

**ENGLISH 4885**  
**Afrofuturism**

**Dr. Jason Haslam**

**Winter 2019**

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**Office and Office Hours: McCain 1192; Friday 12:30 - 2:30, or by appointment**

Dalhousie is in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People. This territory is covered by the "Treaties of Peace and Friendship" which Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) people first signed with the British Crown in 1725. The treaties did not deal with surrender of lands and resources but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations.

The Elders in Residence program provides students with access to First Nations elders for guidance, counsel and support. You can contact the Elders at [elders@dal.ca](mailto:elders@dal.ca) or 902-494-6803 (leave a message).

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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*

Roxane Gay, et al. *Black Panther: World of Wakanda*

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. *Brown Girl in the Ring* is the Dal Reads book, and the instructor has free copies for everyone.

### Assignments

Seminar Presentation (reading time: 10-15 minutes; written: approx. 1500-2400 words): 15%  
 In-class Tests: 10% each = 20%; **February 13th** and **April 3rd**  
 Annotated Bibliography and Essay Proposal: 10%; Due **March 20th**  
 Weekly Discussion Questions: 10%  
 Research Essay, 3000-3600 words (approx. 10-12 pages, double spaced). Due **April 10th** 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 January 21st. 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 Monday class, starting January 21st, 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 48 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. Questions are not graded until the end of term. **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.

### **Reading and Class Schedule**

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

January 07	Introduction
09	<b>Definitions and Methodologies</b> 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"
	<b>Reconstruction: Gothic Fantasies, Gothic Utopias</b>
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> "
16	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.)
23	Primary: Hopkins, continued
28	Primary: W. E. B. DuBois, "The Comet"; Derrick Bell, "The Space Traders" Secondary: Ralph Ellison, "What America Would Be Like Without Blacks."
30	Primary: Primary: Ralph Ellison, <i>Invisible Man</i> , selections
	<b>Civil Rights Speculations</b>
February 4	Delany, "We, in Some Strange Power's Employ, Move on a Rigorous Line" <b>Deadline to withdraw from Winter term courses without a "W"</b>
6	Octavia Butler, <i>Bloodchild and Other Stories</i> , sel.
11	<b>"spill-over" day; Test Preparation</b>
13	<b>In-class test</b>

Feb 18-22	<b>Study Break: No Classes, Office Hours Cancelled</b>
	<b>Language, Power, and the Postmodern</b>
25	Primary: Samuel R. Delany, <i>Babel-17</i> Secondary: De Witt Douglas Kilgore, <i>Astrofuturism</i> (sel.)
27	Primary: Delany, continued
March 4	Primary: Butler, <i>Dawn</i> Secondary: Donna Haraway: <i>Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science</i> (sel.)
6	Primary: Butler, continued
11	Primary: Nalo Hopkinson, <i>Brown Girl in the Ring</i> Secondary: John Rieder, “Science Fiction, Colonialism, and the Plot of Invasion”; <b>Last day to drop fall term courses with a “W”</b>
13	Primary: Hopkinson, continued
18	<b>Special Guest Panel on Afrofuturism and Caribbean Literature, with Dr. Isaac Saney and Dr. Asha Jeffers</b>
20	Screening and discussion, <i>Deep Space Nine</i> , “Far Beyond the Stars” Secondary: Delany, “Racism and Science Fiction”  <b>Annotated bibliography and Essay Proposal due</b>
25	Primary: N. K. Jemisin, “Too Many Yesterdays, Not Enough Tomorrows”; Darius James, “Un Aperitivo Col Diavolo”; Sofia Samatar, “A Brief History of Nonduality Studies” <b>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.</b> Secondary: José Esteban Muñoz, <i>Cruising Utopia</i> (sel.)
27	Primary: Nnedi Okorafor, <i>Binti</i>
April 1	<i>Black Panther</i> Day: Roxane Gay, et al. <i>Black Panther: World of Wakanda</i> and discussion of <i>Black Panther</i> (2018) to be screened earlier.
3	<b>In-class test</b>

**Research Essay Due by April 10<sup>th</sup>, 4:00 pm.**

**(Please see pages 6-9 for other course and university policies.)**

### **Other Course and University Policies, Statements, Guidelines and Resources for Support**

This course is governed by the academic rules and regulations set forth in the University Calendar and the Senate.

#### **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.

#### **Note on Email Communication**

Email is an authorized means of communication for academic and administrative purposes within Dalhousie. The University will assign all students an official email address. This address will remain in effect while the student remains a student and for one academic term following a student's last registration. This is the only email address that will be used for communication with students regarding all academic and administrative matters. Any redirection of email will be at the student's own risk. Each student is expected to check her or his official email address frequently in order to stay current with Dalhousie communications.

This policy is found in the University Regulations portion of the University Calendar at [https://www.dal.ca/dept/university\\_secretariat/policies/information-management-and-technology/official-student-email-policy-.html](https://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/policies/information-management-and-technology/official-student-email-policy-.html)

#### **Student Absence Policy**

##### **Short-term Absence**

Students experiencing short-term absences of three (3) consecutive days or fewer resulting in missed or late academic requirements must:

- Contact their instructor by phone or email prior to the academic requirement deadline or scheduled time and;
- Complete a Student Declaration of Absence form or provide alternate verification of the absence to their instructor or to the instructor's designate in-person, on-line through

Brightspace, or via instructor e-mail within three (3) calendar days following the last day of absence.

A student may submit a maximum of two (2) separate Student Declaration of Absence forms per course during a term. Faculty, College, School, instructor or course-specific guidelines may set a lower maximum.

Students who have recurring short-term absences and who exceed two (2) submissions per course during a term are strongly encouraged to meet with a Faculty or Declared Major Advisor, or Faculty Program Coordinator. In cases of recurring short-term absences, instructors may request documentation to demonstrate a student has met with an Advisor or Coordinator and arrived at a course of action to manage the recurring absences before considering alternate academic requirement arrangements.

### **Long-term Absence**

For long-term absences greater than three (3) consecutive days, students should contact their course instructor(s) or the instructor's designate within five (5) calendar days following the last day of absence.

The Student Declaration of Absence form will not be accepted for long-term absences. Where long-term absences are due to major or chronic physical or mental health conditions, documentation must be provided by on-campus or off-campus primary care health professionals. Documentation should indicate the dates and duration of the condition (confidential health information of the exact condition is not required), when possible should describe its impact on the student's ability to fulfill academic requirements, and include any other information a primary care health professional considers relevant and appropriate. For extenuating circumstances resulting in long-term student absences, instructors may request appropriate documentation depending on the situation.

Students experiencing recurring long-term absences are strongly encouraged to meet with a Faculty or Declared Major Advisor, or Faculty Program Coordinator and refer to the University's Student Accommodation Policy. In such a case, instructors may request documentation to demonstrate a student has met with an Advisor or Coordinator and arrived at a course of action to manage the recurring absences before considering alternate academic requirement arrangements.

### **Academic Integrity**

At Dalhousie University, we are guided in all of our work by the values of academic integrity: honesty, trust, fairness, responsibility and respect (The Center for Academic Integrity, Duke University, 1999). As a student, you are required to demonstrate these values in all of the work you do. The University provides policies and procedures that every member of the university community is required to follow to ensure academic integrity. See the Statement on Academic Integrity at [https://www.dal.ca/dept/university\\_secretariat/academic-integrity/academic-policies.html](https://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/academic-integrity/academic-policies.html)

### **Accessibility**

The Advising and Access Services Centre is Dalhousie's centre of expertise for student accessibility and accommodation. The advising team works with students who request

accommodation as a result of: a disability, religious obligation, or any barrier related to any other characteristic protected under Human Rights legislation (NS, NB, PEI, NFLD). For more information, see the Academic Support website at [https://www.dal.ca/campus\\_life/academic-support/accessibility.html](https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/accessibility.html)

### **Student Code of Conduct**

Everyone at Dalhousie is expected to treat others with dignity and respect. The Code of Student Conduct allows Dalhousie to take disciplinary action if students don't follow this community expectation. When appropriate, violations of the code can be resolved in a reasonable and informal manner—perhaps through a restorative justice process. If an informal resolution can't be reached, or would be inappropriate, procedures exist for formal dispute resolution. See the Statement on Student Conduct at [https://www.dal.ca/campus\\_life/safety-respect/student-rights-and-responsibilities/student-life-policies/code-of-student-conduct.html](https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/safety-respect/student-rights-and-responsibilities/student-life-policies/code-of-student-conduct.html)

### **Diversity and Inclusion – Culture of Respect**

Every person at Dalhousie has a right to be respected and safe. We believe inclusiveness is fundamental to education. We stand for equality. Dalhousie is strengthened in our diversity. We are a respectful and inclusive community. We are committed to being a place where everyone feels welcome and supported, which is why our Strategic Direction prioritizes fostering a culture of diversity and inclusiveness (Strategic Priority 5.2). See the Statement on Respect and Diversity at <https://www.dal.ca/cultureofrespect.html>

### **University Policies and Programs**

- Important Dates in the Academic Year (including add/drop dates) [http://www.dal.ca/academics/important\\_dates.html](http://www.dal.ca/academics/important_dates.html)
- University Grading Practices: Statement of Principles and Procedures
- [https://www.dal.ca/dept/university\\_secretariat/policies/academic/grading-practices-policy.html](https://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/policies/academic/grading-practices-policy.html)
- Scent-Free Program <https://www.dal.ca/dept/safety/programs-services/occupational-safety/scent-free.html>

### **Learning and Support Resources**

- General Academic Support - Academic Advising: [https://www.dal.ca/campus\\_life/academic-support/advising.html](https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/advising.html)
- Copyright and Fair Dealing: <https://libraries.dal.ca/services/copyright-office/fair-dealing/fair-dealing-guidelines.html>
- Libraries: <http://libraries.dal.ca>
- Student Health and Wellness (includes Counselling and Psychological Services): [https://www.dal.ca/campus\\_life/health-and-wellness/services-support/student-health-and-wellness.html](https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/health-and-wellness/services-support/student-health-and-wellness.html)
- Black Student Advising: [https://www.dal.ca/campus\\_life/communities/black-student-advising.html](https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/communities/black-student-advising.html)
- Indigenous Student Centre: [https://www.dal.ca/campus\\_life/communities/indigenous.html](https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/communities/indigenous.html)

- ELearning Website: <https://www.dal.ca/dept/elearning.html>
- Student Advocacy Services: <http://dsu.ca/dsas>
- Dalhousie Ombudsperson: [https://www.dal.ca/campus\\_life/safety-respect/student-rights-and-responsibilities/where-to-get-help/ombudsperson.html](https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/safety-respect/student-rights-and-responsibilities/where-to-get-help/ombudsperson.html)
- Writing Centre: [https://www.dal.ca/campus\\_life/academic-support/writing-and-study-skills.html](https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/writing-and-study-skills.html)
- Studying for Success program and tutoring: [https://www.dal.ca/campus\\_life/academic-support/study-skills-and-tutoring.html](https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/study-skills-and-tutoring.html)