

# MIND of OUR MIND: BLACK WOMEN'S SPECULATIVE FICTION

AML2410  
TOPICS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE and CULTURE  
(Section 1615)  
Spring, 2017



**Instructor Name:** Chesya Burke

**Course meeting times & locations:** MAT 0115: Mon, Wed and Fri, Periods 7

**Office Location and Hours:** Tur4307

**Course website:** <https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/337173>

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## Course Description:

This course will interrogate the speculative fiction genre through the lens of Black women writers. It offers a foray into key debates that surround contemporary genre fiction (science fiction, fantasy, and horror) written by Black women. We will also examine the concept of speculative fiction itself, attempting to define it within the Black feminist literary aesthetic. We will seek to answer these questions: Do Black Women Spec Fic Writers stay true to the basic concepts and ideas of speculative fiction? How do they push the boundaries? Text will include Octavia Butler's *Wild Seed*, Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*, and the lyrics and artistic short film (music video) of *Archandroid* by Janelle Monae.

## General Education Objectives:

- This course confers General Education credit for either Composition (C) or Humanities (H). This course also fulfills 6,000 of the university's 24,000-word writing requirement (WR).
- Composition courses provide instruction in the methods and conventions of standard written English (grammar, punctuation, usage), as well as the techniques that produce effective texts. Composition courses are writing intensive. They require multiple drafts submitted to your instructor for feedback before final submission.
- Course content should include multiple forms of effective writing, different writing styles, approaches and formats, and methods to adapt writing to different audiences, purposes and contexts. Students should learn to organize complex arguments in writing using thesis statements, claims and evidence, and to analyze writing for errors in logic.
- *The University Writing Requirement (WR)* ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. To receive Writing Requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course. This means that written assignments must meet minimum word requirements totaling 6000 words.

## General Education Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the following learning outcomes in content, communication and critical thinking:

- **Content:** Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the academic discipline.
- **Communication:** Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline. Students will participate in class discussions throughout the semester to reflect on assigned readings.
- **Critical Thinking:** Students analyze information carefully and logically from multiple perspectives, using discipline-specific methods, and develop reasoned solutions to problems.

## Required Texts:

### NOVELS:

- **Butler, Octavia, *Wild Seed*.** (9780446676977)
- **Hopkinson, Nalo, *Brown Girl in the Ring*.** (9780446674331)
- **Gomez, Jewelle, *The Gilda Stories*.** (9781563411403)
- **Okorafor, Nnedi, *Who Fears Death*.** (9780756407285)
- **Jemisin, N. K., *Fifth Season*.** (9780316229296)

### CRITICAL READINGS:

- **Morrison, Toni, *Playing in the Dark*** (9780679745426)
- **James, Edward, *The Basics of Fantasy Literature, (BFL)*.** (9780521728737)

**All other readings/links will be made available through Canvas, or can be located easily online.**

**Assignments** (see below for Grading Rubric):

Assignments	Length	Points
<p><b>Close Reading</b> Conduct a close reading analysis of a passage or stanza from one of the texts we have read. In a close reading, you focus on a small section of the text to identify literary facets such as language, vocabulary, point of view, characterization, symbolism, tropes, etc. While you are focusing on a small section of the text, you may begin to see larger patterns in the text. A close reading is a building block of a literary analysis. <b>Due: 20 January</b></p>	500 words	50 points
<p><b>Historical Annotations</b> For this assignment, you will historically contextualize one of the texts we have read in class. Literary texts yield richer understanding when read in light of their historical and social conditions of production. After you have read your chosen text, identify <u>two historical documents</u> related to an event, law, person, text, or other aspect mentioned in that text. Your write-up should briefly explain the historical documents and then show how they enrich our understanding of the text. <b>Due: 10 February</b></p>	700 words	100 points
<p><b>Analysis &amp; Class Presentation</b> Once in the course of the term, every student will present a short paper on one of the texts (10-15 minutes). Your presentation should address one or two key themes in the text, and may include relevant historical or biographical details. After your presentation, you will lead a short class discussion on that text (10-15 minutes). <b>Due: Variable, students will sign up in the second week of classes</b></p>	1000 words	150 points
<p><b>Mid Term Paper</b> Conduct an analysis of an idea, concept, or theme by putting <u>two</u> of the texts we have read in conversation with each other. For instance, you might write about how African Americans and women struggles are similar or any similar themes you discover within the text or differing groups of “Americans.” Your paper should focus on developing one main thesis statement with textual evidence. <b>Due: 3 March (Proposals due 20 February)</b></p>	1500 words	200 points
<p><b>Final Paper</b> For this essay, you will develop an original, strong, and clear argument about a topic or text we have encountered in class. Draw on at least 4 scholarly and peer reviewed sources in your argument. The final paper should demonstrate the ability of the writer to do a critical close reading, historicize the text or topic, and synthesize scholarly sources. Students should discuss potential paper topics with the instructor a few weeks in advance of the due date. <b>Due: 19 April (Proposals due 3 April)</b></p>	2500 words	300 points

## Course Policies:

1. You must complete all *assignments* to receive credit for this course.
2. **Attendance:** Because of the participatory nature of this course, attendance is crucial. You have **up to 2 absences** that you can take without penalty (aside from missing potential quizzes). Students who miss **more than six** class periods **will fail** the course (although the twelve-day rule, laid out below, is the one case for exceptions). It is your responsibility to keep track of your absences.

Prolonged absences will affect your quiz average, since in most cases (aside from the exceptions below) missed in-class assignments cannot be made up. In addition, prolonged absences will affect your grade as follows:

- 3 absences: 10% off final course grade
- 4 absences: 15% off final course grade
- 5 absences: 20% off final course grade
- 6 absences: 25% off final course grade
- 7 absences: Automatic failure of the overall course

If you are absent, please make yourself aware of all due dates and turn in assignments on time. Please check with your classmates to obtain notes for the day you missed.

All members of the class are expected to adhere to official UF time. For this reason, if you are late to class, this will count as  $\frac{1}{2}$  **an absence**. If you are more than **10 minutes late**, I will mark you as absent. If you are frequently late to class or absent, this will also negatively affect your participation grade in the course.

Students are expected to bring the required reading for the day to class with them. If a student recurrently fails to bring the reading (in print or electronic format), you may be marked as absent.

### **Twelve-Day Rule and Absence Exceptions**

According to University policy, students who participate in athletic or scholastic teams are permitted to be absent for 12 days without penalty. However, students involved in such activities should let me know of their scheduled absences at least 1 week ahead of time. In these cases, I will allow you to make up missed in-class work within a reasonable time frame, but you should still aim to submit major assignments and blog posts on time. Likewise, if you must miss class because of a religious holiday, please let me know at least a week ahead of time, and I will allow you to make up missed in-class work.

For the official University policy on absences, please refer to

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx> for more detail

3. **Paper Format & Submission:** All essays must be formatted in MLA style. This means that your paper must meet the following guidelines:
  - Double-spaced
  - 12 point, Times New Roman font
  - 1 inch margins, on all sides
  - MLA style headers with page numbers
  - MLA style citations

For help with MLA format, find a copy of the *MLA Handbook* in the library or refer to the OWL Purdue website (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>).

Any file submitted as a Word document must have a file name that follows the “Last Name” “Assignment Name” format, e.g., Thorat Rhetorical Analysis.

- *Late Papers/Assignments*: If you expect to not make a deadline, please contact me in advance of the deadline. I may allow a short extension on a due date once in the term if you contact me before the deadline, and in exceptional circumstances.
  - *Paper Maintenance Responsibilities*. Keep duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course. Save all returned, graded work until the semester is over.
  - *Academic Honesty and Definition of Plagiarism*. Plagiarism violates the Student Honor Code and requires reporting to the Dean of Students. All students must abide by the Student Honor Code: <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>.
  - Students with *disabilities* who are requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)), which will provide appropriate documentation to give the instructor.
  - For information on UF Grading policies, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>
  - *Grade Appeals*. In 1000- and 2000-level courses, students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant, in the Department office (4008 TUR). Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.
  - *Course Evaluations*. Toward the end of the semester, you will receive email messages asking you to go online and evaluate this course: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>
  - Students who face difficulties completing the course or who are in need of counseling or urgent help may call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center (352) 392-1575, or contact them online: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>
  - Your policy on *classroom behavior and netiquette*:
  - *UF's policy on Harassment*: UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty: <http://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/recruitment-staffing/institutional-equity-diversity/resources/harassment/>
4. **Participation**: Being present in the classroom is not enough to succeed in this class. While I may lecture on occasion, many classes will rely on your questions and comments relating to our texts and assignments. If you are frequently quiet during class, I may call on you.

Your participation grade will be based on your participation in class discussion, in your behavior during group work, your online presence on the class website, and other behavior factors. If you sleep during class or are not present mentally in the classroom, I may mark you as absent.

# SCHEDULE

The schedule may change at the discretion of the instructor.

Short pieces and poems can be located within the link on this syllabus, and will be added on Canvas. Pertinent handouts on the writer, movement, or literary style, if applicable, will be on Canvas, and students will be expected to read them to prepare for class.

## **Week 1 Introduction**

Jan 04: “What is speculative fiction?”  
“Who are the known historical figures of the genre?”  
“How do we study spec fic?”

Jan 06: “Tolkien, On Fairy Stories”  
([http://www.rivendellcommunity.org/Formation/Tolkien\\_On\\_Fairy\\_Stories.pdf](http://www.rivendellcommunity.org/Formation/Tolkien_On_Fairy_Stories.pdf))

## **Week 2 History and Oppression in Spec Fic:**

Jan 09: Delany, “Racism and Science Fiction”  
(<http://www.nyrsf.com/racism-and-science-fiction-.html>)  
“Lovecraft, On the Creation of Niggers”  
([https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/On\\_the\\_Creation\\_of\\_Niggers](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/On_the_Creation_of_Niggers))

Jan 11: Card, “State job is not to redefine marriage”  
(<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700245157/State-job-is-not-to-redefine-marriage.html>)

Jan 13: “SFWA sexism rocks the science fiction blogosphere”  
(<http://www.dailydot.com/irl/sfw-bulletin-jean-rabe-resigned-sexism/>)  
Video: Harlan Ellison groping Connie Willis

## **Week 3 Short Stories:**

Jan 16: Holiday

Jan 18: Short Story: “I Make People Do Bad Things”

Jan 20: Short Story: “CUE: Change”  
**Close Reading Due**

## **Week 4 The Basics of Fantasy Literature:**

Jan 23: Attebery, “Structuralism” (BFL: pg 81-90)

Jan 25: Bould & Vint, “Political Readings” (BFL: pg 102-112)

Jan 27: Saunders, “Why Blacks Should Read (and Write) Science Fiction” (page TBA)

## **Week 5 Historical:**

Jan 30: Butler, *Wild Seed* (pg 1-160)

Feb 01: Butler, *Wild Seed* (pg 161-32)

Feb 03: Historical Annotation Paper discussion

**Week 6 Historical Cont.:**

Feb 06: Gomez, "The Second Law of Thermodynamics" (page TBA)

Feb 08: Gomez, *Gilda Stories* (pg 9-128)

Feb 10: Gomez, *Gilda Stories* (pg 129-252)  
**Historical Annotations Due**

**Week 7 Horror:**

Feb 13: Brooks, "Finding the Humanity in Horror"  
(<http://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1098&context=poroi>)

Feb 15: Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring* (pg 1-140)

Feb 17: Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring* (pg141-271)

**Week 8 Film:**

Feb 20: Mendlesohn, "Thematic Criticism" (BFL: pg 125-133)  
**Midterm Proposals Due**

Feb 22: Newsome, "Wake" (<https://vimeo.com/12133650>)

Feb 24: Kahiu, "Pumzi" ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIR7l\\_B86Fc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIR7l_B86Fc))

**Week 9 Novel, Cont.:**

Feb 27: Okorafor, *Who Fears Death* (pg 3-131)

Mar 01: Okorafor, *Who Fears Death* (pg 131-254)

Mar 03: Okorafor, *Who Fears Death* (256-386)  
**Midterm Due**

**Week 10 SPRING BREAK**

Mar 06: Spring Break

Mar 08: Spring Break

Mar 10: Spring Break

**Week 11 Critique Cont.:**

- Mar 13: Morrison, "Playing in the Dark" (pg 1-45)
- Mar 15: Morrison, "Playing in the Dark" (pg 46-91)
- Mar 17: **TBA**
- Week 12 Short Stories Cont.:**
- Mar 20: Butler, "Blood Child"
- Mar 22: **No Class**
- Mar 24: **No Class**
- Week 13 Short Story Cont.:**
- Mar 27: Holland-Moore, "Empty Vessel"  
**Introduce Final Paper Assignment**
- Mar 29: **TBA**
- Mar 31: **TBA**
- Week 14 Fantasy:**
- Apr 03: Jemisin, *Fifth Season* (pg 1-170)  
**Final Paper Proposals Due**
- Apr 05: Jemisin, *Fifth Season* (pg 171-340)
- Apr 07: Jemisin, *Fifth Season* (pg 341-512)
- Week 15 Music:**
- Apr 10: Janell Monae, "Archandroid"
- Apr 12: Nicki Minaj, "Beam Me Up Scotty"
- Apr 14: Erykah Badu, "New Amerykah Part One: 4th World War,"  
"New Amerykah Part Two: Return of the Ankh"
- Week 16 Finals**
- Apr 17: Paper Topics Discussion
- Apr 19: Paper Topics Discussion  
**Final Papers Due**

### **Grading/Assessment Rubric:**

- Close Reading (500 words, 50 points)  
 Historical Annotations (700 words, 100 points)  
 Analysis & Presentation (1000 words, 150 points)  
 Mid Term Paper (1500 words, 200 points)

Final Paper (2500 words, 300 points)  
Pop Quizzes (50 points)  
In Class Activities (50 points)  
Participation (100 points)  
TOTAL: 1000 points

### Grading Scale

A	4.0	93-100	930-1000	C	2.00	73-76	730-769
A-	3.67	90-92	900-929	C-	1.67	70-72	700-729
B+	3.33	87-89	870-899	D+	1.33	67-69	670-699
B	3.0	83-86	830-869	D	1.00	63-66	630-669
B-	2.67	80-82	800-829	D-	0.67	60-62	600-629
C+	2.33	77-79	770-799	E	0.00	0-59	0-599

### Grading Rubric

Assignment specific grading rubrics will be distributed before that assignment is due. A general overview of how I arrive at the grades for all major assignments is below.

In each written assignment, I will be looking at:

- 1) Content: How strong is your argument, development, and support? Does your multimedia content (when used) seem well-constructed and relevant to your assignment?
- 2) Organization: How well-structured are your paragraphs? Do your overall ideas flow well?
- 3) Mechanics: How frequently do you make errors in grammar, style, and spelling?

You should strive to excel in all three areas.

An A level assignment is complete in content, is organized well, and has few to no mechanical errors. An assignment of this level also demonstrates originality and creativity, showing that the student took extra steps beyond what was required.

A B level assignment is solid overall in terms of content, organization, and mechanics, but may need some minor revision to one of these three areas. An assignment that receives this grade fulfills assignment expectations, but is also complete in content and relatively free of grammatical or mechanical errors.

A C level assignment has promise in some areas, but lacks the command, organization, persuasiveness or clarity of the A or B assignments. An assignment that receives this grade may be overlooking an important component of the assignment, or need significant revision.

A D level assignment does not yet demonstrate the basic lower division writing expectations. The paper has major issues in content, organization and / or mechanics. Assignments that receive this grade will often be incomplete, or have major issues with organization.

An "E" is usually reserved for students who do not do the assignment or fail to attend class. However, an "E" may also be given if an essay blatantly ignores instructions or has major problems in all three areas of evaluation.