

Place-based Writing and Urban Fantasy

My honors project grows out of a passion for fiction writing and two different summer research projects. In the summer of 2020, I interned with a local writer and interviewed other Maine authors in order to learn about the state's literary scene while I worked on crafting some of my own place-based stories. In the summer of 2021, I worked with Professor Jill Pearlman in the Urban Studies department to conduct research on the (mis)use of quasi-historical, faux-medieval aesthetics and built environments in architecture, pop culture, and fantasy literature. But my research quickly shifted to studying a contrasting pattern I found in the physical landscapes of urban fantasy, an increasingly popular (sub)genre whose worlds rebuke the Tolkien-esque, pastoral-medieval landscapes of traditional fantasy.

This academic year, I intend to study both place-based writing and urban fantasy as an English honors candidate by completing a collection of no less than five short stories inspired by Portland, Maine. My experience growing up in South Portland will help to ground this hyperlocal focus, and I will use Portland's small city setting to try my hand at writing in the urban fantasy genre, although I am not planning on constraining my work completely to any one genre or style of writing. My stories will likely investigate themes such as: what it means to create a home for oneself in a rapidly evolving landscape, the painful, often unseen contrast of inequality and privilege in urban spaces, the uncanny and the monstrous, and the surreal, mundane magic of the everyday.

I will begin my honors by continuing to read works of fiction, and particularly short stories, that fall into either the urban fantasy or Maine / place-based literature categories while working on my own small stories and writing exercises to practice, prepare, and think more deeply about my short story collection. This work will allow me to better hone and develop my honors prospectus along with my advisor by early October, and once we have edited the prospectus after receiving feedback from departmental faculty I intend to begin planning and working on a series of stories for the collection, which I will draft, workshop and thoroughly revise over the course of the several months with the support of my advisor and additional readers.