

### **Atmospheric Freeman: Air, Aesthetics, and the Politics of Embodied Experience**

This panel proposes that we revisit Freeman’s literary production through the lens of “literary atmospherics” in light of what Hsuan L. Hsu has called “an atmospheric turn” in literary studies, which has been reframing “how we think about the connections between bodies, minds, moods, and material environments” (Hsu 2017). We have long recognized that Freeman’s stories and novels have a specific mood or tone attached to them. Atmosphere, however, should not only be understood as a background quality. Atmospheres *matter* because they sit at the junction of environmental and health and disabilities concerns, and require that we read bodies within their environments, and the local and the individual within the global.

Atmosphere is at once political and aesthetic. Consider how “dust and disorder” unsettle Louisa Ellis, in “A New England Nun,” and, with her, the gendered politics of domesticity; or how “the peculiar north-room smell,” imperceptible to Marm Lawson (“Brakes and White Vi’lets”), signals the presence of deadly mildew that threatens her grand-daughter, and eventually kills her, thereby pointing to a defect in municipal or national regulations. What is the political affordance of “the curious smell of leather” that “pervade(s) the factory workers in *A Portion of Labor*? Freeman’s texts subtly, so far invisibly, attend to the “slow violence” (Robert Nixon) of social, gender, or ethnic-differentiated atmospheres. To what end does the ghost of Agnes materialize in the displaced scent of roses in “The Wind in the Rose Bush”? Why “a strong odor of lovage” in *The Southwest Chamber*? What does it mean to reframe Freeman’s Gothic in material terms as an ecoGothic (Altschuler)? Or read Louisa’s mysophobia (McLaughlin) as a deviant *and* productive artistic practice of her own? Focusing on Freeman’s literary atmospherics allows Freeman once again to “speak back” to us, as we reconsider her literary use of forms and genres—the local color story, the labor novel, the ghost story, the comic vignette—as aesthetic and political interventions in her, and our, literally and metaphorically toxic atmospheres.

The panel will consider in priority proposals on Wilkins Freeman but will be open to papers reading Wilkins Freeman comparatively with her contemporaries and beyond. To submit a proposal, please send a title, **an abstract of no more than 250 words, and a short bio (max. 100 words)** to [cecile.roudeau@gmail.com](mailto:cecile.roudeau@gmail.com) by **January 15, 2026**. Do not hesitate to send expressions of interest before that date. This is a guaranteed panel.

Works Cited:

Altschuler, Sari (2017) "The Gothic Origins of Global Health." *American Literature* 89.3, pp. 557-590.

Hsu, Hsuan L. (2017) "Literary Atmospherics." *Literary Geographies* 3:1, pp; 1-5.

Hsu, Hsuan L. (2019) "Atmospheric Literary Geography." *Literary Geographies* 5:1, pp. 21-24.

McLaughlin, Don James (2025) *Phobia and American Literature, 1705-1937: A Therapeutic History*, OUP, 2025.

Nixon, Robert. (2011) *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard UP.