ENGLISH 4830/5830: Africana Literatures
Thematic Title: Afrofuturism
T/Th 11:00 AM – 12:15 PM
Cudahy Hall 108

Professor Gerry Canavan
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Office Hours: T/Th 8:45 AM – 9:15 AM
Th 12:30 PM – 2:00 PM
or by appointment

Greg Tate has said that "Black people live the estrangement that science fiction writers imagine."
This course takes up the nexus of intersections between black history and the radical black
imagination that is commonly called Afrofuturism, focusing in particular of figurations of Africa
as a space of science fictional possibility from both sides of the Atlantic. If Afrofuturism has
been, as Kodwo Eshun has said, "a program for recovering the histories of counter-futures
created in a century hostile to Afrodiasporic projection," how does the rise of Africa as a global
economic powerhouse in the twenty-first-century transform our understanding of black futurity?
2018's smash hit *Black Panther* is only the most vivid registration of the ongoing global
importance of the Afrofuturist imagination; from comics to film and television to literature to
music videos to social media we will trace Afrofuturism across the twenty-first century cultural
landscape.

LEARNING GOALS
At the completion of this course, students will be able to:
• Demonstrate understanding of the cultural, historical, and political contexts in which various
   Afrofuturist narratives have been produced;
• Apply techniques of critical analysis as appropriate to diverse cultural archives and documents;
• Explore the relationship between the concept of Afrofuturism and interrelated ideas of history,
   futurity, technology, ecology, disability, gender, race, utopia, and the nation;
• Use literary and cultural study to develop skills for careful reading and clear writing;
• Read and discuss a variety of literary and nonliterary texts on the levels of both form and
   content.

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at the BookMarq on 16th Street)
Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Black Panther: A Nation Under Our Feet,* vols. 1-3
Octavia E. Butler, *Wild Seed*
Nnedi Okorafor, *Lagoon*
Abdourahman Waberi, *In the United States of Africa*

A previous version of this syllabus included Lauren Beukes's *Zoo City* as a required text; this
book is no longer required.

ASSIGNMENTS

Attendance, Participation, Possible Quizzes	20%
Discussion Inauguration Day	10%
D2L Forum Posts	20%
Papers	50%

Students in this class can choose between doing three smaller papers (4-6 pages) or one larger seminar paper (12-18 pages). A detailed description of the two writing assignment options is available on the last page of this syllabus.

Grad students will have slightly different expectations; we can discuss this one-on-one.

GRADING
Grades will follow the following rubric:

* To earn a **C**, you must clearly restate the meaning or project of a text in your own terms. A C essay may volunteer an original argument, but will likely lack evidence or analysis of its sources. C essays are clearly written, though they might display some grammatical weakness.

* To earn a **B**, you must begin to raise important questions about the text under consideration and to use those questions to drive your own interpretive agenda. A B essay typically advances an original argument and provides solid analysis of the text(s) under consideration. B essays are clear, concise, and free of grammatical errors.

* To earn an **A**, you must construct an essay that does more than simply comment on the work of others; you must forward, counter, or transform what they have to say. An A essay advances an original argument that builds toward a climax and makes a persuasive case for its own significance. A essays are clearly written, and often eloquent.

* A **D** means that you have not written in clear prose or that you seem to have deeply misunderstood the text. An **F** means that you did not fully or seriously engage the assignment.

* **A-, B+, B-, C+ (and so on) grades** fall in the gaps between the above categories.

UNGRADED ASSIGNMENTS
Your D2L posts and discussion inauguration will be graded on an extra-credit / pass / low-pass / fail basis:

• Fulfilling all the requirements of the assignment will earn you full credit;
• Failing to do so will earn you half-credit (at best) or no credit (at worst);
• Going beyond the terms of the assignment in an especially ambitious or creative way can earn you extra credit.

QUIZZES
I do not like to give reading quizzes; I think they infantilize the college-level scholar. However, this is by necessity a very reading-intensive class; if it seems to me that people are not keeping

up with the reading, pop quizzes may become necessary despite my philosophical objections. You have been warned.

FORMAT OF WRITTEN WORK
Your final paper should be typed in twelve-point font, double-spaced with one-inch margins, saved in a format Microsoft Word can open. Your filename should contain *your name* in it, for example, yourlastname-finalpaper.docx.

I expect you to *edit* and *proofread* all written work, even forum comments. Drafts that contain excessive typos or grammar mistakes may be returned to the author for correction before I offer comments.

Please give your final paper an original title, and include your name, assignment, and due date in a header on the first page.

All sources relied upon for the writing of your paper, including the primary text, must be appropriately cited.

PAPER SUBMISSION
The final paper should be submitted via D2L Dropbox by 5:30 PM on Friday, December 14. **Because this is a final exam, late final papers cannot be accepted.**

Your other written work will be submitted via D2L Dropbox or via the D2L forums. These papers will have variable due dates driven by your own interests and responses, as well as whether you have chosen to write three smaller papers or one larger paper. **It is thus your responsibility to make sure you are properly keeping up with this portion of the course in a timely fashion.**

Except in very unusual circumstances, work will not be accepted by email.

TECHNOLOGY IS TERRIBLE: PLAN AHEAD!
The Internet goes down. Files become corrupted. Computers crash. These are predictable facts of twenty-first century life, not emergencies. For this course, for all your courses, for the rest of your career and your life in this world you need to develop work habits and strategies that take into account the basic, inescapable unreliability of computers. Start your assignments well in advance of the due date; save them often; save backup copies of essential documents, including copies off-site using a service like Carbonite, Dropbox, or Google Drive.

ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION
Class discussion is an essential component of this seminar; class discussion, not lecture, will be the primary means by which we will investigate these texts together. It is crucial that you come to class every day having read the required material and prepared to discuss it.

Consequently, attendance in this class is mandatory. You should plan on attending every class. Please talk to me (in advance if possible) if you ever find you will need to miss a class meeting.

The course adheres to Marquette University's attendance policy, which can be found on the Internet at http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/#attendance.

You are allowed **three unexcused absences** over the course of the fall semester. **After that, your class participation will drop by half a letter grade for each additional unexcused absence.** Upon the seventh unexcused absence, you may receive a WA (Withdrawn—Excessive Absences) for the semester.

Merely being present in class is insufficient for an "A" in class participation. Each student is expected to *participate in* and *contribute to* our discussions. Just being in the room is not enough.

DISCUSSION INAUGURATOR
Beginning with Week 3, each member of the class will have one day in which they are expected to inaugurate our discussion based on the readings for that day. The requirements for this are necessarily very loose, as each day of the course will have a very different type of text to be discussed; in general, however, the discussion inaugurator will be asked to (1) succinctly describe the project of this part of the text; (2) articulate a brief critical response to the material; and (3) direct our collective attention to one or two problems in, questions about, or particularly important moments in the text. I expect this introductory role to take approximately five minutes.

A signup sheet for this role will be distributed in class next week.

D2L DISCUSSION FORUMS
This course will make extensive use of the forums on D2L, where you can express your response to the material before class begins and where we can continue our discussions after class is over.

The forums are an excellent place for people who may feel inhibited by in-class discussion to share their opinions with the class. I will be reading it before every meeting of the course and I ask you do the same**.** You may choose either to begin a discussion thread on a new topic or to respond to a post composed by one of your classmates.

Before class on Thursday, September 6, every student is required to upload a picture of their face to their D2L profile and respond to at least one of the texts we have discussed thus far. After that, students must write **four short comments (approximately 250-400 words that move beyond plot summary)** responding to any of the texts across the remainder of the course. This is approximately one post every third week. Post your comment in the open thread for that day of class. These comments should ideally be completed either by 9 AM before one of the class discussions devoted to that text or by 9 AM the night before the following class. Roughly half of the posts should be completed before Fall Break.

I encourage you to think of your blog comments as possible "seeds" for your papers; feel free to begin to develop your thoughts there. **You are also highly encouraged to kill two birds with one stone by posting a forum comment on the day you are scheduled to be the discussion inaugurator.**

Up to two additional posts beyond the required four will count towards extra credit on your final grade. Additional posts beyond that number, and posts that respond substantively to other students' arguments, will be looked upon very favorably when I calculate your final grade

EMAIL
Students in this class are required to check their official Marquette email account—whatever account D2L sends its emails to—at least once a day, in case there are any last-minute announcements or disruptions. I endeavor to respond to all emails within 24 hours, usually much less—but please do not send me urgent emails regarding your assignments on the night before they are due and expect an immediate reply.

LAPTOP POLICY
In-class use of laptops, Kindles, iPads, etc. is permitted for access to electronic versions of our texts and for notetaking. However, students *must* refrain from non-class-related computer use, including email, instant messaging, Facebook, Twitter, and the like. **Please do not abuse this privilege or distract your fellow students.** I reserve to right to ban individual technological devices if this becomes a problem. Except in unusual cases of personal emergency, cleared with me at the start of class, no use of cell phones will be permitted during class time; please turn off your ringers and put them out of sight.

CONFERENCES
All students are asked to meet with me in a short one-on-one conference at my office at least once during the semester to discuss the course and your work within it. Please know I am very happy to meet with you individually to discuss work-in-progress in excess of this requirement, as many times as you like. Simply come to my weekly office hours, or see or email me to set up an appointment.

OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS
Regrettably we do not have time to watch *Black Panther* and *Sorry to Bother You* during our scheduled class hours; I will arrange for evening viewings of these films on campus at times and locations to be determined. Students who are not able to attend the screenings will need to watch the films on their own.

FLEXIBILITY
If it will benefit the class, changes may be made to the above.

WRITING CENTER
Students are strongly encouraged to make use of the Writing Center, located in Raynor Library Room 240, at any stage of the writing process. Please visit the Writing Center website at http://www.marquette.edu/english/writingcenter/ to find out how to schedule an appointment and to access the studio's online resources.

ACCOMODATIONS
Students with disabilities who believe they may require accommodations in this course should contact me early in the semester so your learning needs can be appropriately met.

I am of course more than happy to work with you to make sure you are successful in this course and to make this course most accessible for you. However, without documentation, I am limited in what I am able to do. Therefore, in order for me to help you most effectively, I need you to be proactive in contacting Marquette University's Office of Disability Services (located on the fifth floor of the 707 Building). ODS can be reached by phone at (414) 288-1645 or by email at ods@marquette.edu.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Students are expected to abide by the academic honesty policy outlined in your undergraduate bulletin. I urge you all to examine this material and consult me with any questions you may have about plagiarism or academic integrity *before* it becomes an issue.

Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not an acceptable excuse for plagiarism. **Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course.** No exceptions or special dispensations will be made.

Marquette students now sign an Honor Pledge, which states:

- *I recognize the importance of personal integrity in all aspects of life and work.*
- *I commit myself to truthfulness, honor, and responsibility, by which I earn the respect of others.*
- *I support the development of good character, and commit myself to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity as an important aspect of personal integrity.*
- *My commitment obliges me to conduct myself according to the Marquette University Honor Code.*

Full details of Marquette's academic integrity policy are available on the Internet at http://www.marquette.edu/provost/academic-integrity.php.

On a personal level, I (like everyone) hate being lied to. Please, do not feel you need to concoct elaborate stories. Simply be honest with me about whatever is going on and we will work it out.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

We all enter this classroom with preexisting political, ethical, philosophical, and intellectual commitments. You are all required to engage the material—but you are absolutely *not* required to agree either with any of the writers we will discuss, or with me, in whole or in part.

RESPECT

This classroom is a community. It is crucial that we treat each other with the appropriate level of courtesy and respect. No one should be made to feel unwelcome here. Failure to treat other students with the respect they deserve will **severely** impact your class participation grade.

KEEP THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN!

I want this class to be a meaningful and valuable experience for you, both in its own terms and in service of the development of your larger college experience. If you have any ideas, suggestions, or concerns about the way things are going, my door is always open.

PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE

Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class as they become necessary.
Students should come to class prepared to discuss the listed texts or chapters.

T	Aug 28	**FIRST DAY OF CLASS** What Is Afrofuturism? *film* (in class)*:* Sun Ra, *Space Is the Place* (1974) (excerpts)
Th	Aug 30	Mark Bould, "The Ships Landed Long Ago" [D2L] *film* (in class): John Akomfrah, *The Last Angel of History* (1996)
T	Sep 4	Sable Elyse Smith, "Ordinary Violence" [museum] **MEET AT THE HAGGERTY**
Th	Sep 6	*film* (in-class): *Get Out* (2017)
T	Sep 11	*film:* Jordan Peele, *Get Out* (2017) (discussion)
Th	Sep 13	*Get Out* (2017) (discussion continues) Steven Thrasher, *Get Out* thinkpiece #1 [Web] Aisha Harris, *Get Out* thinkpiece #2 [Web]
T	Sep 18	Janelle Monáe, *Dirty Computer* (2018) (viewing and initial thoughts)
Th	Sep 20	Janelle Monáe, *Dirty Computer* (2018) (extended discussion) Aja Romano, "Janelle Monáe's body of work is a masterpiece of modern science fiction" [Web] Brittany Spanos, "Janelle Monáe Frees Herself" [Web] Christopher Lebron, "Janelle Monáe for President" [Web]
T	Sep 25	*film:* Ryan Coogler, *Black Panther* (2018) (discussion)
Th	Sep 27	*Black Panther* (2018) (discussion continues) Gerry Canavan, "The Limits of *Black Panther's* Afrofuturism" [Web] **FIRST PAPER MINI-WORKSHOP**
T	Oct 2	Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Black Panther: A Nation Under Our Feet,* vol. 1 Evan Narcisse, "Ta-Nehisi Coates Explains How He's Turning Black Panther into a Superhero Again" [web]
Th	Oct 4	Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Black Panther, A Nation Under Our Feet,* vol. 2 **FIRST PAPER DUE**
T	Oct 9	Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Black Panther, A Nation Under Our Feet,* vol. 3 Kodwo Eshun, "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism" [D2L]
Th	Oct 11	Octavia E. Butler, *Wild Seed,* Book I ("Covenant, 1690")
T	Oct 16	Octavia E. Butler, *Wild Seed,* Book II ("Lot's Children, 1741")
Th	*Oct 18*	*FALL BREAK—NO CLASS*

T	Oct 23	Octavia E. Butler, *Wild Seed*, Book III ("Canaan, 1840")
Th	Oct 25	*film:* Wanuri Kahiu, "Pumzi" (2009) (in-class viewing and discussion) **SECOND PAPER MINI-WORKSHOP**
T	Oct 30	*film* (in class)*: District 9* (2009)
Th	Nov 1	*film:* Neill Blomkamp, *District 9* (2009) (in-class viewing continues and discussion) **SECOND PAPER DUE**
T	Nov 6	*District 9* (2009) discussion continues *District 10* (forthcoming eventually?) discussion Octavia E. Butler, "The Monophobic Response" [D2L]
Th	Nov 8	Nnedi Okorafor, *Lagoon* (Act I, first half)
T	Nov 13	Nnedi Okorafor, *Lagoon* (Act I, second half)
Th	Nov 15	Nnedi Okorafor, *Lagoon* (Act II)
T	Nov 20	Nnedi Okorafor, *Lagoon* (Act III)
Th	*Nov 22*	*THANKSGIVING BREAK—NO CLASS*
T	Nov 27	Abdourahman Waberi, *In the United States of Africa* (part one)
Th	Nov 29	Abdourahman Waberi, *In the United States of Africa* (whole book) **FINAL PROJECTS/PAPERS MINI-WORKSHOP**
T	Dec 4	*Film:* Boots Riley, *Sorry to Bother You* (2018) Chip Gibbons, "In the World of Film, We've Edited Out All Rebellion: An Interview with Boots Riley" [Web] LAST DAY OF CLASS
Th	*Dec 6*	*CLASS CANCELLED DUE TO INSTRUCTOR TRAVEL*
F	**Dec 14**	**FINAL PAPERS/PROJECTS DUE BY 5:30 PM VIA D2L DROPBOX**

FOLLOW FAME: FRIENDS AND ALUMNI/AE OF MARQUETTE ENGLISH!
On Facebook (page): www.facebook.com/marquettefame
On Facebook (group): www.facebook.com/groups/496438583889194
        (search for "Undergraduate English at Marquette")
On Twitter: @MarquetteFAME

I will also be inviting you to events in the pop culture and pizza series I run periodically during the fall and spring semesters. I hope you can attend!

ENGLISH 4610 ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST (THREE PAPERS)

□ **Discussion Leader**   Date / Topic _____

□ **D2L Posts**
    □ Mandatory Post #1
    □ Free Post 1
    □ Free Post 2
    □ Free Post 3
    □ Free Post 4
    □ Extra Credit Posts

> *These public discussion forum posts are intended to articulate some concrete, critical response to some element of the work under discussion on a given day of the course. They should be approximately 250-400 words long, and may overlap with your discussion inauguration presentation and/or your final project. Additional posts will count towards extra credit.*

□ **First Paper** (4-6 pages; workshop Sep. 27, due Oct. 4; 15% of final grade)
suggested topics: Afrofuturism in art, film, and music; violence and Afrofuturism; horror and Afrofuturism; the prison-industrial complex; African Americans and the U.S. culture industry

□ **Second Paper** (4-6 pages; workshop Oct. 25, due Nov. 1; 15% of final grade)
suggested topics: American visions of Africa; Afrofuturism and the legacy of slavery; Afrofuturist utopias; Afrofuturist dystopias; gender and Afrofuturism

□ **Final Paper** (4-6 pages; workshop Nov. 29, due Dec. 15 by 5:30 PM; 20% of final grade)
suggested topics: African Afrofuturism; aliens; alternate history; Afrofuturist revolution; Afrofuturism and the environment

I cannot stress enough how open I am to your personal interests and approaches; I am genuinely open to any topic, any method, and any form that seems urgent and interesting to you (provided of course that it is the intellectual-labor equivalent of a 4-6-page scholarly paper, more or less). I sincerely want these papers to be something you are excited about and enjoy writing, *not* an unpleasant chore. I can't wait to read them.

ENGLISH 4610 ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST (ONE PAPER)

□ **Discussion Leader**   Date / Topic _____

□ **D2L Posts**
    □ Mandatory Post #1
    □ Free Post 1
    □ Free Post 2
    □ Free Post 3
    □ Free Post 4
    □ Extra Credit Posts

> *These public discussion forum posts are intended to articulate some concrete, critical response to some element of the work under discussion on a given day of the course. They should be approximately 250-400 words long, and may overlap with your discussion inauguration presentation and/or your final project. Additional posts will count towards extra credit.*

□ **Final Project "Pitch"**   (due in-class on Sep. 27; ungraded)

For the Oct. 2 workshop all I ask is that you have a basic idea for what you think you might want to write your seminar paper on.

□ **Final Project Prospectus** (due in-class on Oct. 25; 10% of final grade)

The prospectus is a formal, half-page anticipation of the major thrust of your final project as you anticipate it taking shape. Generally speaking, it should lay out the aspect of Africana literature that you plan to discuss, and articulate a *central claim* which clearly and succinctly describes your planned scholarly intervention. It should also provide five-to-ten primary or secondary sources you expect to draw on for your project.

Creative or curational projects still need to be "pitched" and still need to provide a prospectus.

□ **Final Project**   (due to D2L Dropbox by Dec. 15 by 5:30 PM; 40% of final grade)

I cannot stress enough how open I am to your personal interests and approaches; I am genuinely open to any topic, any method, and any form that seems urgent and interesting to you (provided of course that it is the intellectual-labor equivalent of a 12-to-18-page scholarly paper, more or less). I sincerely want this paper to be something you are excited about and enjoy writing, *not* an unpleasant chore. I can't wait to read them.