

ENGL 3377: Multicultural Literature
Black Feminist Speculative Fiction
Syllabus

General Information

Instructor

Prof. Benjamin J Robertson

Feel free to address me as Ben, Dr. Robertson, or Prof. Robertson. I use he/him/his pronouns.

E-Mail

benjamin.j.robertson@colorado.edu

Meeting Times

Tuesdays/Thursdays from 2:20 – 3:35 pm, via Zoom.

Link: <https://cuboulder.zoom.us/j/93591484536> (Passcode required. See your email. If you cannot find the passcode, please email me.)

“Office” hours

Office hours will be on Zoom, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays throughout the term from 11:30 am - 12:30 pm.

Link: <https://cuboulder.zoom.us/j/97629857933> (No passcode.)

Course Overview

This class will focus on genre fiction—including science fiction, fantasy, and horror—by black women. Going back to the 1970s, when Octavia Butler began her career as one of the finest writers of science fiction ever, and continuing into the present decade, when NK Jemisin became the first writer to win three consecutive Hugo awards for best novel, black women have reshaped genre fiction in terms of its content and form. In so doing, these writers have transformed public conversations about fandom, publishing, and awards, drawing our attention to the systemic racism and microaggressions that continue to shape popular discourse about the subjects and objects of generic discourse. This class will take up these issues, alongside others raised by these writers, including: the question of race as it intersects with gender, class, sexuality, and (dis)ability; the limits of conventional genre categories with regard to these writers’ innovations; and the complex relation among discourses of Afrofuturism, Africanfuturism, and Afropessimism.

Schedule

Please familiarize yourself with the reading/assignment schedule, which includes a list of required texts (on Canvas).

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Course Requirements

Short Writing Assignments (40%)

Each week I will provide you with a prompt, in response to which you will write 600 – 800 words. There will be fifteen such prompts throughout the term (one for each of weeks 2 – 16). You are responsible for completing EIGHT, each worth 5% of your final mark. See Short Writing Assignment Instructions and individual prompts for more information.

In-Class Group Work (40%)

Many but not all, class sessions will begin with group work, which will ask you to answer a series of questions about our readings and related concepts. Groups will consist of 4 – 5 students, each of whom will be expected to contribute to assignment. Each member of the group will be assigned—by the group—a score for the day (a 2, 1, or 0). The total points you earn (up to 40) will be your grade for this assignment for the term. See the In-Class Group Work Instructions for more details.

Final Project (20%)

You will complete, by the end of the term, a project of your design. This project could be a paper, if you are most comfortable with that type of assignment, but could be many things. See the Final Project Instructions for more details.

Grading Policies

Late Work

I have taken pains to make sure that you can complete graded work according to your own schedule, but at the same time I will not accept late work. Each Short Writing Assignment must be completed in the timeframes specified. That said, you may (and should) pick and choose which of these assignments you complete. You may miss seven of these assignments without any penalty as your lowest seven scores will be dropped. Similarly, although In-Class Work, as the name suggests, will be completed in class and cannot be made up, you will not need to complete every instance of this assignment. The Final Project must be turned in by the date specified.

Incompletes

Only granted for non-academic reasons, when <30% of the class is outstanding, and after signing an incomplete contract.

Grade calculation

For Short Writing Assignments

A = 5; B = 4.3; C = 3.8; D = 3; F = 0

Each short writing assignments will be assigned a whole letter grade, which will be converted to a score out of five. Your top eight scores will be added up to give you your grade for the term.

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For In-Class Work

Each instance of this assignment is worth 2, 1, or 0 points, as determined by the group at the conclusion of each work session. Your points for each instance will be added up to give you your score for the term, up to 40 points.

For the Final Project

A+ = 100%; A = 95%; A- = 92%; B+ = 88%; B = 85%; B- = 82%; C+ = 78%; C = 75%; C- = 72%; D = 65%; F = 0%

Your letter grade converts to a percentage which is then multiplied by 20%. A 'B' Final Project will therefore be worth 17.6 points towards your final mark ('B' = 88% x .2 = 17.6).

For final mark

95 – 100 = A; 90 – 94 = A-; 87 – 89 = B+ ; 84 – 86 = B; 80 – 83 = B-; 77 – 79 = C+; 74 – 76 = C; 70 – 73 = C-; 65 – 69 = D; 0 – 64 = F

Points from your Short Writing Assignments, In-Class Work, and Final Project will be added together. The number that results from this operation is your final mark.

Zoom Etiquette

General

- You should be on time for our Zoom meetings and have the meeting passcode available to log in as quickly as possible.
- If possible, sign in with your full first name and last name as listed on the class roster. Do not use a nickname or other pseudonym when you log in.

Exceptions

- Since enrolling in class, some students have changed their names to better reflect their gender identity. If you currently use a different name than what is listed on the official roster, please send a private Canvas message so this can be noted on the roster and you can use your current name on Zoom.
- If you do not have access to a computer or smartphone with internet access, call into class using a landline phone. This is not optimal; please try to locate an internet-enabled device to use for class.
- Stay focused. Please stay engaged in class activities. Close any apps on your device that are not relevant and turn off notifications.

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If you need technical help contact OIT at:

- Phone: 303-735-4357
- Email: oithelp@colorado.edu
- Self-Service Portal: <https://colorado.service-now.com>

Video

- Ideally, you will have your camera on during our class meetings. It is helpful to be able to see each other, just as in an in-person class. However, I understand that it will not always be possible—or desirable—for you to have your video on.

Exceptions

- If you have limited internet bandwidth or no webcam, it is ok to not use video.
- If you're unable to find an environment without a lot of visual distractions, it is also okay to turn off your video.
- If you are uncomfortable having your video on, you may keep it off. If this is the case, please just let me know. You don't need permission, but I would like to keep track of why people are not using their video.
- Keep it clean. Don't share anything you wouldn't put up on the projector in class!

Audio

- You will be muted when you enter the Zoom session. Please keep your microphone muted when you are not talking. This helps eliminate background noise.
- If possible, use a headset. If you own headphones with a microphone, please use them. This improves audio quality.
- When possible, be in a quiet place when possible. Find a quiet, distraction-free spot to log in. Turn off any music, videos, etc. in the background.
- That said, I do understand that doing so may be difficult at times. If you are having difficulty finding a suitable place to sit while attending class sessions, please let me know.

Chat

- Stay on topic. Use the chat window for questions and comments that are relevant to class. The chat window is not a place for socializing or posting comments that distract from the course activities. If you fill it up with random comments, I will be unable to sort through the information quickly to address students' real questions/concerns about the course.
- No disrespect or hate speech. Just like in our in-person class, respectful behavior is expected.

These guidelines were adopted from: <https://www.k-state.edu/keepeteaching/zoom-policies.html>

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Other Course Policies

You should bring have all relevant materials available during class sessions.

If you require any of our course materials in more accessible formats (especially handouts created from scanned books), please let me know.

Below, you will find boilerplate language from the university on classroom behavior, being on campus during COVID-19, disability accommodations; preferred names and pronoun use; the honor code; sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment and/or related retaliation; and religious observations. Of course, not all of this material applies to this class in the same manner it would if we were meeting face-to-face, but common sense suggests the ways in which it DOES apply, so please think about these things and let me know if you have any questions about them.

If you don't know something, please ask. I am happy to help.

University of Colorado, Boulder Syllabus Statements

Classroom Behavior

Both students and faculty are responsible for maintaining an appropriate learning environment in all instructional settings, whether in person, remote or online. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. For more information, see the policies on [classroom behavior](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

Requirements for COVID-19

As a matter of public health and safety due to the pandemic, all members of the CU Boulder community and all visitors to campus must follow university, department and building requirements, and public health orders in place to reduce the risk of spreading infectious disease. Required safety measures at CU Boulder relevant to the classroom setting include:

- maintain 6-foot distancing when possible,
- wear a face covering in public indoor spaces and outdoors while on campus consistent with state and county health orders,
- clean local work area,
- practice hand hygiene,
- follow public health orders, and
- if sick and you live off campus, do not come onto campus (unless instructed by a CU Healthcare professional), or if you live on-campus, please alert [CU Boulder Medical Services](#).

Students who fail to adhere to these requirements will be asked to leave class, and students who do not

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leave class when asked or who refuse to comply with these requirements will be referred to [Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution](#). For more information, see the policies on [COVID-19 Health and Safety](#) and [classroom behavior](#) and the [Student Code of Conduct](#). If you require accommodation because a disability prevents you from fulfilling these safety measures, please see the “Accommodation for Disabilities” statement on this syllabus.

All students who are new to campus must complete the [COVID-19 Student Health and Expectations Course](#). Before coming to campus each day, all students are required to complete the [Buff Pass](#).

Students who have tested positive for COVID-19, have symptoms of COVID-19, or have had close contact with someone who has tested positive for or had symptoms of COVID-19 must stay home. In this class, if you are sick or quarantined, please let me know as soon as possible so we can figure out how best to keep you on track for the class and for the term. To be clear: take care of yourself FIRST and get in touch with me when your situation is stable. Moreover, you need not specify the nature of your illness, but only alert me to the fact that your situation is hindering your progress in the class.

Accommodation for Disabilities

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation letter from Disability Services to your faculty member in a timely manner so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Information on requesting accommodations is located on the [Disability Services website](#). Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or dsinfo@colorado.edu for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition, see [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) on the Disability Services website.

Preferred Student Names and Pronouns

CU Boulder recognizes that students' legal information doesn't always align with how they identify. Students may update their preferred names and pronouns via the student portal; those preferred names and pronouns are listed on instructors' class rosters. In the absence of such updates, the name that appears on the class roster is the student's legal name.

Honor Code

All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Honor Code. Violations of the policy may include: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access to academic materials, clicker fraud, submitting the same or similar work in more than one course without permission from all course instructors involved, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to the Honor Code (honor@colorado.edu; 303-492-5550). Students found responsible for violating the academic integrity policy will be subject to nonacademic sanctions from the Honor Code as well as academic sanctions from the faculty member. Additional information regarding the Honor Code academic integrity policy can be found at the [Honor Code Office website](#).

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Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination, Harassment and/or Related Retaliation

The University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) is committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. CU Boulder will not tolerate acts of sexual misconduct (harassment, exploitation, and assault), intimate partner violence (dating or domestic violence), stalking, or protected-class discrimination or harassment by members of our community. Individuals who believe they have been subject to misconduct or retaliatory actions for reporting a concern should contact the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) at 303-492-2127 or cureport@colorado.edu. Information about the OIEC, university policies, [anonymous reporting](#), and the campus resources can be found on the [OIEC website](#).

Please know that faculty and instructors have a responsibility to inform OIEC when made aware of incidents of sexual misconduct, dating and domestic violence, stalking, discrimination, harassment and/or related retaliation, to ensure that individuals impacted receive information about options for reporting and support resources.

Religious Holidays

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. Because there is no attendance requirement for the class, this should not be a problem.

See the [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.