Back to the Cabin: Reconstructing the Spaces of Slavery in Mary White Ovington’s *Hazel*

Laura Hakala Ph.D.
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2:05 – 2:30 pm
Clark Memorial Library Learning Lab

Dr. Hakala is an assistant professor of English at Shawnee State University. She completed her Ph.D. at the University of Southern Mississippi. She teaches courses in composition, children’s literature, and American literature. Her research interests include children’s and young adult literature about the American South and girlhood studies.

Presentation Summary:
Published in 1914 by NAACP co-founder Mary White Ovington, *Hazel* was one of the first children’s novels specifically written for black children. This presentation examines how *Hazel* functioned as a transitional text in the development of African-American children’s literature. While *Hazel* contains less racist stereotypes than 19th century depictions of black characters in children’s literature, the book still promotes a system that privileges whiteness above blackness. In this presentation, Dr. Hakala contextualizes *Hazel* alongside historical information about early 20th century rural black communities to demonstrate how Ovington reproduces and validates some plantation-like environments. She argues that Ovington constructs black southern girlhood as an experience with some freedoms from antebellum traditions, but it is also an experience limited by the spaces of slavery.