

English 647.001  
Spring 2022  
T 7-9:50 p.m.  
Colson G18  
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Dr. Cari M. Carpenter  
Office: 341 Colson  
Office Hours: W 12:30-2:30  
(and by appointment)  
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## Special Topics in American Literature, 1865-1915: The Ecogothic

As an exciting new strain of nineteenth-century American literary theory, the ecogothic—a term applied to either the texts themselves or the theoretical lens through which they are examined—is associated with nature turned eerie, spectacular or even monstrous. While the word “nature” has conventionally called to mind a pristine wilderness untouched by humans, ecocritics have begun to consider place in more expansive terms. Like theorists Joni Adamson and others, I am interested in what is called environmental racism: a structural oppression that means, among other things, that people of color are much more likely to live on or near polluted lands. For these residents, a pristine wilderness seems far removed indeed. We can witness the beginnings of modern environmental racism and other forms of oppression in the nineteenth century, when, with the rise of industrialization, the landscape (both the actual and, accordingly, the literary) became contaminated. For some, literature became a means of protesting this form of urban “progress.” In this course we will study at least four kinds of nineteenth-century American ecogothic literature: the “classic” American literature of artists like Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Chesnutt, Harriet Jacobs, and Elizabeth Spofford, the “muckraking” literature of Ida Wells Barnett and Rebecca Harding Davis, the “monstrous” texts of Stephen Crane and H.P. Lovecraft, and the increasingly prevalent ghost story. Throughout the semester we will keep past, present, and future in mind, as the specter of climate change looms large.

Note: Most of the course readings will be available to you on eCampus. Please be sure I have the email address you check most frequently, and let me know if you'd like all of the readings at once.

### **Texts to Purchase (available online or in campus bookstores)**

Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Dover)

Davis, *Life in the Iron Mills* (Feminist Press)

Chopin, *The Awakening* (SDE Classics)

James, *The Turn of the Screw* (Norton critical edition)

### **Requirements**

Participation (10%): Students in graduate-level English courses are expected to come to class prepared to participate in class discussion. Attendance is, of course, required. All assigned reading should be completed on schedule.

Leading Discussion: (10%) Alone or with one other student, you will initiate our discussion for one class session. You should prepare your presentation to help generate and focus our discussion for that session. Ask questions for discussion, set up important terms, provide context, etc. Don't read a paper. Presentations can and should draw on a number of resources related to the week's reading. I recommend that you prepare a handout for the class. Plan to spend about 20-25 minutes leading discussion.

Group to Determine an Ecocritical Text (5%): On March 22, you and other members of a small group will propose one ecogothic text from the period that you believe should be included in this course and one piece of theory associated with it. You will then, as a group, lead a discussion of it.

Draft of Final Paper (5%): This five-page draft of your final paper will give you an opportunity to get feedback on your work to date. You will receive written feedback from me and a peer.

Peer Critique: (10%) Each student will read one other student's paper and write a peer critique of it in the form of a letter. More information about this paper is forthcoming.

Final Paper and Presentation (60%): You will write and present a conference-length (about 10-page) paper on a relevant topic of your choice.

## **CLASS POLICIES**

\*Statement regarding Covid.\*\* Although infections have decreased with the availability of vaccines, we are still in the midst of a complex, rapidly-changing event that might require small or significant changes in the syllabus or class procedures. My first concern is of course health and safety, so I will defer to medical officials in making decisions about the class. If you (or a close friend or family member) happen to fall ill with Covid, be sure to notify your professors; we can then make a plan with you for classwork. Our classes will be in person. If you are not comfortable with this format, please replace this with another class. **Please make sure I have the email address you check frequently and stay in constant contact with me throughout the semester. We will get through this!**

For the safety of you and your peers, please get vaccinated, wear a mask, and observe social distancing during class.

University statement: WVU is committed to maintaining a safe learning environment for all students, faculty, and staff. Should campus operations change because of health concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic or other campus-wide emergency, it is possible that this course will move to a fully online delivery format. If that occurs, students will be advised of technical and/or equipment requirements, including remote proctoring software.

**Updated WVU Attendance Policy** In a face-to-face environment, our commitment to safety requires students, staff, and instructors to observe the social distancing and personal protective equipment (PPE) guidelines set by the University at all times. While in class, students will sit in assigned seats when required and will wear PPE according to current University guidelines. Students who fail to comply may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for sanctions.

As detailed in the WVU Attendance policy, a student who becomes sick or is required to quarantine during the semester should notify the instructor. The student should then work with the instructor to develop a plan to complete the course learning outcomes while he or she is absent.

All assignments must be completed and attendance must be regular for a passing grade. Participation will be assessed as a discretionary component of required course work.

Plagiarism, a form of theft, is illegal. Plagiarism is defined as the submission of work that contains ideas not fully your own: ideas taken from publications, from other students, your professors, the Internet, etc. Remember that you are required to cite a source if you include a direct quotation *or* if you borrow an idea and put it in your own words. If you have questions about the fine line between being influenced by a text or person and plagiarizing its/his/her ideas, cite the source. For a more detailed description of plagiarism, as well as the correct form for citation of sources, see a writing handbook or ask me. A proven case of plagiarism may result in an unforgivable “F” in the course.

West Virginia University is committed to social justice. In accordance with that commitment I maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and nondiscrimination. WVU does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, disability, age, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color, or national origin. Any suggestion as how to further such a positive and open environment in this class is appreciated and given serious attention.

Any student with a disability who needs an accommodation or other assistance in this course should make an appointment to speak with me as soon as possible, and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (call 293-5805 or email Access2@mail.wvu.edu).

## **SCHEDULE**

*Each piece should be read by the date on which it is listed. This schedule is subject to change.*

**T=textbook (purchase hard copy)**

**E=electronic (available online via pdf or url; see “Readings”)**

T Jan. 11: Introduction

T Jan. 18: Irving, "Sleepy Hollow" (<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/41/41-0.txt>); Melville, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" (<https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furr/i2l/par-tar.html>); Lloyd-Smith, "What is American Gothic?" (E); Kern, "Ecocriticism: What is it Good For?" (E); Keetley and Silvis, "Approaches to the Ecogothic" (E)

T Jan. 25: Poe, "The Black Cat", "The Fall of the House of Usher", and "Ligeia" (<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2148/2148-h/2148-h.htm>); Hawthorne, "The Birth-Mark," (<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/59280/59280-h/59280-h.htm>) "The Minister's Black Veil" (same); Ginsberg, "Slavery and the Gothic Horror of Poe's 'The Black Cat'" (E); Edwards, "Introduction" (E); Buell, "Toxic Discourse" (E)

T Feb. 1: Sigourney, "The Father" (E); Spofford, "Circumstance" (<https://www.bartleby.com/400/prose/1889.html>); Marshall, "Literal and Metaphoric Harmony with Nature: Ecofeminism and Harriet Prescott Spofford's 'Circumstance'" (E); Leopold, "Wilderness"; Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness" (E)

T Feb. 8: Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (T); Roberts, "Slavery and Gothic Form" (E); Carpenter, "Bleeding Feet and Failing Knees: The Ecogothic in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Chasing Ice*"

T Feb. 15: Ida Wells Barnett, excerpt from *Southern Horrors*, "The Offense"- "Self Help" (<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14975/14975-h/14975-h.htm>); Chesnutt, "Po' Sandy" (<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14975/14975-h/14975-h.htm>); Dunbar, "The Lynching of Jube Wilson" (<https://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/100/the-heart-of-happy-hollow/1715/chapter-12-the-lynching-of-jube-benson/>); Anderson, "The Fall of the House of Po' Sandy" (E); Chesnutt, "Po' Sandy" (E); Outka, "Trauma and Metamorphosis in Charles Chesnutt's *Conjure Tales*" (E)

Feb. 22 Davis, *Life in the Iron Mills* (T); Phelps, "The Tenth of January" (E); Gatlin, "Disturbing Aesthetics" (E)

**Deadline: Titles to read for 3/22**

**T March 1 NO CLASS**

T March 8 Chopin, *The Awakening*; Gaard, "Ecofeminism" (E); Plumwood, "Feminism and Ecofeminism" (E); George, "The Whole Island Seems Changed": A Bioregional Approach to Kate Chopin's Fiction" (E)

**Mar. 12-20 SPRING BREAK**

**T March 22 NAME YOUR TEXTS**

T March 29 Crane, *The Monster* (<https://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/crane/monster.htm>); Bierce, "The Incident at Owl Creek Bridge" (<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/375/pg375->

images.html); Lovecraft, "The Outsider"; Burleson, "The Outsider" (E); Smith, "Twentieth-Century Gothicism" (E)

T Apr. 5 James, *Turn of the Screw*; Smith, "Gothic Proximities" (E)  
**Peer Critique Letter due (one copy to me and one to author)**

T Apr. 12 Wharton, "Kerfol" (<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/24350/24350-h/24350-h.htm>); Glasgow; "The Shadowy Third" (E); Hopkins, "Talma Gordon" (E); Freeman, "The Lost Ghost" (<http://www.eastoftheweb.com/shortstories/UBooks/LostGhos.shtml>); Bierce, "A Vine on the House" (E); Weinstock, "The Ghost in the Parlor" and "Queer Haunting Spaces" (E); Smith, "Twentieth Century"  
**Draft of final paper due (one copy to me and one to peer)**  
**Last Day to Drop a Class with a "W"**

T Apr. 19 Presentations

T Apr. 26 Presentations

**Final due: to my email by W May 4, 5 pm**