

**English 5944
Afrofuturism**

Dr. Jason Haslam

Winter 2015

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Course Description

This course focuses on non-realist literary works by African American and African Canadian authors, framed within a larger diasporic tradition known as Afrofuturism. The course aims to attend to the complex interplay of Afrofuturist literary traditions with cultural and political structures, including (but not limited to) how non-realist modes respond to and challenge institutional and other forms of racism in North America. In order to explore this rich field, we will also study the critical theories relating to Afrofuturism, science fiction, and non-realism more generally. Specific traditions studied will include: science fiction; alternate histories; conjure and hoodoo stories; magic realism; sword and sorcery; and utopias. The class will thus engage several critical and theoretical histories and methodologies, including, among many others, African American and Canadian history (cultural, social, and political); theories of SF; and critical race, gender, and queer studies.

Required Texts

Octavia Butler *Wild Seed*

Samuel R. Delany, *Flight from Nevèrÿon*

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Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

Pauline Hopkins, *Of One Blood*

Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*

George Schuyler, *Black No More*

Course Reading Package with short texts and critical readings (On OWL)

Recommended Text

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers

Course Policies: In addition to the information below, see the page “Course and University Policies” on our OWL site for information regarding academic honesty, accessibility information, and course participation grades. Please note it is the responsibility of all students to read and understand all applicable university policies.

Method of Evaluation

Weekly discussion questions: 10%
 Critical bibliography assignment and presentation: 10%
 Longer Analytical Presentation: 20%
 Final Essay: 50%
 Class Participation: 10%

Assignment Descriptions

Weekly discussion questions: For each class, starting January 15, students will submit 2 discussion questions/critical thoughts about the material. Before the last class, students will submit the same, but summing up their thoughts on the course as a whole (you do not have to submit on the days you present; this makes 9 weekly question assignments in the term). These should be specific questions, addressing particular aspects of the material read, and should also engage with both the primary and secondary materials. These questions will form the basis of discussions for our weekly meetings. **Please submit the questions 24 hours in advance, through the discussion board on BbLearn/OWL.**

Questions are marked out of 3 points: 1 point is given per submitted question/thought, and the instructor will use the additional points to note the strength of the submission (0 points for an overly general submission that doesn't engage with the material in a specific fashion, up to 2 point for a specific, incisive submission).

Critical bibliography assignment and presentation: This assignment consists of two parts. First, you will prepare a bibliography of critical works dealing with the primary material scheduled for a particular week. This list can be as comprehensive as possible, but must be comprised of at least 5 entries. Second, you will then present a 5-10 minute overview of what you see as a significant critical trend on the subject as evidenced by the items on your bibliography. This overview can analyze either a some of the most recent articles, or some of the standard texts. This report should not be restricted to a summary, but should analyse the material, providing an argument about trends in the critical field just as you would present an argument about a set of literary texts.

Both the bibliography and a formal written version of the criticism review will be submitted on the same day as the presentation. The bibliography and overview will be weighted equally. The bibliography will be marked for its adherence to MLA style; the critical overview will be marked for the quality and clarity of the analysis. **Note: you must do this assignment on a different week and author than your analytical presentation.**

Analytical Presentation: This 15- to 20-minute presentation (approx. 8 to 10 pages, double spaced), following the style and format of a conference presentation, will consist of an analysis of one or more of the primary readings scheduled for the week of the presentation. You can analyse any aspect of the text, using whatever critical approach you think most appropriate and helpful. A formal written version of the analytical presentation must be submitted on the same day as the presentation. The written version and the presentation will each be worth half of the grade.

For both presentations: The written version and the presentation will each be

worth half of the grade. Both the presented and written versions will be graded according to the English Department's statement on Graduate Seminar Evaluation (see below), while the grade for the presented version will also take into account the student's ability to respond to questions and lead class discussion.

Note: Presentations will begin 29 January. A sign-in sheet for both will be made available in the week of 12-16 January.

Final Essay: The final essay will be 5000-6000 words (approximately 17 to 20 pages, double spaced), and can analyse any text or group of texts studied in the class. It can be based on your analytical presentation (though it will be expected that you take into account both class discussions and my comments on your presentation, in addition to expanding it). This essay will be graded according to the English Department's statement on Graduate Seminar Evaluation (see OWL page).

Note: All written work must be documented according to the latest edition of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. The final essay is due **16 April 2015**.

Note: for all written assignments, submit electronically to instructor over email.

Class Participation: This grade will be based on the quality and consistency of your participation in class discussions (with an emphasis on quality). Students will be expected to respond constructively and professionally to their colleagues presentations, and to contribute to general class discussion of course material. Come prepared to discuss specifics about the material each week. (The page on course policies on our OWL site includes other statements about participation that are mandated by the Faculty of Graduate Studies, most of which are stunningly obvious, and some of which don't apply to English courses.)

Class Schedule and Readings

Note: all readings not available in the Dalhousie Bookstore are available on our OWL page.

Foundations and Definitions: Afrofuturism, the Fantastic, and Science Fiction

January 8 Introductions, Expectations, and Opening Discussions

15 Required: Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (sel.); Samuel R. Delany, "Science Fiction and Literature; or, The Conscience of the King"; Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic* (sel.); Lisa Yaszek, "Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future"

Fighting America: The Gothic, Resistance, and Reconstruction

22 Primary: Charles Chesnutt, *Conjure Woman* (sel.)

Secondary: Teresa Goddu, *Gothic America* (sel.); Hyejin Kim, "Gothic Storytelling and Resistance in Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman*"

Reimagining Africa and America

- 29 Primary: Pauline Hopkins, *Of One Blood*
 Secondary: M. Giulia Fabi, *Passing and the Rise of the African American Novel* (sel.); Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (sel.)

- February 5 Primary: Octavia Butler, *Wild Seed*
 Secondary: Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body* (sel.)

Civil Rights and Science Fiction

- 12 Primary: W. E. B. DuBois, "The Comet"; George Schuyler, *Black No More*
 Secondary: Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "Writing 'Race' and the Difference it Makes";
 Ralph Ellison, "What America Would Be Like Without Blacks."

- 19 Reading Week

- 26 Primary: Derrick Bell, *And We are Not Saved* and *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* (sel.)
 Secondary: Kimberlé Crenshaw, et al., eds. *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement* (sel.)

Identity, Violence, Community

- March 5 Primary: Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*
 Secondary: Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs"; Lisa Yaszek, *The Self Wired* (sel.)

- March 12 Primary: Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*
 Secondary: John Rieder, "Science Fiction, Colonialism, and the Plot of Invasion"

- 19 Primary: Octavia Butler, *Bloodchild and Other Stories*(sel.); other stories TBA
 Secondary: Donna Haraway: *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (sel.)

Queering Race, Queering Genre: A Case Study of Samuel R. Delany

- 26 Primary: Samuel R. Delany: *Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia*
 Secondary: Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination"

- April 2 Primary: Delany, *Flight from Nevèrÿon*
 Secondary: Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?"; José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia, The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (sel.)

- April 9 Screening and discussion, *Deep Space Nine*, "Far Beyond the Stars"; Delany, "Racism and Science Fiction"; Delany, *The American Shore* (sel.)