Ecohorror & Environmental Literature

“Nature is a power incessantly ready for action”

– Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*

“I knew her for a little ghost / That in my garden walked”

-Edna St. Vincent Millay “The Little Ghost”

Dr. Joshua Myers Spring 2025

Email: jmyers3@bsu.edu Class: 2 – 2:50 p.m. in Burris 115

Office: Elliot Basement Office Phone: 765-285-7418

**Office Hours:** M:10-12 & 3-4; W: 10-12; TH: 1-4; F: 10-12

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Ecohorror and Environmental Literature invites students to explore the fascinating overlap between science and culture by taking an interdisciplinary approach to storytelling and reading. In a world beset by increased natural disasters – storms, droughts, wildfires, floods – discussions and debates about the causes and consequences of environmental issues frequently form the basis for narratives of adventure and horror.

More than just scary stories, such tales reflect how monsters and madness often indicate deep-seeded human anxieties and emotions about important environmental issues. Toxic terrors of pollution, mythic mushrooms, evolutionary evils; there seems to be no limits to the interplay between nature and the human imagination.

Looking at these thrills and chills of fictional stories, alongside the non-fiction of science and nature writing, students will discover how human behavior has influenced, and been influenced by, the intricacies of place and nature. In this way, students will address how society can use written communication to prevent humans from being the next endangered species.

LEARNING OUTCOMES & GOALS

* Learn about the growing field of Environmental Humanities and its many worldly applications.
* Enhance students’ critical thinking abilities through careful reading and thoughtful analysis.
* Recognize the interdisciplinary nature of reading and research in order to produce well-reasoned and thorough scholarship.
* Situate the genre of horror, and its many subgenres, in appropriate historical and cultural contexts to better understand horror as a mode of storytelling and artistic production.
* Engage in discourses about environment, nature, and the written expression of such matters, especially as pertains to the genre of horror and similar narrative styles.

REQUIRED TEXTS & SUPPLIES

* Occasional short readings will be provided to students by the instructor.
* Notebook and a writing implement (pencil, pen, etc.)
* The following books, provided by the Indiana Academy:
  + Nonfiction:
    - *A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold
    - *Carnivorous Nights* by Margaret Mittelbach
* Fiction:
  + - *Wildwood: Tales of Terror & Transformation from the Forest* edited by William P. Simmons
    - *Picnic at Hanging Rock* by Joan Lindsay
    - *Burnt Offerings* by Robert Marasco

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Participation 15%

(graded monthly, see next page for specifics)

In-Class Activities / Shorter Writings/ Reading Quizzes 15%

(several – agglomerate score)

Nature Journaling 15%

(monthly nature writing using *A Sand County Almanac, total of 3*)

Cryptid Creature Design 15%

(students will explore cryptozoology by designing a cryptid-animal

inspired by a mythical (?) creature)

Analytical Course Text Paper 20%

(4-6 page paper about a course reading)

Ecohorror Paper 20%

(4-6 page ecocritical paper about any horror or horror-style work)

**Grade Scale:** A (95-100%); A – (90-94%); B+ (87-89%); B (83-86%); B – (80-82%); C+ (77-79%); C (73-76%); C – (70-72%); D (69% and below)

* **Assignment sheets with specific graded instructions and requirements for each project will be made available at the appropriate time during the semester.**
* **You will have plenty of time to complete all assignments and plenty of opportunity to receive assistance from me. Thus, there are no re-writes/revisions of an assignment *after* the grade for that assignment is returned to you – no exceptions!**
* **You can always talk to me about your individual work and progress throughout the semester, so please do not hesitate to reach out. However, if you are having difficulty with any aspect of the assignment then you must please reach out BEFORE you submit the project for a grade (not after).**
* **ALL major writing assignments completed outside of class will be typed on a Google Doc created by Dr. Myers and assigned to the student, so that Dr. Myers can monitor students’ writing process.**

EXTENSIONS & LATE WORK POLICY

* I rarely grant individual extensions, and only if there is a legitimate reason (i.e. documented absences with The Academy). The following things are NOT legitimate excuses:
  + Being busy with other courses - everyone, myself included, has numerous responsibilities outside of this class.
  + Last minute technological mishaps.
  + Getting sick or missing class when something is due is NOT a valid excuse for being unable to submit an assignment that you’ve had weeks to complete.
* I will always except late work with an accompanying loss of points. The amount of missed points ultimately depends on the circumstances, AND o on how late the assignment is. In those situations, I will give the student notification of a specific timetable via email.

The *only* exceptions to any aspects of the above policy are cases that have been appropriately documented with the Academy (for example, a family emergency or a severe illness of which the administration has been made aware).

PARTICIPATION GRADING POLICY

In an attempt to be considerate of all personality types – those who feel comfortable talking and those who do not – the following is how I will grade your monthly participation:

* **If you actively participate by contributing to discussion (i.e. you talk):** then you are NOT required to take notes when I tell the class to write something down (though, certainly, I *strongly* recommend and encourage that all students always take notes).
* **If you do not actively contribute to discussion (i.e. you are quiet/shy/not a talker**): then you ARE required to take notes, especially when I tell the class to write something down. ALSO: to compensate for your not talking, you should be visibly attentive with your body language to show that you are actively paying attention (nodding your head, smiling, generally showing that you are aware of what is happening in class).
* Workshopping and peer review are vital to the process of creative writing and, by extension, are therefore key to your success in this class. All students should, as part of their participation grade, be prepared to have their work read by their peers, to read the work of their peers, and to give productive and respective feedback.

**ANY of the following behaviors will result in a loss of participation points for EVERY student (no matter which group, talker or non-talker, that you fall into):**

* Unauthorized use of electronic devices, laptops, or phones. ESPECIALLY blatant phone usage during class, such as texting when you are supposed to be listening – see more about this in the official Indiana Academy Electronic Devices Policy, included later in this syllabus.
* Sleeping/nodding off/laying with your head down, etc.
* Not bringing required copies of rough drafts or other required materials for workshops
* General refusal to participate (not taking notes, not working with groupmates, ignoring me when I speak to you, etc.)
* General disrespectful attitudes or behavioral problems (note: any such instances will also be documented with Ms. Schultz and, in such an event, she will likely require that you meet with her and possibly other members of the administration).
* More than 1 **un**excused absences during the month. If you’re not in class, you cannot participate.

**Each time you engage in any of the above behaviors, you lose ten points from your monthly participation grade.**

**FOR EXAMPLE:**

* **texting once = – 10**
* **sleeping once = – 10**
* **one day when you refused completely to engage = – 10**
* **2 unexcused absences (1 unexcused absence more than the 1 that I permit) = -10**

**EQUALS: a monthly participation grade of 60/100.**

ATTENDANCE & ABSENCE POLICY

It is the policy of the Indiana Academy that any absence from class is unexcused, except for illness, death in the family, college or school-related activities, and extenuating circumstances. When a student is absent from a class, the instructor reports the student absence to the Faculty Attendance Coordinator in the Office of Academic Affairs. Unless the absence is excused by a school official, it is considered unexcused. The decision as to whether an absence is excused is not determined by the instructor. Four or more unexcused absences in any particular class a student takes will lead to academic and residential consequences to be determined by the Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of Residential Life that may include detention, residential groundings, parent/principal conference, among others.

MAKE-UP ASSIGNMENT POLICY FOR THIS COURSE

* Makeup work for excused absences that have been documented with the academy are always permitted. The student must talk to the instructor upon their return to receive instructions regarding the make-up process and the schedule of due dates.
* If the absence was unexcused, I still permit a make-up for material missed that day, but I do so with the following strict guidelines:
  + **That the make-up assignment and/or scheduling of a make-up quiz be completed no later than one week from the student’s return.**
  + **Failure to submit any make-up assignment or to complete any make up of missed material within the one-week deadline (one week from the student’s return to class) will result in a zero on the assignment – no excuses!**
* Again, as stated earlier in the grading policy, **there are no re-writes/revisions of an assignment *after* the grade for that assignment is returned to you – no exceptions!**

ELECTRONIC DEVICES POLICY:

Pursuant to Indiana Code 20-26-5-40.7, The Indiana Academy for Science, Mathematics and Humanities prohibits student use of wireless communication devices for non-instructional purposes in the classroom. As such, any and all portable wireless devices, that have the capability to provide voice, messaging, or other data communication between two or more parties, must only be used for academic purposes directly tied to the classroom activity or related educational task. Exceptions to this wireless device policy are eligible through academic accommodations, individualized education programs, or with instructor approval permitting the use of a wireless device for justification related to health, safety, and/or well-being. The improper use of a wireless device in an active classroom setting is subject to disciplinary action including but not limited to; a verbal warning, temporary seizure of said device by a school official, an unexcused absence for the class in question, written communication to parent/guardian, among other elevated consequences for repeated improper use.

**For this course, specifically, all electronic devices are prohibited unless I have told you in-class that you can use them. You will take your notes with pen and paper – not electronic pad and stylus – and laptop use, phone use, earbuds, etc. are not permitted unless you have academic learning accommodations or except on days when I have specifically told you that you are permitted to use such devices** (for example, if we are having an in-class writing workshop). Non-permitted use of these devices will lower your monthly participation grade, as discussed previously in the participation policy.

E-MAIL POLICY

--- I check my e-mail regularly and often and so should you.

--- My response may not be instantaneous since, like you, I have a life outside of this classroom and other classes. I will always reply as soon as possible, so please be patient.

--- Please feel free to e-mail me anytime, but if you e-mail me after 6 p.m. you probably will not get a response until the next morning.

--- **Considering all of the above, you will ALWAYS get a response within 24 hours. If a full 24 hours go by, and you do not receive an emailed reply from me, then you should resend your e-mail because I did not receive it.** THUS, please be aware that email mishaps are not acceptable excuses for missed work.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

You are responsible for the integrity of your work, and you must produce work that is

academically honest. This means that all your coursework must be your own and must be created specifically for this course. Failing to maintain the integrity of your work can have serious consequences. Examples of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to, the following: submitting someone else’s paper, including papers you obtain online, as your own writing; and, attempting to take credit for someone else’s (or an AI’s) words or ideas without properly citing them. **If you are even remotely uncertain about whether or not any part of your work is academically honest, please contact me for assistance before you submit your work for grading.** Also, please refer to the student handbook for additional information, especially the quoted portions below:

* *Plagiarism: representing as one’s own work any material obtained on the Internet (such as term papers, articles, etc.). When Internet sources are used in student work, the author, publisher and website must be identified. (See policy on Academic Dishonesty in the student handbook.)*
* *Students are prohibited from using any electronic device to capture, record, and/or transmit test, quiz, exam, or other class information or any other information in a manner constituting fraud, theft, cheating, or academic dishonesty and students are prohibited from using electronic devices to receive such information.*
* *Plagiarism or violations of procedures prescribed to protect the integrity of an assignment, such as: a. Submitting an assignment purporting to be one’s original work, which has been wholly or partially created by another person; b. Presenting as one’s own work ideas, representations, or words of another person without customary and proper acknowledgment of sources; c. Submitting as new work, without the faculty member’s prior consent or knowledge, one’s own work which has been previously presented for another class elsewhere; d. Knowingly permitting one’s work to be submitted by another person as if it were the submitter’s original work; e. Cooperation with another person in academic dishonesty, either directly or indirectly, as an intermediary agent or broker; f. Knowingly destroying or altering another’s work, whether in written or digital form, computer files, artwork, or other format; g. Aiding, abetting, or attempting to commit an act or action that constitutes academic dishonesty.*

AI POLICY:  
 From the Humanities Division of the Academy (History, Languages, English):

* *“The Humanities Division recognizes that artificial intelligence (AI) provides some exciting new tools for academic work. However, AI also poses significant dangers for academic integrity. Passing off as your own any research, words, or ideas which you did not create is plagiarism. That is always the case whether the source is print, internet content, or generated by AI. It is vital to read the policies your individual humanities instructors have regarding AI, and ask them any questions you may have about the use of AI in their course.”*
  + **On that note, here is my AI policy specifically for this class: it is not permitted. Any usage of AI will result in an academic integrity violation.**

To limit your temptation to use AI, much of our writings, especially the smaller ones, will be handwritten and composed gradually during classes while longer writing assignments will be typed on a GoogleDoc that Dr. Myers provides to you. Alas, our increasingly digital world seems to require that teachers monitor student work more in order to assess learning.

READING CONTENT / SUBJECT MATTER POLICY:

From the Humanities Division of the Academy (History, Languages, English):

* “As with many classes, the lectures, readings, and discussions will include a range of topics that may be triggering, emotionally distressing, and difficult for some students. [Engaging with the genre of horror, and its many subgenres, often means reading depictions of violence, crime, death, and/or other topics that have the potential to instill fear or anxiety in the reader]. Literary studies seek to understand how writing communicates and expresses the experiences, thought processes, and cultures of writers, whether for good or ill. Sometimes the language and word choices used by people in the past, especially, may be insensitive or politically incorrect today. Nevertheless, the goal of the humanities is to understand people and cultures within their own context and time. If a reading, image, or discussion is truly troubling to anyone, please do not hesitate to talk to your instructor. In most circumstances, an alternative reading and/or assignment can be arranged.”

RESPECTFUL EXPRESSION POLICY

* Opinions, discussions, and different interpretations are the bedrock of academic study; however, **please participate in a manner that respects the viewpoints of everyone in the class.** i.e., no dismissiveness, name-calling, bullying, or general meanness.
* **Please exercise discretion in what you share in this class**, both in class discussions and in your writing. Stories need to have conflict, but language, by its very nature, can be misunderstood. **Instructors are responsible for reporting any evidence of abuse, neglect, or a student’s possible intent to harm themselves or to harm others**. In creative writing, especially, certain topics can sometimes be tricky to navigate, so **please reach out to me if you ever have any doubts, concerns, or questions about what you want to express.**
* **PLEASE recognize that all feedback you receive from me in this class, including graded comments, is constructive**.
  + I genuinely want to assist your academic progress and professional growth by helping you become better writers and stronger critical thinkers!
  + However, this means that I must hold you accountable to both course requirements and the standards of higher education. Just like learning an instrument, playing a sport, or any other life achievement, you cannot improve unless you confront your mistakes and learn how to fix them.

**Behavioral Norms:** Alongside steady attendance, students are expected to maintain consistent healthy habits of decorum, respect, and kindness towards their classmates, instructors, and teaching assistants. When students fail to meet these classroom behavioral standards and academic habits, it is the expectation that faculty engage appropriately to bring quick and immediate resolution. When students consistently fail to meet these behavioral standards and academic habits in the classroom, an administrative consequence ladder will be adopted, and recorded, in an attempt to administratively address, engage, and rectify ongoing challenges.

INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE STATEMENT

Ball State University aspires to be a university that attracts and retains a diverse faculty, staff and student body. We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse as expressed in our Beneficence Pledge. As a reflection of Ball State’s commitment to respect, civil discourse, and the Beneficence Pledge, Inclusive Excellence at the Indiana Academy emerges as one of the priorities of our living and learning community. We strive to exist together respectfully and compassionately, creating an environment where every member can thrive. Unfortunately, there might be occasions when something occurs that disrupts our progress toward meeting these objectives. In this case, we encourage any member of the Academy community to file a Campus Climate Report (CCR) <https://bsu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6mbRbL5acAntUTI>.  All reports will be taken seriously, and appropriate responses will be carried out by Academy administration.

DISABILITY SERVICES

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact me as soon as possible. The Office of Disability Services coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided. Disability Services can be contacted at **765-285-5293** or [**dsd@bsu.edu**](mailto:dsd@bsu.edu)