not come as much of a surprise to me: I got along with almost everyone I made the acquaintance of there. It would be both easier and quicker for me to make a list of the people whom I did not like rather than the ones that I did. Another girl, Eleanor, was from

Manchester. In addition to being a perfectly unremarkable British person in every possible way, she sounded and reminded me of Daphne from *Frasier*, my all-time favorite TV show.

I impressed myself and my flat that night when I baked a delicious red velvet cake after borrowing or otherwise appropriating the necessary kitchen implements. I graciously treated my flatmates all to a piece, which they universally acknowledged was very good. Kyle ate two pieces of cake without a fork like some kind of savage. He remarked that the sponge was “exceptionally supple.” An offbeat choice of words, but I took it as high praise. Kyle and the rest of the flat seemed to think that I had been hiding some secret cake recipe up my sleeve. Because I attempt to practice honesty in all aspects of my life, I informed them that the cake was not anything fancy. It was simply made from a Betty Crocker brand box of cake mix, prepared exactly as directed on the box.

18 November 2014 Not a bad Tuesday by any means, though it appears that someone misinterpreted my offering of a *single* piece of cake. When I returned to the flat that afternoon, my beautiful cake that I had intended to be a treat for myself was nearly devoured. American Lit and the American Lit seminar were unremarkable, and I do not tend to go too crazy over the Imagist poets. I will not deny that Ezra Pound was a brilliant writer, however.

I went to the UMWC social around 8 p.m. The time of year had come where members were signing up for club-branded clothing, and I eagerly placed a clothing order with the UMWC. I ordered a softshell (some kind of snug fitting jacket) and a polo shirt. Apparently polo shirts were only available to officers, but they were willing to cut me some slack on this matter because I would never have the chance to wear it around anyone who was even aware of that rule. Embroidered on them are the Bangor University logo, the UMWC logo, my name, and the date of my membership. A personal inscription was optional, and I omitted it on the softshell. Egged on by my British friends into making a regrettable decision, however, I had the polo shirt

embroidered with a nickname I had acquired during my time abroad for absolutely no reason at all: 'Sexy American Beast.'

Once again, upon returning to the flat, I realized I was without my key. My carelessness was starting simultaneously to annoy and amuse me. I was counting my lockouts, and that was lockout number four—or five, if I counted the time my door actually broke during the beginning of my stay. That one was free of charge, at least because it was not my fault.

19 November 2014 I was endowed with a certain culinary ambitiousness that day. It was the kind of ambitiousness mixed with desperation that one might experience when frozen pizza dominated one's diet for two consecutive weeks. I went to Morrison's after class and purchased some supplies. I endeavored to make mussels for dinner, in a white wine and garlic sauce. Unfortunately I could not buy wine. This was not an issue at all because I lived with a bunch of rowdy college students who, though frequently lacking both money and food, rarely lacked alcohol. I used some of Stacey's wine. It was the cheapest white wine imaginable, but I suspect that it ultimately did not affect the end result too much. The mussels were alright; though cooked well, I did not know then that I was supposed to remove the beards before cooking. This made eating them slightly uncomfortable. Stacey, Kate, Kim, and Kyle had never eaten mussels and absolutely refused to try them. Stacey, for one, was not fully sure whether mussels were an organism or a part of an organism.

Afterward, I attempted to make biscuits according to the recipe my grandmother uses. They were edible but were not even close to what she makes. When I get back to the States, I decided, I would have to go and get properly trained in the art of biscuit making. After cleaning up the flour that now coated the kitchen from my failed biscuit making experiment, I found that I had locked myself out AGAIN. I had been completely sober every time, and each time became more and more amazed at my terrible ability to remember my key.

20 November 2014: I had a good sleep for a change, and I got up early for my 10 a.m. class. I had a coffee from the café in Main Arts. My morning beverage routine was beginning to be costly in the same way that it was back home at UNCP. Class was pleasant, as was seminar. After class, I hiked a short distance up to Roman Camp, which is a sizable hill located a short walk from Main Arts, and admired the view. From Roman Camp one can see the coastline of Anglesey from Porthaethwy to Beaumaris on the one side; facing the other way, one is granted a bird's-eye view of Bangor pier and lower Bangor, which is mostly a vast expanse of student apartments; over a tree-line and another hill it is possible to make out the imposing figure of Penrhyn Castle; beyond the castle looms picturesque Snowdonia, with its highest peaks robed in vapor just as the Romantic poets saw; and finally, to the left of Penrhyn, the Snowdonia mountains sloped gradually down to a bumpy coastline, eventually rising again into an imposing cliff at the Great Orme. In my line of sight there were peaks, valleys, jagged crags of rock, houses full of students, and pubs and clubs and shops. There were places I had been, places I had yet to go, and places I would never have the time to get to. It was a view that was complicated, intricate, and captivating, one that encompassed the whole of my experiences in Bangor.

I had planned to head back to the flat after taking in the landscape, but a trail leading off into the woods from Roman Camp caught my eye. The trail wound through a beautiful stretch of woods, which seemed both a good place to experience some natural scenery as well as a good place to get stabbed and cannibalized by a feral homeless person. The latter did not occur. I followed the trail until it ended in a small gate entering a row of apartments, right above the Bangor pier.

Since I was so close to the pier I figured I might as well walk down the street to it and get some lunch and a view. I walked onto the pier for the second time since being there, and it was

virtually deserted. The pier was sturdy in its construction, and it really was beautiful. I walked the length of the pier. I stopped about halfway back and looked out onto the Menai Strait, the surrounding land and the sky above me reflected in its shimmering waters. Standing there with scarcely any noise reaching my ears but the cries of the gulls and the lapping of the salt-water on the pylons of the pier, I enjoyed a few short moments of the deep sort of contemplation that strikes a person perhaps once in a week, flows in desultory rivulets out of no mental place in particular, is frustratingly imprecise, and is generally ephemeral. Moments like those, I noticed, occurred with a higher frequency while I was abroad, immersed in the newness of Wales. The moment was ineffable and impossible to recall accurately. Would that I could write more on the subject, yet I have no memory of what exactly my thoughts were then or if they were of any importance at all. The experience, put simply, was almost mystical.



For lunch, I stopped at the very same restaurant that I had visited upon first coming to the pier. I ordered Menai mussels that first time, but today I ordered Welsh rarebit. The name may sound like the dish contains rabbit, but it does not. Welsh rarebit is toasted bread loaded with cheese, and topped with sliced tomato. It was good, and as I was the only patron in the small food kiosk on the pier, the old Welshman who owned the establishment proffered to me, to my privilege, that rare breed of local wisdom that only octogenarians seem to possess. The conversation centered on no single topic, but it was clear that this man was very wise and I, being at least intelligent enough to recognize his sagacity, listened intently. Among other things, I learned that the pier was reconstructed in 1980 following an extensive restoration effort; the coastal area adjacent to the Menai Strait has the climate of northern Portugal, as it is warmed by the sea and sheltered on the windward side by the isle of Anglesey; and that the first donation to rebuild the pier came from the mayor of New York City. He also gave me a list of places to visit that I may not know about; indeed, I had not heard of many of them. Apparently there was a Neolithic barrow called (and I am frightfully unable to pronounce this) Barclodau'r Gwawres somewhere near a place called Cable Bay. He informed me of a bus stop near Cable Bay, which I definitely wanted to see before I left. Unfortunately, I never made it there. There was also an ancient and more intact barrow called Bryn Celli Ddu, which was two miles outside of a town with the strangely lengthy name of Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch. It sounded to me like the full name was some kind of cruel joke for those who could not master Welsh pronunciation. Most people simply called the place Llanfair PG. I did actually make it to Bryn Celli Ddu, and I am forever grateful to that old man for his advice. As a reminder of my time in Wales, I still carry in my wallet the scrap of paper upon which the old man scribbled the names of all the places he thought that I should visit.

After talking to the wise old man, whom I had not yet ruled out as being Merlin or some other legendary literary figure, I walked back to Ffriddoedd site via the city center route. This route was a longer but mostly flat journey past Aldi, Peep, and then Pontio, but it makes up for its flatness in the form of Bitch Hill which I had to climb to get back to Peris. I ran into Kim in city center and did not have to suffer the walk back to Ffridd in silence.

I made up for my pensive and potentially productive mood earlier in the day by going clubbing with my flat that night. We acquired Academi tickets on Ffridd site for a couple of pounds each, and the tickets included a voucher for a free t-shirt. The free t-shirts were available only at Varsity, another nightclub in upper Bangor that was a good distance from Academi. We caught a cab there, and since it was before 11 p.m., it was cheap (three quid each, split between Kim, Stacey, and me). My vote was still to walk, even if it was cold. The bouncers at Varsity meant business, but I managed to coerce them with my American charisma. How I managed continually to persuade security to let me in despite lacking any valid identification baffled me, especially since I am painfully aware in the States of just how much younger than my actual age I appear. Varsity was actually quite nice on the inside; it was a kind of hybrid between a club and a pub, with a dance floor occupying one half, a bar in the middle, and a pool table and a lounge on the other half. I acquired my shirt from a Student Union staff member. It was yellow, with "I love the noughties" printed prominently on the front, and above that in smaller type was the Academi "MilkShake" logo. Both of these things perhaps require a brief explanation. Thursdays at Academi (and Varsity, as the two were apparently associated with each other) were branded as "MilkShake" night. Now, the term had nothing whatsoever to do with the blended dairy treat, and from what I could best ascertain the name referred to the fact that the theme every Thursday was always something novel and different. The MilkShake themes were different from Mondays and Saturdays, which were invariably "Cheese Night" and "Students on

Saturdays.” Cheese night had nothing to do with cheese, in the same way that MilkShake had nothing to do with actual milkshakes. It instead referred to the fact that the club blasted cheesy music on Mondays, usually from the 90s and 2000s. The “I Love the Noughties” expression was a double entendre referring to the theme of that particular Thursday, which was the music of the early 2000s, though there was the obvious sexual implication as well. It was a neat shirt and perhaps the only evidence that I ever did anything substantially out of my norm while I was in the UK.

Anyway, the night progressed in a very predictable fashion. We stayed at Varsity until about midnight. Apparently there was a famous British TV show being filmed there. I found out, after some investigation, that the show was *Geordie Shore*, which was the British equivalent to *Jersey Shore*, or something. I did not want to think about what it might mean that I found myself at the same club as that kind of artistic garbage. They were filming far away from the crowd, however, and security kept people from interfering with their painfully scripted antics. I really cannot conjure enough scornful adjectives to describe my distaste with people who carry out such a decadent, self-absorbed existence. The thought of these tangerine-colored morons acquiring so much undeserved fame while contributing absolutely nothing to bettering the human condition frustrated me infinitely. I talked to people I knew from my course while I glared at Stacey and Kim who were gawking at the half-baked celebrities. I was not entirely mad; I did, after all, get a free shirt. Thinking back upon that night and my instantaneous judgement of those celebrities (I use the term loosely), I cannot help but recall Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier* once again. I wonder what Orwell’s coal miner, the “grimy caryatid upon whose shoulders nearly everything that is *not* grimy is supported,” would have to say toward a bunch of university students, partying the night away and spending mostly their parents’ money on liquor and taxi cabs (18).

Stacey, Kim and I walked down the hill to Academi from Varsity. I insisted that we walk this time—getting a cab to cover so short a walking distance would have been unjustifiably expensive. On the way down, we ran into Franch, ginger Rach (short for Rachel), and a few other people we knew. We passed the beautifully Tudor-inspired pub at the bottom of the hill, Yr Hen Glan. It was closed at this hour, its windows dark. We followed the procession of loud, intoxicated Bangor students across the road to the club. The Academi bouncers were reluctant to grant me admission, but I again managed to weave a long, convoluted, and impressively well-constructed but absolutely untrue excuse that somehow coerced them.

Academi was the same as it always was. It really did not matter what night of the week it was; the music was loud and sounded all the same. The place was always packed, and I allowed myself to let loose a little bit by dancing only slightly. I was and still am an incredibly controlled person, though it is a quality that occasionally I despise. The fun ended abruptly when Stacey's friend Chloe—who was a few inches taller than me, ridiculously intoxicated, and easily more than thrice my weight—threw herself upon me like some kind of polyester avalanche. Much to Stacey's displeasure, I made known immediately *my* displeasure. There was not-well-concealed terror in my eyes as, stumbling and incoherent, she chased me around the club. I rejected her advances, and we left without making eye contact again. From that night on she hated me inexplicably, considering that the whole affair was absolutely her fault. Stacey and Chloe remained friends, and we did not speak again.

23 November 2014 Sunday. I did remarkably little that day, except for washing clothes between the hours of four and six in the evening and warming up dinner. Doing my laundry had become something of a late afternoon Sunday ritual for me. I usually used the little-known second floor of the launderette by the security lodge, the entrance to which was nearly hidden behind a hedgerow. The appliances there were in much better condition than on the first floor

launderette due to their lack of use. For dinner I baked something called a "chicken lattice." It was premade, seemingly a slightly improved British version of a Hot Pocket. Whatever it was, it was good.

I ended up finishing Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) around 4 a.m. At the time I thought that the book was, without a doubt, one of the worst books I ever had the misfortune of having to read. In some ways I could see how the protagonist, Anna Morgan, was similar to *Native Son*'s Bigger Thomas in that some readers would be inclined to hate her even as some would love her. Though I could sympathize with Bigger, I could not sympathize with Mrs. Morgan. She seemed at the time to be a wretch of a protagonist, and only if Rhys had not rewritten the ending of the novel to allow Mrs. Morgan to live, would the protagonist be worthy of any sympathy. At the time no book had more infuriated me, so I guessed *Voyage in the Dark* would have at least some memorability. Though my initial opinions of the book were less than positive, my anger was tempered with empathy acquired from our in-class discussions. It was only then that I grew to love the book, and after reading it a second time I would rank it among my favorites. I ended up writing my final paper for QXE-2027 on Rhys's novel, cleverly titling my essay "This Modern Bower Her Prison." As I explain in the introduction of that paper, "The result of Rhys's focus on alienation in *Voyage in the Dark* is an exploration of how modernism affects ideas of femininity, and to a lesser extent, race, through Anna's frustrating—and often disturbing—narrative." As effectively as I may think that that sentence describes Rhys's text, I cannot deny that the rest of the paper was not high-quality. I made a 70 on it, which was a low A on the British scale.

24 November 2014 Mondays were always a drag, and that day the temperature lingered in the low forties and the wind cut right through my already inadequately weather-resistant clothing. I had a significant break from 10 a.m. to noon after my first class. There was little

seating in Main Arts aside from what was in the café downstairs. TERAS, the café, was overpriced and the food was almost as bad as the garbage that Sodexo serves at UNCP. Everyone but first years and unlucky international students seemed to have figured out that truism, because I rarely saw anyone from my second-year classes in TERAS. The café did have an excellent view of lower Bangor, however, and in the seating area was a beautiful stone patio. TERAS was along a poorly lit hall, but one that was poorly lit in the way that the lower floors of castles are supposed to be poorly lit and not in a way that made the hall seem in disrepair. When I was not passing my time in TERAS eating one of their TERAbles sandwiches, I would walk back to my Peris Hall room and snack on whatever spare food I had in my kitchen, making sure to open the window so that I could look at the grass between Peris and Enlli, which was usually a particularly verdant shade of green due to the frequent rain.

I enjoyed my walk home that day in the same way that I always did, despite the cold. On the way back, I stopped at a little café called “Options” on College Road and had a good cup of tea—with milk of course—and a full English breakfast. Options was another café that I frequented in Bangor, and it became a kind of Café Nervosa for me. On the way out I was feeling adventurous and purchased a black pudding bap to go. Black pudding, also known as blood sausage, is made from pig’s blood. “Bap” was a word the British (but mostly the Welsh, I think), used for a certain type of sandwich bread. I ordered the bap because Options did not sell black pudding a la carte, and I returned home before I took the pudding out of the sandwich and tasted it. It was indescribably vile in appearance, texture, smell and taste. The slices of pudding looked like sausage patties, except that they were very dark brown—just a shade under black—and flecked with white bits that I think were barley or some other grain used to thicken the blood. The texture is hard to describe for those who haven’t had black pudding. It was supple yet surprisingly robust, but slightly less stable than traditional sausage, and were I inclined to try

catfish bait I might expect a similar texture and taste. The more I thought about it, the less dissimilar catfish bait and blood sausage seemed to be. I imagined the two were interchangeable. The taste was of blood, but not in the way that a rare steak tastes of blood. No, the bloody taste of that black pudding seemed stagnant, almost rotten tasting, probably because it is mixed with oil and grain and cooked to death. The thing was greasy, too. It oozed grease as I took my first, last, and only taste of black pudding. My experience that day with black pudding was one that I knew I would remember always, but never desired to repeat. Maybe the food in the UNCP cafeteria was not so terrible after all.

27 November 2014 In America, it was Thanksgiving. In the spirit of that holiday, I skipped all of my Thursday classes. In around three and a half years of university, it marked the first time I intentionally had missed a class without being severely ill. Even when sick days were taken into account, I had only ever missed four classes, and three of those were at Bangor! I had missed one of my Monday classes early in the semester due to fresher's flu, and on Thursday I missed two classes—a lecture and a seminar. I made the most of the early part of my Thanksgiving by sleeping until 2:00 p.m. A couple hours later I made the walk to Morrison's and purchased a roast chicken from the deli. I also purchased a box of Betty Crocker cake mix (what my flatmates considered the “posh” brand), a loaf of garlic bread, and a roast dinner pastie. A pastie is like the oggie I described previously. I got back around 5 p.m.; Stacey had already gone home to her family for reasons unrelated to the American holiday, but Kim and Dan were around. Stacey would not be back until Sunday, and she would be returning with Kate, my other flatmate who was doing the British equivalent of student teaching but as a first year. I called my parents and baked my cake, a devil's food with chocolate fudge icing. I then heated up the food I bought from the deli and Skyped my parents while I ate. I sat down to eat my meal around six, at the same time that my parents and family were eating their Thanksgiving meal, the only

difference being that they were eating lunch as I was eating dinner. After dinner, and after I introduced my family to Kim and Dan and their intense Yorkshire accents, I frosted my cake which I had so carefully baked. It tasted as nice as it looked. Though I acquired a little knowledge of cooking abroad, I actually learned more during the summer that I did research at UNC-Charlotte. Doing research in a lab, it turns out, teaches a person a lot of skills that can readily be applied to the kitchen.

28 November 2014 I did not do much of anything on Friday. I started reading *Frankenstein*, a book that I had surprisingly not yet encountered in my English studies. I read the first volume, which to my surprise had me enthralled until the very last page. The following day I would be going to Manchester with International Programs, so I packed my bag and prepared my clothing for the morning, in order to extend the amount of time I would be able to stay in bed. I set three alarms.

Saturday 29 November 2014 Today I went on International Programs' field trip to the Manchester Christmas markets. A university-booked coach to Manchester for £17 was not a bad deal at all.

I woke up about 8 a.m., had a bite to eat at my Peris Hall flat kitchen, and left about 8:20. I made better time than usual in walking to Main Arts, and I was ready to depart at 8:30. We boarded the coach around 9. The drive to Manchester was roughly two hours with no traffic problems, and the wonderfully scenic North Wales coast prohibited any possibility of sleep. Roughly ten minutes into the drive, as we were leaving Bangor, most of Penrhyn castle—all its uppermost fortifications, at least—became spectacularly visible through the light morning fog. After leaving Bangor we went along the A55 for a while, from which Beaumaris, which I had recently visited, and most of northern Anglesey were visible. It was low tide as we passed Anglesey, and the Menai Strait was reduced to a trickle. We continued along the coast, passing

piers, beaches, and many small towns. During this time I noticed a trailer park cleverly concealed behind a façade of small trees; I did not realize until then that trailer parks were something that existed outside of the States. Wind energy was quite popular along the north Wales coast due to the region's above-average and consistent windiness, and as we travelled to Manchester I discerned the faint but impressive outlines of rows upon rows of wind turbines in the morning fog. The latter thirty or so minutes of the journey was uneventful as we diverged from our parallel trajectory with the coast. At some point the road signs ceased to be in both Cymraeg and English; everything eventually became unilingual, in English.

We arrived in the heavily urbanized part of Manchester around 11 a.m. It was at this point, following an orderly disembarkation, that we began to disperse in a disorderly fashion. I seemed to be the only American in the group, stranded in a raft of Europeans. Such a distinction normally wouldn't be a massive discomfort for me, but still I left them—or perhaps they left me, I could never be sure—at a coffee shop near the bus stop, where I had the best cappuccino of my life and a delicious Belgian chocolate brownie. We were told to be back at the bus and ready to depart at 5:45 p.m. Admittedly, my initial reaction to being so alone and mapless in the second largest city in the UK was one of horror. I adapted quickly, however, and likely saw more sights than anyone else who went on the trip that day. Though socializing with all types of people from around the world had been one of the greatest boons of my study-abroad experience, it was always better, I discovered, to travel somewhere alone if one's main goal is to see as much as one can in a limited space of time. That solitude was exactly the situation I found myself in: I had from around 11:45 a.m. until 5:15 p.m. (I wanted to make sure I made it back to the bus) to see as much as I could of Manchester; after all, it would be a while, I was sure, before I would be able to make it back there. From the block on which the coffee shop was situated, I could see nothing that even hinted of Christmas markets, so I followed the throng of pedestrians to some

park near the center of town. Here there was a massive and permanent Ferris wheel as well as a good sized row of food stands selling street food from almost every imaginable European and Asian culture. There were German food kiosks, Italian desserts, Asian dishes, Middle-Eastern fare, and a whole other range of delicious things to eat. Regrettably, I did not actually stop to get anything to eat because I was more intent on getting my bearings in the city and finding out what places I wanted to visit.

The first thing I set out to do was to become reasonably acquainted with the park I was in, where a small portion of the famed Christmas markets were set up. I reckon the markets there occupied a good part of the block. At the park's center was a water feature that was simple and unremarkable. The Ferris wheel detracted from the beauty and the atmosphere of the park, at least for me. Around the periphery of the park were statues of historical figures; there was one of a man who was presumably a major figure in the long history of the city, standing nobly on a pedestal flanked by bronze figures of Britannia; another of an important man of the nineteenth century, seated on a pedestal wearing a long and noble coat; and finally a large statue of the ever popular Queen Victoria seated on a throne, holding a globe and a scepter and gazing auspiciously downward at tourists.

I left the park and began walking down one of the spacious city streets, enjoying the architecture as I proceeded. The architecture of M'cr, as the locals affectionately abbreviate it, was very interesting to me. It lacked the impressive verticality one might expect of a major American city, and the skyline was limited to just a few skyscrapers, none of which even came close to some of the vertical architecture I had seen in the USA, even in a medium-sized city like Charlotte. What Manchester had that the USA lacked, however, was a huge number of medium-sized, very historical buildings that were hundreds of years old. Instead of the sleek, contemporary look and feel of a modern city, Manchester was a mixture of both historical and

modern architecture. It seemed both old and new. This feature did not detract from the cityscape in any way; instead, it highlighted by way of contrast the differing architectural styles. The new buildings were built primarily of steel and glass, whereas the old ones were made of brick, with an intricacy absent in a building constructed in this century. The decorative outer pillars of the building by our bus stop, for example, were supported by mermaid caryatids; each figure was fashioned individually and bore a different expression than its neighbor, but they all worked together harmoniously.

As I walked, my general intention was to keep walking along the heavily urbanized streets until I happened upon something that piqued my interest and warranted further exploration—precisely what happened when I walked into the Manchester Art Museum. I browsed their galleries for a good half hour, steering clear of the modern art exhibitions that were of little interest to me and would only delay my exit. I did see some very interesting eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century art. A Victorian gallery contained famous paintings and decorative china, while a pre-Raphaelite exhibit featured a painting of Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott." A Romantic exhibit of paintings depicting picturesque and Romantic scenery interested me as well, thanks to my studying the Romantic period at Bangor that semester.

I left the art museum and continued down the street. I made a turn and found myself in an open space where a library and a small row of markets were situated in an open square. Beside the library was an Armani store that sold extremely posh clothing leagues beyond the upper limit of my budget. Looking at overly expensive clothes was not at the time something I enjoyed, but I went in the store just for the novelty of the situation. I had never even been inside an Armani store before that.

After looking at Armani products that I was loathe to touch for fear of damaging them, I went into the library, which was free to enter and functioned both as a historical space and a public library. The public library part of the building was more modern and performed the normal function of a library, but the older library building had the feeling of a museum. Inside were old, elegant, and most likely priceless manuscripts. I did not notice any texts that were particularly famous (for example, an illuminated text of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*), except for the oldest surviving fragment of the New Testament, which was much older than anything of Chaucer's. I believe that it was dated to around 100 A.D. The books in the library were not the only thing that could be called art in that place; the architecture was astoundingly intricate and gothic. From my reading, I believed I was correct in assuming then that the gothic architectural style was very popular for government buildings in Britain between the early modern and contemporary eras. Upstairs was a well-preserved eighteenth century reading hall, which functioned as a spectacle for tourists but also still as a fully functional working space for the library's patrons. The reading hall was truly a sight to behold: Almost two stories of books towered above the polished stone floor, and marble statues of famous bards and writers flanked the entrances of the reading alcoves. Every book was well aged and gracefully bound, and massive biblically themed stained glass windows soared at both ends of the hall. I normally do not enjoy public libraries but this one was truly a sight to behold.

I gawked at the library for a while and went outside into the square, where I bought from a foreign man who was tending a confectionery tent some kind of tartlet that contained yogurt and was topped with glazed fruit. It was explosively colorful but, sadly, more a feast for my eyes than my mouth. I bit into it and was surprised to find that it was quite bland. I continued walking for a while, wandering aimlessly. My general goal was to reach the Museum of Science and Industry, but I only had a faint idea where to find it. After trying a couple of streets and

making no progress I asked a police officer for directions, and she kindly pointed me the right way. Once I had the museum in sight, and knew where I was headed, I stopped at a chip shop for a plate of fish and chips. Though the lower area of the chip shop was populated, I ate in complete solitude in the loft of the building that had been converted into a dining area, where the only outstanding noise was the satisfying crunch of the fish that I had ordered. The UK's version of fish and chips, the original, is about the same as what one might find in the United States but with one notable difference: In the UK, fish and chips are served with a delightfully bland and unnaturally green sauce called "mushy pea sauce." Bland as it was, the texture more than made up for the shortcomings of mushy pea sauce.

After lunch, I explored the museum, a good one with an aviation exhibit I particularly enjoyed. Second to the aviation exhibit were the museum's open-access collections, such as a massive collection of old electrical instruments and scientific equipment visible in glass-protected drawers. Of particular interest to me was a drawer full of antique microscopes. The museum contained other exhibits, most notably several very large exhibits on processes such as cloth-making and advancements in the railway system during the British Industrial Revolution. The exhibits were clearly meticulously constructed and maintained, but being a fanatic of neither trains nor cloth, I found myself feigning interest in the exhibits. Still, I left the museum feeling satisfied with the experience and the time I spent there.

I began walking around town again after I left the museum, still rather aimlessly. Manchester was such a big place, and I had seen almost none of it. All directions seemed full of opportunity. Though I wandered with no particular purpose I was far from idle, for I noted every building I passed. In fact, walking aimlessly was a very valuable part of the experience, and my observations were made more memorable, I think, by my isolation. After a while, I found myself walking parallel to the canal that runs through the city and on which many restaurants and other

attractions are situated. There were some interesting buildings cantilevered over the canal, as well as a very modern suspension bridge that made an interesting contrast to the nineteenth-century gothic-looking bridge a few hundred meters beside it, and from which I found myself viewing the modern bridge. It was around this time I walked into the Manchester People's History Museum. Of all the places I went, it was probably the least enjoyable. It offered exhibits on most of the major events in modern British history, but with a clear socialist propagandistic slant. I am no political science major, nor do I possess any bias against socialism or any other form of government that does not infringe upon people's basic human rights. I do, however, like my museums to be unbiased and present their exhibits in a way that allows me to form my own opinions on an issue. Still, there were one or two interesting displays in the museum that contained British propaganda from WWII. Wow, I thought to myself. They really, really did not like the Germans in the early twentieth century.

I left the People's History Museum hastily. I then went to the National Football Museum, which was impressive but would have been more so if I had known anything about football. My main motivation for going in was to buy a Manchester United jersey—and I did just that. I planned to wear it frequently when I got back to the States to show how multicultural I was. As it turned out, practically anyone who knows anything about Manchester United has one of those shirts, regardless of whether or not they have been to the UK. In this modern age where virtually any souvenir imaginable can be bought on the internet, it is not very difficult to appear well-travelled. Experiences, unlike football jerseys, is not a commodity that can be bought or sold.

I left the football museum. A band of street performers was playing jazzy Christmas tunes nearby as a steady stream of shoppers pored over the holiday merchandise offered at the markets. I stopped briefly at a stand and bought a bag of Turkish delight. It is sweet and

gelatinous, and I don't like it all that much. Still, I buy it when I can because of a lingering fascination I have with that particular confection. It is rarer in America than it is in the UK, but I have occasionally found it in international food stores and at international festivals. My fascination with the sweet comes from the film adaptation of C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Early in the first film, there is a scene where Edmund is eating Turkish delight against the snowy backdrop of Narnia. The sudden red of the rosewater-flavored candy against the white background makes the viewer imagine it to be utterly delicious.

By the time I had left the football museum and the nearby markets, it was getting close to 3 p.m., and the clock was ticking. Nearby the football museum is a very old cathedral, and the largest in the city as I understood it. The cathedral was built in the same gothic style as the library, and it was indescribably beautiful. Unlike so many modern buildings whose surfaces can be described in writing in such a way that the reader may generate a mostly accurate mental image of the structure, the intricacies I saw in the cathedral were too ornate to be put into words. I cannot possibly describe how each doorway was adorned with perfectly proportioned gargoyles and biblical figures, and I could not in thirty pages describe the countless hours of hard labor that must have been required to construct the impeccably carved wood furnishings. Inside there was a choir practicing hymns, and in their voices was an angelic resonance. In the rear of the cathedral were tombs and altars for private worship.

As I pored over every detail of the place, I recognized unashamedly that despite my beliefs or lack thereof—I am agnostic at best—cathedrals tend to affect me in a way that is, to put it bluntly, surreal. Inside those walls millions of people had kneeled in reverence and thousands of hymns had been sung; thousands of young couples had been united in their love, and thousands of families mourned the passing of their loved ones; thousands of children had been baptized, born again. A single bomb fell upon that very cathedral during the blitz, and my

two feet walked among its halls on that chilly November day. My path had been taken by many others, I was sure; many still would take that very same path in the future. How many people, I wondered then, from how many different walks of life had stood awe-struck in the ancient halls of that place?

I did not spend as much time as I would have liked in the cathedral, and I do not think that a single day would be sufficient for me to absorb its full glory. I did not spend as much time as I would have liked in the surrounding markets, or in any of the other places that I went. I tried to do in a single day what probably should have been done in several. In the interest of actually making it back to the bus I exited the cathedral and picked up the pace, walking in the general direction of the bus stop. I looked at a map nearby and found that I had wandered further than I realized, but was still within walking distance and not in a huge hurry. There was no real danger yet of getting stranded, and realistically I had time for a few more stops. As I walked back I stopped inside a few shopping places—Debenhams, Primark, and Marks & Spencer. I did not buy anything.

I made it back to the square with the Ferris wheel around 4:15 p.m., and seeing as how I still had some time decided to give the Ferris wheel a spin. The price of a trip up was 7.50 after deducting the roughly two pound student discount, which was not anything to complain about. The Ferris wheel was all right, but nothing spectacular. I complained about the sight of it earlier, and being inside it did not do much to change my impression. I had hoped to get a better view of Manchester, but because it was well past 4:30 when we started up, it was already effectively dark. To make things even less fun, the Ferris wheel lost power half-way down. I found myself temporarily stranded in a cabin with three strangers, halfway through the cycle of the wheel and low enough not to have a view of anything. Normally I would have been less freaked out about such a mechanical failure than I was then, but it was already almost 5 p.m. and I had a bus to

catch in a short forty-five minutes. After a tense half-hour, the technical issues were resolved, and we were let off the wheel. For all of the hassle, the infinitely generous Ferris wheel staff offered us an unbelievable £5 discount on a £20 photo of the ride.

I made it back to the bus stop about 5:20 p.m. because the Ferris wheel was actually very close to our bus. I still had time for a coffee at the same café I had stopped at earlier that day. I got an amaretto latte this time instead of my usual cappuccino. The drink was quite good, though sweet, and it tasted of almond. It appeared that everyone else from Bangor had the same idea, as I saw a lot of them in the café. In a moment of unusual extroversion I sat down at a communal table with two men who looked to be from the Middle East, and who I eventually found out were from Iran. They were graduate students, I learned, at Manchester Metropolitan University. Despite a significant language barrier I left feeling more connected with the world around me.



The bus ride back to Bangor that night was made bearable only because I had brought with me my copy of *Frankenstein*. I sat beside a portly, unsociable, and unkempt fellow student who unapologetically occupied all of the available leg room, a discomfort made worse as the ride

continued when he slowly annexed even more of my leg room. The only benefit of having no one to talk to was that I did read almost eighty pages of my book, leaving me feeling slightly better about the pile of reading that was steadily accumulating for the week.

We arrived back in Bangor around 8 p.m. at Main Arts, though I thought that a bus drop-off at Ffriddoedd site would have been a better idea, since most of the internationals reside there. At least it was not raining on the way back as it so often was during my hikes back from The Tap. I arrived back in Peris and found Kim and Reece chatting in the kitchen. Usually, when Reece was in the room, he did all the talking and those who were listening at the time were stuck until someone else came in and they could manage to escape. I told them about my day in Manchester; it was late and I doubt they cared, as they so rarely cared about the mundane things I did in the UK that I found fascinating as a foreign national.

Tuesday, 2 December 2014: With the exception of Reece, who refused to acknowledge the fact that there was a time of year that the majority of people refer to as the “holiday season”, we all spent the majority of the afternoon making lovely Christmas decorations for the flat kitchen. Ing Sun—Nicole, as she wished us to call her—made a large number of impressively symmetrical paper cranes and taped them up, adorning our walls. She tried for a good half-hour to teach me how to fold them but unfortunately I could never manage more than a crumpled mess of paper. Stacey, Kyle, Kate, Liam and I cut out snowflakes and pasted them on the wall, and Reece appeared every hour or so to make a cup of tea and glare at us. I do not think he actually drank nearly as much tea as he made. Instead, I think tea was his mechanism for seeing what we were up to without having to come into the kitchen with the burden of having to talk to people. Though I did then hold his grouchiness against him, I would later recant my criticisms. I learned that he had many compelling reasons to feel the way he did about the holidays. In addition to snowflakes and cranes, we made paper flags to put on the wall: an American flag for

me, a Chinese flag for Sun, and a Union Jack for the Brits. To be amusing, I made the American Flag much larger than the rest. Unfortunately my flatmates pointed out that I had only thirty-something stars rather than the proper fifty.

In addition to the paper snowflakes and flags, we made a shabby Christmas tree from printer paper that we colored green with markers. We made the body of the tree from hand tracings that we would cut out and then stuck together with tape. This project took almost an hour and though the finished product was not the most beautiful rendition of a Christmas tree I had ever seen, it was ours and we hung it proudly on the wall of the kitchen adjacent to the door so that everyone who entered could see it. We wrote Merry Christmas on pieces of paper in three different languages—English, Welsh, and Mandarin—and stuck those on the wall by our window above the flag cutouts that we had made.

After all of our decorations were hung up, I was not alone in feeling festive and ready for the holidays. I realized that night as I sat in our kitchen with six of my seven flatmates, the plastic chair I was sitting in reclined against the wall, that I had become closer to these people than I expected. No, it was not ideal, I knew that. Stacey was unbearably immature at times, Kyle was apathetic, Kim was too loud, and Nicole was difficult to communicate with. But in that kitchen sat the six people who, at that point in my life, were the six peers who I had spent the most time with. Socially, that realization was a watershed moment in that I knew then that I was, in fact, an extrovert. My introverted nature in college up until that point was not because inherently I wanted to be that way; it was because I had not yet metamorphosed into the social creature that I then and now aspire to be. I also realized then that, sadly, my time with these people was coming to an end. Soon, I would forget them and they would forget me, too.



5 December, Friday: That day I woke up in a good mood. I was fully recovered from my lack of sleep on Wednesday night, and the holiday spirit was still fresh in my mind. Having Fridays off was one of the greatest boons of the way that my modules were scheduled in Bangor. It was unfortunate, looking back on my time in Bangor, that I did not take greater advantage of my three-day weekends. I could have gone to Europe or to London in that time! Still, there is some value I think in simply spending a day in leisure, soaking up the intricacies of my small sphere of people, places, and events that made up the majority of my existence as an exchange student.

Around 3:00 that Friday I headed off to Main Arts. Essays were ready to be picked up, and I was anxious to be the first one there because I simply could not wait any longer to see what I had made. I went in through the front door of Main Arts rather than the English department entrance as I always did, made my way to the English wing, went up the stairs to the second

floor and found the English office surprisingly deserted of any students. I figured that I had beaten the crowd. I exchanged pleasantries with the secretary of the English department, an older British lady whose accent made her seem to be more sincere than perhaps she actually was. I handed her my student card and watched, terrified, as she slowly thumbed through the stack of essays. Without being overly nosy I noticed the grades on many of the coversheets. I saw mostly Cs on the way to my paper, a couple of Bs, and only one A. There are some harsh graders in this department, I thought. I was screwed, I just knew it. She finally found my three papers near the bottom of the stack. I had seen the other grades; I felt like a sheep who had just witnessed its brethren being fed to wolves. Slowly she extracted my papers from the stack, and though I had peeked at all the other grades I dare not look at mine, not with another set of prying eyes in the room. I wanted to be alone when I experienced my first bad grade. I exited the room and walked down the long hallway leading to the stairs. Alone and with a crippling expectation of impending doom, I flipped my papers over in my hand and looked at the section of the cover sheets that indicated my received mark. 70, 71, 77. Three A minuses—I knew then that I would live another day!

In the United States, I tended to hold myself to more rigorous standards where grades were concerned. Those same three A minuses would not leave me feeling so ecstatic had I received them in classes back home. The British system was different, though. In fact Bangor held a meeting for the U.S. students early in the semester specifically to warn us that, though we may be used to receiving high 90s back home, in the UK the grading system was far stricter. One biology professor informed us that in all his years of teaching—and he looked as if he may have known Darwin personally—he had never given above an 85. A grade of 100 implied true perfection. With that information in mind, and taking into account that I had only seen only one other A, I congratulated myself.

I called my parents when I got back to the flat to inform them of the good marks, although they have always cared far less about my grades than I have. Even early on in college they did not attempt to monitor my progress, and I do think that their detachment allowed me to construct my own intrinsic motivation. It is perhaps ironic that I have chosen to mention my motivation at this point in the text. When I called my parents that day they were at my grandparents' house and informed me that I would be the proud owner of a new Hyundai Genesis Coupe when I got home. I felt undeserving of such a generous gift, and that feeling has never left me. Though I could never find a way to express my gratitude to my family, I could also never find a way—except, perhaps, through writing—to express the crushing sense of guilt I feel when they buy me luxuries like a car, or like the watch they would later buy me toward the end of December. I was dependent on them and until I start graduate school, I will remain that way like some kind of lamprey, a parasite feeding off of the energy of its host. I wish that such feelings of guilt might be severed from those of gratitude, for I am eternally appreciative of all my parents have given me, of the privileged life I have been able to lead.

6 December, a Saturday: The early part of the day was uneventful, aside from the usual banter and shenanigans that I had come to expect living in student accommodation. Toward the end of my time in Bangor, I ate every meal in the kitchen. I wanted to socialize as much as possible with my flatmates before I left them forever. When I reflect back upon the experience of living with seven other students, I am surprised at just how much I developed socially. I really did become quite the social butterfly at Bangor. I also acquired a liking of gossip, though I suppose gossip is not all bad. I would go so far as to say that gossip was the lifeblood of our flat's social sphere, but that would not be true. I had seen on many nights that cheap alcohol was the actual lifeblood of our flat's social sphere, though I did not allow myself to partake of that

particular vice. To his credit, Reece also abstained from drinking though I think his smoking habit was probably far more detrimental than everyone else's frequent partying.

I walked to a bar on College Road called The Greek around 8:30 that night for the UMWC Social. It was truly one of those Saturdays where all I wanted to do was stay in, not because of some introverted desire to avoid socializing with people or because I was purposefully squandering my valuable time abroad, but because I was exhausted. Had I been anywhere else in the world more fantastic than where I was then I probably still would have preferred to stay inside that night, but that was my last chance to pay the £75 I owed the club for my clothing order. I always thought that The Greek looked seedy on the outside, and I had assumed it was also seedy on the inside. Oh, how accurate were my assumptions. The place was devoid of UMWC members when first I arrived, and it looked as if it were the haunt of suspicious locals with whom I was not keen on fraternizing with at the time. Laura turned out to be seated in an alcove with Kathryn (another UMWC member), and they waved me over. I deposited my money with Laura, made polite conversation for a few minutes, and then took my leave and headed back to Peris Hall in a light rain.

When I returned, I found the kitchen empty. I began making tea: Earl Grey with milk and a dash of sugar. I knew that the vigorous bubble of our electric kettle would draw Reece from his lair, in which he had been spending more time than usual the past few weeks because he had purchased an Xbox One. Reece walked into the kitchen wearing the same hoodie, shirt, and jeans that he always wore. He was also wearing that trademark sleep-deprived look of someone who had just gotten a new gaming system. We started chatting about this-and-that: politics, religion, sports, etc. You never really knew what Reece was going to bring up until he started talking, but you always knew that whatever it was it would be long-winded. That is not to say that I did not enjoy Reece's company; in fact, I did enjoy talking to Reece, especially toward the

end of my stay. He and Kyle were probably the two of my flatmates with the most mature heads on their shoulders.

Shortly after Reece and I began talking, Stacey and Kate came in to make dessert. I believe they were attempting to make bread pudding again. First, however, they made hot chocolate and then sprawled out over the padded chairs near the door of the kitchen. They had not lately been making any real efforts to hide from Reece their disdain for him, and tensions were rising. Reece said something fairly innocuous to me, precisely what I have since forgotten. Stacey felt the need to direct a barb at Reece for no reason other than to satisfy her need to make known her dislike of him. Reece reciprocated; I was not yet under the impression that things were about to get out of hand, because those kinds of exchanges had been happening since reading week. Stacey usually would say something cryptic and nonsensical and Reece would respond with a mutter so indistinct that Stacey would not be able to determine what exactly he said. But that night, Stacey exploded for no apparent reason and launched into a rant about smokers. Reece was understandably offended because he was a habitual smoker, but by and large he did not say much at all other than to defend himself.

Stacey soon became spectacularly incoherent and eventually started sobbing uncontrollably. Reece left the room, unsure how to handle the situation, and Kate tried to comfort Stacey, in the way that a mother might try to comfort a child. I sat back in my chair, unsure what to do and waiting on Reece to return. I refused to take sides. Stacey had exhausted the limits of my sympathy and now was being childish. Stacey and Kate exited the kitchen and went to Kate's room. Kate returned shortly and made hot chocolate for Stacey. She would not speak to me for some reason, as if I were actually at fault rather than an unfortunate bystander. When she left, Reece came back into the kitchen.

Reece returned looking more haggard than usual. He was not the type of person to get so distraught about a simple argument, and I knew something deeper was at play. As it turned out, it was not Stacey who had upset him. It was that Stacey reminded him of his abusive stepmother. Reece knew that Stacey would not understand, so he vented his pent-up rage to me, and that is how I learned Reece's life story that night. Reece's life story is a moving one, full of incredible struggle, incredible despair, but also of incredible success. I cannot possibly repeat here the story that Reece told me over the course of over four hours that night because I could not possibly do his story justice. I cannot not accurately portray the fear that was in his voice as he described the year he spent as a homeless teenager, living on the streets of Rhyl; I could not accurately put into words how sad he sounded when he spoke of the countless, impoverished friends he lost to drugs; and I cannot begin to understand the courage it must have taken for him to leave his old life—all of his destructive family, his friends—and come to Bangor University. Reece was, I discovered, the strongest of us all.

7 December, a Sunday: I tried to catch up on reading, and spent some time reflecting on my study abroad experience. With each passing day I was reminded that I drew ever closer to my date of departure.

8 December, a Monday: I did not do anything notable that Monday. It rained a lot and, other than go to class, I moped around a lot. I had been having some trouble sleeping. I stayed awake until the early hours of the morning thinking about how reluctant I was to leave. I knew that I was powerless to do anything about my predicament, yet I was equally powerless to stop thinking about how powerless I was. If only I could have shut out those feelings and relished each passing moment in Bangor rather than think only about the end of them.

9 December, a Tuesday: I took the day off from classes that day to catch up on the sleep that I had been missing. I walked down to the halls office to check my mail after class and, as I

suspected, the silk Bangor University tie I had ordered online about a week earlier had finally arrived. The same skinny old man who always managed the halls post office was there that day, and I retrieved my package from him. He wore a purple polo shirt bearing a small Bangor crest on the upper right front of the shirt. The postal workers were not the only ones with colored polo shirts; in fact, the university color coded all of its workers who were not academic faculty. The groundskeepers wore light green, the wardens wore dark green or gray, and some of the non-PhD academic staff wore black. Peer guides wore yellow polo shirts, and the international student advisers wore red jackets.

Later that day, the essay topic for QXE-2027: Literature and Modernity was released. I was hoping that the alternate assignment for international students—in lieu of a January exam—would not be an essay. I was dead wrong. I now have another 5,500 words to write, and I knew then that it would not even be possible to finish the outline of my journal before I returned home.

PART III

10 December, a Wednesday: Today I attended a mini-graduation ceremony for international students, for which I had confirmed my attendance roughly a week prior. I skipped my QXE-2020 seminar from 11 a.m. to noon to get ready. Although I was able to sport my new Bangor University tie at the graduation, I was otherwise a mess: I had flown over from the United States with only one ill-fitting dress shirt and had neglected two major components of any well-put together business-casual outfit: shoes and a belt. My pants, too, were a disaster. They were cheap black slacks, ill fitting and too shiny. Luckily, Liam had some dress shoes of a darker brown color, and Kyle had a belt that nearly matched Liam's shoes (My go-to belt, the only one I had with me at Bangor, was far too large for the slender loops on my dress-pants).

The ceremony filled me with memories and gratitude for the indescribable privilege of spending a few short months in Bangor. Liam and Stacey came to support me—a touching gesture. Unfortunately, they were relegated to the guest seating area near the back of Pritchard-Jones Hall which is the name of the primary and largest lecture hall in Main Arts. I located Charles and Sara before entering the room; we then walked into the hall and found our seats, which were assigned by the international staff. The seats were arranged by university, so I got to sit with my UNCP friends. We ended up near the front of the crowd. On the seats, for each of us, were canvas Bangor University alumni bags bearing informational booklets about postgraduate study.

Andrew Griff-Owen took the stage and extensively thanked the international staff and spoke on several other matters of thanks. Then, a well-dressed postdoc from Arcadia University spoke about the benefits of studying abroad. He covered all aspects of our collective experience, and after his speech there was a palpable sense of sad but optimistic contemplation in the hall. Finally, the director of postgraduate studies gave a short speech about why we should all

consider coming back to Bangor for graduate school. I had already considered graduate school in Bangor as an option and required little further convincing. I sincerely hoped to return to Bangor as a graduate student one day. As it turns out, I will not return to Bangor for graduate school; instead, I will pursue a Ph.D. in biochemistry, cell and molecular biology at Cornell University, an equally beautiful institution with a reputation for excellence.

Once the lineup of speakers concluded their presentations, Mr. Griff-Owen took the stage once more and began calling students in groups to the stage to collect their “diplomas” and to stand in front of a large Bangor University logo to have their pictures taken. We UNCP students were the last and smallest group to be called on. Our names were read one by one, and as I walked up on stage to receive my certificate I felt an incredible excitement, a sense of completion. I knew that my real graduation three semesters in the future would be even more fulfilling. The three of us stood on stage as the Bangor staff took pictures; I looked out into the audience and saw a lot of familiar faces. There was Paul, the Polish graduate student; there was Clara with her scarf; there was Ing Sun sitting with a group of her friends; and there were Stacey and Liam in the guest rows in the back of PJ hall. They cheered me on and took plenty of pictures. My study abroad experience was not over yet, but in that brief moment—which lasted forever—it sure felt over. I gazed over the crowd and looked at the beautiful vaulted ceiling in PJ Hall. I felt a small pang of regret for those things I had not had the willpower or the time to do. Mostly, though, I felt happy. I felt that my study abroad experience, though by no means perfect, was fulfilling and would influence the direction of my life for years to come. Much of what I set out to do I had done, I had experienced a lot of firsts, and I had grown immeasurably as a person.



11 December, a Thursday: “Dylan Thomas’s early work seems willfully obscure,” I wrote in my notebook that day during class. Flipping through my notes from Bangor in retrospect, it seems that they too are willfully obscure. It is fascinating how poorly I retained much of the literature from my classes there. I do not even remember reading Thomas’s “Altar-Wise by Owl Light,” which I would have sworn I read for the first time late one evening during a burst of productivity in summer 2015. I worked on my reading and writing for most of the remainder of the day once I got home from classes. Studying abroad still involved a good amount of studying after all.

Around 7 that evening I walked into the kitchen to make myself some tea so that I could push through my sleepiness and continue grinding away at my work. I walked in to quite a commotion, with Stacey threatening to pour a full glass of cold water on Liam. He must have been antagonizing her, as he frequently did, and I suppose Stacey decided to get revenge.

Apparently Liam had said something to Stacey, and she was threatening to pour water on him. Such antics were not uncommon in our flat and unless Reece was involved were not perceived as malicious. I had until that point not been an instigator—a participant, perhaps, but never an instigator. My role changed when, as I walked by Stacey to grab my teacup, I gently pushed the glass she was holding causing it to spill all over her. No one expected that kind of spontaneity from me, least of all myself, and that of course only made the whole ordeal even more hilarious. Stacey attempted to splash me with the remaining water but missed and soaked Kim instead. Against my better judgement, I got wrapped up in an hour long water fight: Things escalated quickly; Liam barricaded the kitchen; water was flying everywhere; and Kim's slippers—and most everything else in the kitchen and hallway—got soaked.

In the moment we were all having an excellent time, but then the reality of what we had just done set in. If we let the water stay there for too long, we knew, there would be water damage. And water damage would equate to a fine for which someone would be held responsible. So, for the next two hours, we all sat in the hallway with the girls' hairdryers on maximum power, trying desperately to get the water to disappear. Liam, it turns out, had locked himself out of his room during the commotion and had to get security. The security guard looked puzzled by the presence of three hairdryers in our hallway, but he did not ask questions.

I was now no longer a bystander in the complex game of our flat's practical jokes. Instead, I was an instigator. If I were not careful, I knew, I would fall victim to something far worse than being soaked with cold water. Liam's mattress was hidden from him for a whole two days once—I did not want that happening to me. I started locking my door. As it turned out, however, Stacey got her revenge fairly quickly by stealing and hiding my room key for most of the rest of that night leaving me stranded in the hallway.

12 December, a Friday: I worked on my QXE-2020 essay for a good portion of the day. In the same way that driving in the UK feels different, writing also feels different. Though I had by this point in my academic career done a lot of writing, I was in Bangor struck by the same sense of uncertainty one might experience during a first-year literature course in the States. The writing process was the same and yet it was different. The overall lack of essay guidance, too, required a lot more self-criticism on my part. There were no first or second drafts here; no revisions for a better grade. There was just one chance at success: either I would write a good essay or I would be forced to watch my A be obliterated by a single grade. From my experience with my previous essays, I knew that I had straddled the A/B line. I should expect no different this time, and I feared that but a single comma error or a single flubbed reference might sink me. In hindsight, my decision to write on utopian idealism in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was a poor one. I was engaging with a level of literary criticism that was foreign, obscure, and over my head. In the end, I scraped by with the lowest possible A average. William Godwin nearly came back to haunt me.

That night we had a couple of guests in our flat. Natalie Hislop and Rachel Hurst, who were known to us as "Nat" and "ginger Rach," came over around six that evening. Rachel came to see Liam, as those two had slowly become an item over the course of the semester. I could see that they got along very well, and their relationship came as no shock to any of us. Natalie was in our flat because she was reduced to bumming meals off of her friends. Her funds were long gone, and according to her, her parents refused to give her any more money because she had spent her last £200 on clothing.

While Natalie and "ginger Rach" were visiting, everyone decided rather spontaneously that they would all love to meet my American parents. I consented after some resistance, and soon there were seven people piled into my small room trying to squeeze into a seat on my even

smaller bed as I rung my parents on Skype. I prayed they would for once not answer my call, but they did. I think that in the end everyone was amused, except perhaps me. My parents probably learned a thing or two they did not yet know, and I think my British friends left knowing more about me too. While this brief conversation constitutes but a trivial example of intercultural interaction, striking was the juxtaposition of fully American people and fully British people. My parents could hardly understand Kim's thick accent, and my flatmates could hardly understand my parents' slight southern dialect. I had not realized that, over the course of three months, I had actually myself picked up a great ear for British. American accents were, for a while, the strange sounding ones. My accent stayed mostly the same, though I did accomplish the loss of at least part of my southern accent, of which one day I had hoped to eliminate all traces.

13 December, a Saturday: I relaxed with Liam most of the day that Saturday. He had recently bought a new PlayStation, so we spent a few hours mindlessly slaughtering other people in multiplayer on *Call of Duty*. It had been a while since I had even held a controller, so of course I played terribly.

That night in PJ Hall, the Bangor University choir put on its Christmas recital. Stacey, Kim and I went to support Kate, who was a member of the choir; Liam was planning on going but remembered that he had football practice at the last minute. I have a real soft spot for Christmas music in the same way that I have a soft spot for cathedrals, and hearing Christmas hymns sung in Welsh only added to the emotional, spiritual nature of the experience. The choir members were dressed in all black, and they looked stunning and solemn. The acoustics in PJ hall were incredible, for the songs echoed through the hall in a way that put me immediately into a reflective mood about my study abroad experience. Through my deep state of reflection and appreciation of the music I could hear Stacey and Kim snickering the entire time. Oh, if only I too were a carefree freshman!

14 December, a Sunday: I finished my Romantic Literature essay that day and realized then that I would not be done with essays by the time I got home. No, I would be working right up to that late January deadline. My parents were scheduled to arrive in Wales around December 23 so that they could spend with me my last week in Wales. Our flat had already made plans to prepare a large Christmas dinner the upcoming Tuesday before everyone left for the holidays. I pitched in and bought most of the food because Liam was down to his last few cents and so was everyone else. It was strange, but it actually felt more fulfilling to buy things for these people than it did for myself, and I had no qualms about pitching in a few extra pounds to ensure our meal was a success.

15 December, a Monday: Tonight I met with the members of the Bangor Mountain Walking Club for the last time while I was in Bangor. It was the night of the Christmas meal and reservations had been made for us all at the Eryl Mor Hotel just a few blocks uphill from The Tap. There was the option of turkey, steak, or salmon, and the hotel was not stingy with the amount of food they provided. There was plenty to go around, and the club even provided the luxury of three bottles of wine per table. Christmas crackers were the first order of business before we ate. A delightfully British tradition, Christmas crackers are thin cardboard tubes covered in festive foil with a firecracker-like charge inside that makes a loud pop when pulled. Each cracker contained a paper crown which we all put on before we ate, a variety of useless plastic novelties, and a lame joke on a scrap of paper. There is only one way to properly pull a Christmas cracker, I was told beforehand. When the time came, everyone put one hand on one end of their Christmas cracker, and their other hand on the end of the Christmas cracker of the person adjacent to them. In this way, everyone's arms were linked around the table and we all opened our crackers simultaneously. It was a simple act no more than fifteen seconds long, but it

is one of my most pleasant memories of Bangor. There was an abundance of Christmas cheer to go around, and everyone at the hotel was joyful that night.

16 December, a Tuesday: On Tuesday I had another Christmas dinner to attend, and this time I would be playing a critical role in organizing it. Though my dinner with the mountain walking club was an amazing evening, the Christmas dinner we hosted in our flat was more intimate, more personal. That Tuesday dinner was the final significant event, besides an uneventful party the next day, of my core study abroad experience.

We walked down to Morrison's that afternoon to purchase the food that we would need. Stacey had invited several of her friends, and Nicole had invited several of hers as well. The Christmas dinner we prepared was really the only time we had a large gathering in our flat that semester. I bought a couple of pre-cooked chickens, frozen vegetables, and potatoes. Everyone else pitched in to buy the Yorkshire puddings, the gravy, and the stuffing (for which I believe there is another name, which I cannot recall). In addition to the food we had to buy, we needed an extra table and several extra chairs. Lucky for us, Kyle was still around, so we went to a flat on the first floor whose residents had all already left for the holidays. We took a table and several chairs from there, and after failing to stuff the table in the small elevator we carried it carefully up the stairs.

That night's dinner was a highlight of my experiences in Bangor. After working so long that day to prepare the dinner, it was a delight to see it was a success. Thirteen people were there in total, and the food was delicious. Nicole made a few Chinese sides to go along with our meal; we all appreciated her kindness. After dinner we played a few card games and called it a night.

17 December – 22 December: One by one, I said goodbye to my flatmates as they departed for the holidays. It was the last time I would see them, probably forever. Soon they would exist only as words on a page, brief memories in my journal. When they returned, I

would be gone. Kim left first, and then Stacey. Reece stayed because he had no one to go home to, and over the course of our few days alone in the flat we had a chance to bond, to become actual friends. Ing Sun, though she was staying until June, departed to spend the holidays in some fabulous European city. Liam and Kyle left last of all. I was sad to see them all go. I could see from the kitchen window as they walked into the courtyard and out of my sight forever. Of course, we all talked about how we would have to visit each other at some point in the future, how we were such excellent friends. I think we all knew that would never happen; friends, close as they may be, drift apart as life unfolds and new friends are made. Yet, for the short time I knew them all, they *did* have an impact upon my life. They incorporated me into their social sphere in a way that essentially brought me up to speed socially where before I had been lagging behind; I may forget them, but I will not forget the effect that they exerted on my life.

24 December, a Wednesday: My parents arrived Tuesday, and I had honestly never been more glad to see them in my life. Yet I will not describe in this journal, with the exception of one event, anything we did together during the seven or so days that we spent in Bangor. When they arrived, I was once again placed in my comfort zone; they were my tether to home. I was no longer studying abroad at that point, and for the most part I was simply sightseeing. I qualify my previous statement because there was one notable event that occurred on December 24: I attended midnight mass at the Bangor Cathedral.

Dressed in a new coat, I filed into the cathedral that night with the rest of the worshippers, most of whom were Bangor residents. Before I left I wanted to experience the Anglican branch of Christianity, and I absolutely could not have picked a more perfect night. I found a seat in a pew about halfway toward the front of the cathedral. During the period preceding the start of the service as more people filed in, I admired the woodwork, the

stonework, and the ancient aura of the building I was in. It was cold inside but I did not feel it, as I was too invested in admiring the beauty of the place. Bangor cathedral struck a chord with me in the same way that the cathedral in Manchester did, and though the service had not yet started yet I was already primed for an emotional evening.

The evening started with a prayer, and I bowed my head in reverence. As I kept my eyes closed I could scarcely hear the din of the bishop's voice—my mind was filled then with a rush of images and memories from the past three months. I thought about everything I had experienced, the friends I had made, how I loved Bangor and how it had become a kind of second home—and I wept. I wept uncontrollably even as I unbowed my head. The choir opened with “O Holy Night” and “The First Noel.” As the members sang beautifully and in perfect harmony, I was again dragged under a second tide of emotions. I looked toward the front of the cathedral near the ceiling where there was a large wooden figure of Jesus, gazing down upon the room. Despite my agnosticism a deep spiritual awe struck me, and I was not crying out of depression or dismay but out of gratitude, gratitude for everything I had experienced there. I regained my composure during the bishop's sermon and thought that surely I was emotionally drained for the evening. I was wrong. The final performance was by a children's choir, and they sung a Welsh hymn called “Suo Gan.” To this day that song will bring tears to my eyes. That night, as the children sang with utter perfection those beautiful and foreign notes, every tear-inducing emotion I had hitherto experienced that evening was combined, amplified, and came welling back up. I wept because of the beauty of that moment; a display of weakness, utter vulnerability, seemed to be the only possible emotional reaction that could do that experience justice. I wept as I thought of Bangor, of the past three months and of how I would miss them. It struck me then, just as it strikes me now, that no amount of words or pages would sufficiently

capture my study abroad experience. Instead I must think back to that cold night of December 24th, of “Suo Gan” resounding through the cathedral, and of the tears that streamed down my face, of the thoughts that produced them. Only then do I find myself back again in Bangor.



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Appendix A: Notes on the Welsh Language, According to the Writer

The Welsh language is very complicated, or it definitely appeared that way to an English speaker. Cymraeg belongs to the Celtic language family, and English belongs to the romantic language family. As such, Cymraeg and English have very little in common, and it is not as easy for an English speaker to learn Welsh as it would be for an English speaker to learn French or Spanish, for example. Admittedly, I have almost no understanding of Cymraeg except for an elementary knowledge of pronunciation, and even my grasp on that information is tenuous at best. I managed to learn just a few phrases in Welsh; all syntax, however, is virtually foreign to me. In this brief section I will attempt to convey what I have learned about pronunciation with the main intention of exposing the reader to the Welsh language—not because the knowledge is expected to be of any practical use to the reader.

D, DD: The letter “D” in welsh makes a normal “D” sound, as in “delta”. “DD” however, makes a “TH” sound, as in “then”.

F, FF: In Welsh, a single “F” makes a “V” sound. Thus, the first syllable in “prifysgol”, the welsh word for university, is pronounced “priv”. “FF” makes the English “F” sound, as in “fire”.

LL: Called the “belted L” by linguists, LL is by far the most confusing sound I encountered, as there exists no equivalent sound in English. It seems to me to be a mixture of the sounds made by an “L”, an “H” and a “C”. Though I managed to pick up a good understanding of the sound made by that letter, I could not possible explain it here. The sound of the LL letter in Welsh is only really understood when one hears it spoken by a native speaker. When a Welsh speaker

pronounces it, it is a sound both foreign and pleasing. My pronunciation of the letter is still lacking, though it is a good mimicry.

U: U in Welsh makes the English "I" sound, as in "piece."

Y: The letter Y generally makes a short U sound, as in "up," but the pronunciation varies depending where in a word the letter Y is found. For example, in the beginning or middle syllables of a word, the letter makes the U sound that I mentioned. If, however, the letter Y appears as the final syllable of a word then it makes the traditional English sound, as in the word "mystic".

As I said, I am absolutely helpless where the pronunciation of longer Welsh words is concerned. I admire the Welsh language in part because of its difficulty and the degree to which it seems exotic when compared to English and the more familiar romantic family of languages. I am impressed, too, by the intense pride with which the Welsh people regard their language. Welsh language and culture are inextricably linked. Though no one in my flat spoke Welsh fluently, those who went through the Welsh school system were required to take Welsh language classes and at the very least had a better understanding of pronunciation than I did. In the mountain walking club, there were several members who spoke fluent Welsh, and on the isle of Anglesey there is an unusually high density of fluent speakers.