

ENGLISH 4885
Afrofuturism

Dr. Jason Haslam

Fall 2016

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Office and Office Hours: McCain 1193; Friday 1:30 - 3:30, or by appointment

This course focuses on non-realist literary works by authors of the African diaspora, with particular attention to American and Canadian writers, 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 course will thus engage several critical and theoretical histories and methodologies, including, among many others, African diasporic history (cultural, social, and political); theories of SF; and critical race, gender, and queer studies.

Required Texts: All texts, except the course reading package, are available in the Dalhousie bookstore. The course reading package is available at Campus Copy.

Required Texts

Octavia Butler *Dawn*

Samuel R. Delany, *Babel-17*

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

Pauline Hopkins, *Of One Blood*

Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*

Nnedi Okorafor, *Binti*

Course Reading Package on Brightspace, with some on reserve in the Killam Library.

Assignments

Seminar Presentation (reading time: 10-15 minutes; written: approx. 1500-2400 words): 15%

In-class Tests: 10% each = 20%; **October 12th** and **November 30th**

Annotated Bibliography and Essay Proposal: 10%; Due **November 14th**

Weekly Discussion Questions: 10%

Research Essay, 3000-3600 words (approx. 10-12 pages, double spaced). Due **December 12th**
by 4:00 p.m.: 35%

Attendance and Participation: 10%

Assignment Descriptions

Seminar Presentation: There are a few options for this 10- to 15-minute presentation (approx. 5-8 pages, double spaced). **You can analyze either the literary text(s), critical/theoretical text(s), or a combination thereof, that are scheduled for the class in which the seminar is**

given. In addition, you can also present on a text not on the schedule, but that is written by one of the authors being studied that day. In any of these cases, the presentation should consist of a cohesive and coherent argument and analysis of the text(s) you choose. While some summary may be appropriate (especially if analysing a text from outside of the reading list), the vast majority of the presentation should critically *analyze* the work you are discussing. In other words, this seminar should follow exactly the format you would use for a formal essay, regardless of which text you examine. A formal written version of the seminar will be handed in one week after the presentation, and may take account of class discussion. The presentation itself and the written version will each be worth half of the assignment's grade.

A sign-in sheet for presentations will be available after the first class. Presentations will begin on September 19th. Because of enrollment numbers, some overlap should be expected, and even welcome!

In-class tests: These assignments are designed to test your basic knowledge of the texts we are reading, your comprehension of class discussion, and your analytical ability. Each test will consist of close readings and interpretations of some short passages chosen from the works studied.

Annotated bibliography and essay proposal: This assignment is designed to help you understand and engage in the larger critical discussion surrounding the works we are reading. It is also designed to give you a head start on the final essay.

For the bibliography, you will be required to hand in a list of **seven to ten critical works** concerning the texts and/or issues that you want to write about in your final essay. (You are not required to write your essay about the works you mention in the bibliography assignment, but doing so would help you to use your time more effectively.) All citations must be done according to MLA guidelines; the list should look exactly like a works cited list.

Two of the titles in this list must be annotated—that is, you must provide a brief description (one paragraph) of the argument presented in the essay (please do this on a separate page). You must also state, briefly (no more than two or three sentences) how you think these essays will help you with the development of your own argument about a particular literary text from the course readings. **NOTE: the summaries must be in your own words and contain properly documented quotations, as with any assignment; the distinction between proper paraphrase and plagiarism will be discussed in class.**

In addition, you will provide a one-page (300-word) proposal for your final essay. This part of the assignment should present which work(s) you will study, the general area of enquiry and specific focus for your essay (some topics will be handed out), and a thesis statement which maps out the argument you are proposing. The proposal should also briefly address the critical or theoretical implications of your essay (see the annotated bibliography part of the assignment). Note: you can decide to change your topic after this assignment but, if you do, you are required to discuss the new topic with the instructor. **The most effective way to write this proposal is to view it as a draft of the first page/introduction of the essay.**

This assignment is worth 10% of the course grade. The proposal will be worth 5/10, and the annotated bibliography will be worth 5/10 (MLA style will be worth 2.5; the annotations will be worth the other 2.5). Proper research techniques and sources will be discussed in class.

Checklist for the bibliography/proposal assignment:

- one-page proposal
- bibliography of ten essays (done as an MLA “works cited” list)
- separate page(s) with annotations for two of the essays

Research Essay: In the essay, you will analyse one or two of the primary texts we have studied during the term. You will construct a coherent argument about the text(s), and **use at least 5 theoretical/critical text** to support your argument (see annotated bibliography assignment). You may use your seminar as the foundation of the final essay but, in addition to expanding it to fit the length requirements you are expected to revise the argument following the instructor’s comments and pertinent class discussions.

Weekly Discussion Questions: For each Tuesday class, starting Sept 19th, students will submit one discussion question/critical thought about the material being read that week (on either day) for each class. These should be specific questions, addressing particular aspects of the material read. They can address specific works, or try to connect many works. These questions will form the basis of discussions for our weekly meetings. **Questions must be submitted at least 24 hours in advance, through Brightspace; questions that are not submitted on time will receive a mark of 0 (zero).**

Each question is marked out of 3 points: 1 point is given for an on-time submission, and the instructor will use the additional points to note the strength of the overall weekly submission (0 points for an overly general submission that doesn’t engage with the material in a specific fashion, up to 2 points for a specific, incisive submission). The ratio between points available and points achieved in the term is then used to calculate an overall mark out of 10. **You do not have to submit questions for the day on which you are delivering your seminar.**

Attendance and Participation: Each of these will be worth half of the 10%. The attendance mark will be based on attending each class and signing the sign-in sheet. The participation mark will be based on activity in class discussions, on the level of engagement with the text that is demonstrated (i.e. you must demonstrate that you have read *and* thought seriously about the text before class), as well as on your engaged, helpful, rigorous, and respectful discussion of the issues raised in your classmates’ presentations.

Other Course and University Policies

Late Penalties and Missed Assignments

Formal written assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date indicated, or at the time and date indicated. Late assignments will be docked 5% for each 24 hours that they are late. For example, a paper due at 12:00 pm on Day 1 will drop 5% starting at 12:01 pm on Day 1, another 5% starting at 12:01 pm on Day 2, etc. **Assignments will not be accepted after the marked, on-time assignments are handed back;** any assignment not handed in by that point will be given a grade of 0 (zero). Marking schedules will be made clear in class.

All formal written assignments must be handed in to your tutorial leader and submitted

electronically through the assignment tab on our Brightspace page. If either copy is not submitted, the assignment could be given a grade of 0 (zero).

In-class assignments can only be completed during the time and date listed on the syllabus. Missed assignments will be assigned a grade of zero. **Only properly documented medical problems or other documented severe circumstances which are out of your control will be accepted as excuses for late or missed assignments. Documentation** must state which days the student was unable to complete work, and **must be provided within a week of the missed work**, or the documentation must cover the time past that week.

Travel plans are not an excuse for missing assignments or the final exam. Book your holiday travel accordingly.

Accommodation Notice

Students may request accommodation as a result of barriers experienced related to disability, religious obligation, or any characteristic protected under Canadian human rights legislation. Students who require academic accommodation for either classroom participation or the writing of tests and exams should make their request to the Advising and Access Services Center (AASC) prior to or at the outset of the regular academic year. Please visit www.dal.ca/access for more information and to obtain the Request for Accommodation form.

A note taker may be required as part of a student's accommodation. There is an honorarium of \$75/course/term (with some exceptions). If you are interested, please contact AASC at 902-494-2836 for more information or send an email to notetaking@dal.ca.

Please note that your classroom may contain specialized accessible furniture and equipment. It is important that these items remain in the classroom, untouched, so that students who require their usage will be able to fully participate in the class.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

All students in this course are to read and understand the policies on academic integrity and plagiarism referenced in the Academic Policies and Student Resources sections of the academicintegrity.dal.ca website. Ignorance of such policies is no excuse for violations. Any paper submitted by a student at Dalhousie University may be checked for originality to confirm that the student has not plagiarized from other sources. All forms of cheating, including plagiarism, are considered serious academic offences which may lead to such penalties as loss of credit, suspension or expulsion from the University, or the revocation of a degree. It is essential that there be correct attribution of authorities from which facts and opinions have been derived. The Senate has affirmed the right of any instructor to require that student papers be submitted in both written and computer-readable format, and to submit any paper to be checked electronically for originality. As a student in this course, you are to keep an electronic copy of any paper you submit, and the course instructor may require you to submit that electronic copy on demand. Failure to submit an electronic copy when it is requested will result in a grade of 0 (zero) for that assignment.

Other Services

- Other student services on campus: http://www.dal.ca/current_students.html
- The Writing Centre: <http://dal.ca/writingcentre>

Grading Scale

For the official grade scale and definitions used in this course, see:
http://www.dal.ca/campus_life/student_services/academic-support/grades-and-student-records/grade-scale-and-definitions.html.

Reading and Class Schedule

(Note: all stories and critical texts not available in the course textbooks are available through Brightspace).

September 07	Introduction
12	Definitions and Methodologies Tzvetan Todorov, <i>The Fantastic</i> (sel.); Darko Suvin, <i>Metamorphoses of Science Fiction</i> (sel.); Samuel R. Delany, <i>The American Shore</i> (sel.); Lisa Yaszek, “Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future”
	Reconstruction: Gothic Fantasies, Gothic Utopias
14	Primary: Charles Chesnutt, <i>The Conjure Woman</i> (sel.) Secondary: Hyejin Kim, “Gothic Storytelling and Resistance in Charles W. Chesnutt’s <i>The Conjure Woman</i> ”
19	Primary: Charles R. Saunders, <i>Imaro</i> (sel.) Secondary: Lyman Tower Sargent, “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited”
21	Primary: Pauline Hopkins, <i>Of One Blood</i> Secondary: M. Giulia Fabi, <i>Passing and the Rise of the African American Novel</i> (sel.)
26	Primary: Hopkins, continued
	Civil Rights Speculations
28	Primary: W. E. B. DuBois, “The Comet”; Derrick Bell, “The Space Traders” Secondary: Henry Louis Gates, Jr. “Writing ‘Race’ and the Difference It Makes”; Ralph Ellison, “What America Would Be Like Without Blacks.”
October 3	Primary: Ralph Ellison, <i>Invisible Man</i> Secondary: Lisa Yaszek, <i>The Self Wired</i> (sel.)
5	Primary: Ellison, continued. Test Preparation

October 7	Deadline to withdraw from Fall term courses without a “W”
10	Thanksgiving: No Classes
12	In-class test
	Language, Power, and the Postmodern
17	Primary: Nalo Hopkinson, <i>Brown Girl in the Ring</i> Secondary: John Rieder, “Science Fiction, Colonialism, and the Plot of Invasion”
19	Primary: Hopkinson, continued
24	Primary: Samuel R. Delany, <i>Babel-17</i> Secondary: De Witt Douglas Kilgore, <i>Astrofuturism</i> (sel.)
26	Primary: Delany, continued
31	Primary: Screening and discussion, <i>Deep Space Nine</i> , “Far Beyond the Stars” Secondary: Delany, “Racism and Science Fiction”
November 2	Primary: Octavia Butler, <i>Bloodchild and Other Stories</i> (sel.); Delany, “We, in Some Strange Power’s Employ, Move on a Rigorous Line”
7-11	Reading Week
	Afrofuturism and Allies: Intersectionality, Slipstream Fiction, and a lot of Tentacles
14	Primary: Butler, <i>Dawn</i> Secondary: Donna Haraway: <i>Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science</i> (sel.) Annotated bibliography and Essay Proposal due; Last day to drop fall term courses with a “W”;
16	Primary: Butler, continued
21	Primary: N. K. Jemisin, “Too Many Yesterdays, Not Enough Tomorrows”; Darius James, “Un Aperitivo Col Diavolo”; Sofia Samatar, “A Brief History of Nonduality Studies” Note: stories by James and Samatar are available in <i>Mothership: Tales from Afrofuturism and Beyond</i>, available on 2-hour reserve in the Killam Library. Secondary: José Esteban Muñoz, <i>Cruising Utopia</i> (sel.)
23	Primary: Nnedi Okorafor, <i>Binti</i>

28	Music Day: listening, viewing, and discussion of a selection of songs and music videos from such artists as Sun Ra; George Clinton and Parliament-Funkadelic; Jimi Hendrix; Prince; and Janelle Monae.
30	In-class test
December 05 and 06	Classes replaced by extra office hours to hand back tests and for essay discussions

Research Essay Due December 12th by 4:00 pm.