In the fall 2015 semester, I enrolled in ENGL428Y: Another Green World: Nature and Early English. A seminar for students in the departmental Honors program, the course utilized ecocritical theory to examine medieval texts, focusing particularly on both repeated and unique cultural interpretations and representations of nature. The professor, Dr. Kellie Robertson, required students to write a final research paper composed of 10-12 pages that focused on one reading in particular and explored a major theme of the class. I chose to write about *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a poem written in the 14th century by an anonymous author. After reading and discussing the Arthurian tale, I was immediately struck by the character of the Green Knight, a giant green figure who interrupts King Arthur’s New Year’s dinner by demanding to play a beheading game with one of the knights of Camelot, a game that he magically survives. Later in the poem, readers discover that the immortal knight is also Lord Bertilak, a cultured and seemingly-human aristocrat who lives in the Hautdesert forest miles away from Camelot. I immediately questioned the significance of the character’s dual ontology, and these questions would later guide my research. I wondered: why did the Gawain-poet write a shapeshifting figure into a text which is otherwise realistic, and what did this strange human/nonhuman hybridity mean to the poetic work as a whole?

I began the writing process by selecting specific passages in the poem and performing close-readings. I reexamined the initial descriptions of the Green Knight as well as Lord Bertilak, scrutinizing the Gawain-poet’s language at these textual moments, before analyzing the Knight and Bertilak’s respective actions, diction, and interpersonal character dynamics. Once I had performed my initial inquiry and drafted a precursory thesis statement, I began my online
research to engage with scholars in the wider academic community. I utilized databases such as JStor, WorldCat, Project Muse, and Google Scholar, relying on broad search-terms such as “Green Knight,” “hybridity,” and the poem’s title. As my research progressed, however, I modified my approach; once I had secured sources directly related to my topic (namely, Lawrence Besserman’s article and Gillian Rudd’s “Being Green in Late Medieval English Literature”), I scoured through these sources’ footnotes and bibliographies, highlighting further scholarship that peaked my interest and that would add to or perhaps even challenge my thesis. I subsequently located the new articles by directly accessing their journal of publication. In this way, I gained a comprehensive understanding of the scholarly conversation surrounding medieval literature as well as my thesis’s more specialized academic niche. By the end of the process, I was familiar with the names, biographies, and works of several prominent modern-day medieval scholars (most importantly, Gillian Rudd and, although he is not cited in my bibliography, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen), and I felt that I could confidently and effectively engage with their arguments. Throughout the entire process, I relied on the University of Maryland’s subscriptions to various databases as well as its participation in the Interlibrary Loan Services network to access articles both online and in print, and I realized how invaluable and crucial these library resources are to performing research in the humanities.

I encountered a strange form of adversity during my research process while reading Gillian Rudd’s “The Green Knight’s Balancing Act.” While reading this piece, I realized that Rudd’s argument was incredibly close to my own thesis at that time – i.e. that the Green Knight/Lord Bertilak serves as Sir Gawain’s antithesis in the poem and that the hybrid ultimately reveals to readers their own potential hybridity. I felt disheartened that my own findings closely resembled those of another scholar, and I feared that my paper would border plagiarism if I did
not alter my thesis. I saw Dr. Robertson during her office hours and relayed my dilemma to her. She advised me to keep my research as it was, to add a footnote if necessary stating that scholars have independently noted findings similar to my own (see footnote 18 in my paper), and to perhaps add a new dimension to my paper in an effort to make it unique. She pointed me to our course’s last reading, “The Agency of Assemblages” from *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* by Jane Bennett. Ultimately, Dr. Robertson inspired me to turn my research in a different direction by adding a layer of scholarship to my argument, putting my findings about the medieval poem in conversation with a prominent modern philosophical theory of hybridity (or to be more precise, of ‘assemblages’). As a result, my research blossomed; as I refined the ‘so what?’ of my existing thesis, the paper gained deepened senses of both academic timeliness and personal relevance. In December, I submitted my final paper “Hybrid Bodies: The Green Knight, Lord Bertilak, and Sir Gawain as Assemblages in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*” to Dr. Robertson never having been more proud of my own authorship.

In conclusion, I learned a lot during my research process. Like I previously stated, I fully realized the importance of the University of Maryland Libraries’ various subscriptions and partnerships which provide students access to a virtually-limitless amount of information and knowledge. I undoubtedly would not have been able to perform the same caliber of research without these resources, and my paper would not have met its full potential as a result. I also learned the benefits of seeking inspiration for a research project outside of its existing academic niche; my final paper proves that interdisciplinary research can often be more fruitful, pertinent, and interesting. Furthermore, I honestly would not change my research process for this paper if I could. Although I admittedly read a plethora of articles that I did not end up citing or using in my paper, every source that I digested added to my knowledge of the subject area, and I
thoroughly enjoyed becoming an expert on hybridity in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. As I gained familiarity with the current community of medieval scholars, I also acquired an understanding of the time, effort, creativity, and willpower necessary to be a researcher of the humanities. I spent more time writing, editing, and researching for this paper than I ever previously had during my collegiate career, and I am ultimately grateful that Dr. Robertson challenged me and my classmates to produce elite work and that the University of Maryland Libraries’ resources facilitated my research during every step of the process.