

ON SFU WORLD LITERATURE'S

2019 UNDERGRADUATE CONFERENCE:

Being in Place: Landscape and Identity

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There was an ode to urgency that consumed the Halpern Centre as undergraduates from all corners of SFU flooded its halls—as, after all, there was a conference to be had. The immediate realization of all tasks was encouraged; thus, the quiet and comforting buzz of hard work filled the room, as each of us had little time to stand still. To spin around was to see someone with ink etched across their hand, or another with a camera tucked under their arm, gently trying to capture the flutter of life that roamed freely and methodically in preparation for the event ahead. This amalgamation of academics, constructed by creative minds was the 5th annual of its sort, and upheld an increased participation of papers from various First Nations and French classes, showcasing a more diverse and educational setting.

The theme of this year's conference: Being in Place: Landscape and Identity. It was sweetly ironic, as each person involved in the event at hand appeared to be drawn to place, unable to remove themselves from within the building's walls. Topography: in the midst of the chaos that is university life, it felt essential to devote four hours of one's time to celebrating the aspect of our existence that is often subdued from the forefront of our thoughts. In this world, landscapes of both the literal and physical can be muted in one's mind, while screaming loudly in another's. It is a term often concrete in structure, yet fluid in nature.



As such, the sheer vastness of the term manifested itself in the multiplicity of papers presented. Over forty ideas basking in originality were presented that day, and each one tackled the topic through their own lens. From geographical to ideological, the words uttered in the Halpern Centre derived from individuals across vast spectrums of life, humans with experiences and moments etched into them, whose being resonated with the eagerly listening audience. That is precisely what the topic of Being in Place suggests: that one can feel entirely anchored in their landscape while also feeling alienated; a landscape in which the ground beneath their feet feels both urgent and cemented. To take one turn in this lifetime is to invite geography to wobble. The pieces presented stretched from a Sex and the City analysis to Kafka, with some humorous, and others tragic. Nonetheless, what can undeniably be agreed upon is that each student spoke with distinction and truth, filled with a desire to articulate their allegiance to place and express how it moves them.