

**English 360**  
**African American Writers: Hallucination, Prophecy, and the Supernatural**  
TTh 12:00-1:20pm  
107 Esslinger

Instructor: Dr. Faith Barter (she her hers)

Office: PLC 320

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1:45-4:45pm. Sign up [here](#) (link also available on the Canvas home page)

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**Course Description:**

Working from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present, this course will consider African American and Caribbean literature that troubles our notions of the “natural” and the “real.” Exploring narratives of hallucination, prophecy, and divination, we will study the ways that Black writers have documented political resistance and claimed Black identity through the language of what we will provisionally call “the supernatural.” Rather than reading the supernatural solely as forms of ghost stories, psychosis, and horror, we will take seriously narratives of hallucination and prophecy in order to unsettle dominant colonial norms of knowledge, literature, and sanity.

**A Note on Content:**

This course will examine texts that document, describe, and grapple with issues of racial and sexual violence. The material may be graphic, and class discussions will frequently take up issues that many people consider controversial. Please consider whether this content will be disturbing or triggering to a degree that will interfere with your learning in the course. No one in this class will say the n-word, regardless of whether that word appears in our course texts. See the Canvas site for additional information on language practices around slavery.

**Learning Outcomes:**

Through reading, written assignments, and in-class discussion, this course will help you:

- Arrive at a deeper historical, theoretical, and literary understanding of African American and Afro-Caribbean literature and culture.
- Generate a deeper knowledge of how colonial norms influence accepted ways of knowing and being, including how colonial norms shape definitions of categories such as sanity, competence, etc.
- Achieve a sense of how these literary traditions and norms have evolved over the past three centuries.
- Refine, through written expression, close reading, critical thinking, and critical argumentation skills.
- Identify other places in which to use these skills—other coursework, daily life, personal reading, etc.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

**The following texts are required. I do not allow laptops or other electronic devices to be used in class (with the exception of documented accommodations). As a result, you may occasionally need to print out hard copies to bring to class with you. Please note that you will also be required to obtain access to two films.**

- Maryse Condé, *I, Tituba: The Black Witch of Salem* (ISBN: 9780813927671)
- Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (ISBN: 9781400033416)

- Erna Brodber, *Louisiana* (ISBN: 9781578060313)
- N.K. Jemisin, *How Long 'Til Black Future Month* (ISBN: 9780316491372)
- *Daughters of the Dust* (film, dir. Julie Dash; available to rent through Amazon Prime; DVD on reserve at Knight Library)
- *Black Panther* (film, dir. Ryan Coogler; available to stream on Netflix)
- You will also be required to read/listen to the following course texts. PDFs or links will be provided to you:
  - *Confessions of Nat Turner*
  - Zora Neale Hurston, excerpts from *Tell My Horse*
  - Ishmael Reed, “Neo-Hoodoo Manifesto”
  - Sun Ra, songs and video clips

### GRADING DISTRIBUTION:

Canvas Posts (6 total)	15%
Paper 1 (Ways of Knowing) (3-4 pages)	10%
Close Reading Paper (4-5 pages)	20%
In-class presentation	10%
Proposal/outline for final project	5%
Final paper/project (6-7 pages or equivalent)	25%
In-class participation	15%

### COURSE POLICIES:

**Class participation:** Active classroom participation is an integral part of your success in this course. On a practical level, I expect you to come to class having read and thought about the assigned readings, and therefore having prepared to discuss them. You are unable to participate effectively if you have not brought the text(s) we are discussing that day. If you are observed using your laptop or other electronic device during class, you may or may not receive a warning – but repeating such behavior will inevitably degrade your participation score for the term. Your classroom participation grade will be based on my assessment of your regular contributions to class discussion and a self-evaluation of your in-class performance that you will complete at the end of the term.

**Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory and essential to your success in the course. You are allowed two absences during the term. I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences except for religious observances. Each absence over two will result in 1/3 of a letter grade penalty off your final grade in the course. Missing 6+ classes for any reason will result in automatic failure in the course. **Attendance is taken each day, but only tallied at the end of the term. It is your responsibility to keep track of your attendance and to be aware of how many absences remain available to you without a penalty on your final grade.**

**What to do if you miss a class:** Most of the time, nothing. I do **not** need or want to know why you miss individual classes unless it is for a religious observance or a school-sanctioned absence. If you are experiencing serious personal issues that cause repeated absences, I do encourage you to speak to me as early as possible so that we can strategize together how to navigate the situation. If you miss a class, it is **your** responsibility to get notes and information from a classmate. Do not ask me to summarize content you have missed. You are welcome, however, to come to office hours with specific questions about missed content *after* you’ve consulted with a classmate.

**Tardiness:** Class begins promptly at 12:00pm; late entries are disruptive and are strongly discouraged. If you are more than 20 minutes late (or leave more than 20 minutes early), I will mark you absent.

**Electronic devices:** As stated above, laptops and other electronic devices are permitted only with an accommodation from the AEC. Phones should be turned OFF (not on vibrate or silent) before entering the classroom and should remain off for the duration of class. You should not be talking or texting during class using *any* electronic means, including your watch.

**Academic Honesty:** I take very seriously our shared obligation to academic integrity, and all of your work in this class—including informal papers and paper proposals—should be entirely your own.

**Access:** The Accessible Education Center ([uoaec@uoregon.edu](mailto:uoaec@uoregon.edu)) handles requests for accommodation of disabilities. I and the University want this class to be an inclusive learning environment. Please notify me as soon as possible if aspects of the course are creating barriers to your participation or if you need to share an accommodations letter from the AEC.

**Correspondence:** Allow 48 hours for responses to emails. If you are requesting information that is already available in the syllabus or on Canvas, you are likely to receive a response to that effect. Please make sure you consult those resources *before* contacting me.

**Deadlines:** I take deadlines extremely seriously. For formal papers, submitting even one minute past the deadline counts as a late submission and will result in a penalty of 10% for each day that it is late. Please avoid this scenario by seeking out extensions early – I grant them quite readily, but you must request them at least 24 hours before the due date. **Late Canvas posts receive zero credit.**

**Extra Credit:** I offer extra credit for attending and completing brief write-ups of relevant campus events. You may submit up to three extra credit assignments this term. Events eligible for extra credit will be added to the course calendar in Canvas. See the Canvas page on Extra Credit for detailed information about how to complete a write-up and how I apply extra credit points.

## **ASSIGNMENTS:**

Detailed assignment instructions are posted on Canvas – you should never submit an assignment without carefully reviewing the instructions posted on Canvas.

**Canvas posts:** At the beginning of the term, the class will be divided into two groups: Tuesday posters and Thursday posters. From Week 2 through Week 8, you are responsible for submitting a close reading post on your assigned day. Posts are due by 11:00am on the day of class (1 hour before class starts), whether you attend class or not. **Late posts will not be accepted.** You must submit 6 posts by the end of the quarter, meaning that you can miss 1 weekly post without penalty – use that freebie strategically. Posts are graded out of 2 points. All posts that follow the guidelines in the prompt will receive a full 2 points. Posts that do not conform to the instructions will receive only partial credit. You may not re-write incomplete posts for credit. Late posts will receive 0 points.

**Paper 1 (Ways of Knowing, 3-4 pages):** Toward the beginning of the term, you will write a short paper in which you consider a way of knowing/being that you practice in your own life (religion, meditation, astrology, higher education, etc.). You will need to interrogate that practice in part by using at least one text we have read.

**Close Reading Paper (4-5 pages):** You will complete a 4-5 page argumentative close reading paper on a passage of your choice from one of our texts. You will be practicing close reading in your weekly Canvas posts—I strongly encourage you to use that space to test out ideas that you can then develop into a longer paper. You will have the option to revise this paper for a higher grade.

**Final project/paper:** You will design a final project in a format of your choice (with my approval). Your final project in the course will be a 6-7 page argumentative paper on a topic of your choice OR an alternate project that is the equivalent in scope and scale of a 6-7 page paper. You *may* use your close reading paper as a starting point for an expanded final paper. You will also turn in a separately graded project proposal and preliminary outline.

**In-class Presentation:** Once during the term, you and a group of classmates will teach/lead the first 20 minutes of discussion on that day’s reading. Your entire group must 1) Submit a presentation agenda at least 24 hours before your presentation (the agenda should include an outline of the presentation and a description of how each group member has contributed to the presentation); and 2) Make a 20-minute presentation during class on the day’s reading. It is up to you whether you want to deliver a lecture-style presentation and/or lead some other group activity or discussion. All members of the group will receive the same grade. If any member of the group is absent on the day of the presentation, all group members will receive a 10% penalty.

### COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1		
T	Jan. 7	Introductions
Th	Jan. 9	Zora Neale Hurston, excerpts from <i>Tell My Horse</i> (distributed in class; PDFs also available on Canvas)
Week 2		
T	Jan. 14	Maryse Condé, <i>I, Tituba: The Black Witch of Salem</i> (read first 1/3)
Th	Jan. 16	Maryse Condé, <i>I, Tituba: The Black Witch of Salem</i> (read second 1/3)
Week 3		
T	Jan. 21	Maryse Condé, <i>I, Tituba: The Black Witch of Salem</i> (read final 1/3)
W	Jan. 22	<b>***Paper 1 due via Canvas by 8pm***</b>
Th	Jan. 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Confessions of Nat Turner</i> (distributed in class; also available at <a href="https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/turner/turner.html">https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/turner/turner.html</a>)</li> <li>• Victor Séjour, “The Mulatto” (distributed in class)</li> </ul>
Week 4		
T	Jan. 28	Toni Morrison <i>Beloved</i> (read first 1/4)
Th	Jan. 30	Toni Morrison <i>Beloved</i> (read second 1/4)
Week 5		
T	Feb. 4	Toni Morrison <i>Beloved</i> (read third 1/4)
Th	Feb. 6	Toni Morrison <i>Beloved</i> (read final 1/4)
Week 6		
M	Feb. 10	<b>***Close Reading Paper due via Canvas by 8pm***</b>
T	Feb. 11	<i>Daughters of the Dust</i> (watch film before class)
Th	Feb. 13	Erna Brodber, <i>Louisiana</i> (read first 1/3)
Week 7		
T	Feb. 18	Erna Brodber, <i>Louisiana</i> (read second 1/3)
Th	Feb. 20	Erna Brodber, <i>Louisiana</i> (read final 1/3)
Week 8		

T	Feb. 25	Ishmael Reed, “Neo-Hoodoo Manifesto” (distributed in class)
Th	Feb. 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sun Ra, watch the following clips before class:  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djBKQNVj5Cc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djBKQNVj5Cc</a> and  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fgz-iQ5lSw4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fgz-iQ5lSw4</a></li> <li>• Sun Ra, view exhibits in this gallery:  <a href="https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/collex/exhibits/sounds-tomorrows-world/gallery/">https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/collex/exhibits/sounds-tomorrows-world/gallery/</a> (at a minimum, read “Negroes Are Not Men” and “The Great Whore”)</li> <li>• Listen to at least 15 minutes of Sun Ra’s music on Spotify or YouTube</li> </ul>
F	Feb. 28	<b>***Final Project Proposal/Outline due via Canvas by 8pm***</b>
<b>Week 9</b>		
T	Mar. 3	N.K. Jemisin, <i>How Long ‘Til Black Future Month?</i> (Read Introduction, “The City Born Great,” and “Red Dirt Witch”)  Recommended: The essay on her website that she references in the Introduction
W	Mar. 4	<b>***Option Close Reading Revision due via Canvas by 8pm***</b>
Th	Mar. 5	N.K. Jemisin, <i>How Long ‘Til Black Future Month?</i> (Read “Cloud Dragon Skies,” “The Elevator Dancer,” and “On the Banks of the River Lex”)
<b>Week 10</b>		
T	Mar. 10	<i>Black Panther</i> (watch film before class)
Th	Mar. 12	Evaluations, Reflections (no reading assignment)
M	Mar. 16	<b>***Final Projects due via Canvas by 11:59pm***</b>