

Drowning and Other Stories: a creative nonfiction portfolio

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I spent my summer reading, writing, and thinking about the ways in which humans can ethically participate in nonhuman ecosystems. My project, originally titled “Coastal Living,” was grounded in my personal experience living on the Maine coast over the past three summers. Taking specific places and memories as a starting point, I created larger narratives with the coast as the central unifying theme. I wrote about fishing and shellfish harvesting in Maine, and how my participation in these systems has forced me to think critically about the environmental and moral consequences of eating meat. I learned about Maine’s invasive species (specifically the European green crab, *Carcinus maenas*), and considered the ways in which environmental policy is used to preserve certain species and ecosystem types that are economically viable. I read about the impact of climate change on coastal communities throughout the world, with a specific interest in the Gulf of Maine. Besides looking at the coast from an ecological perspective, I also wrote about the emotional associations that can develop between individual people and the landscapes that surround them. For example, my essay titled “A Drowning” explores my personal associations between water and feelings of depression, sadness, and melancholia. This essay portrays “drowning” as a metaphorical and mythical act, and considers how different interpretations of drowning may all be fundamentally environmental.

Working on this project has taught me a lot about my motivations and passions within the broader field of environmental nonfiction. I will be using the research and writing that I produced during this fellowship to shape an honors project this coming fall, which is tentatively titled “Mourning the End of the World: essays on depression and ecological dread.” My honors project will bridge the intersection between environmentalism and mental health, with a specific focus on the concept of “ecological dread” (also referred to as “environmental anxiety,” “environmental trauma,” “endsickness,” and other related terms). Ecological dread can be summarized as the debilitating mixture of negative emotions that a person feels when confronted with climate change, natural disasters, and other major environmental events. My honors research will be heavily influenced by the themes of my summer fellowship.

I’m very grateful for the research opportunities that the Rusack Coastal Studies Fellowship has provided, and I’m incredibly excited to embark on the next stage of my research in the fall.

Faculty Mentor: Professor Alex Marzano-Lesnevich

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