This course will consider Afro-diasporic literature that troubles our notions of the “natural” and the “real.” Exploring narratives of hallucination, prophecy, psychic knowledge, and supernatural phenomena, 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, prophecy, and supernatural phenomena in order to unsettle dominant colonial norms of knowledge, literature, consciousness, and sanity.

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 these issues in detail. Please consider whether this content will be disturbing or triggering to a degree that will interfere with your learning in the course. If so, I will be happy to help you select an alternative course.

The State of the World, and the State of Our World

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge upfront that this academic term poses specific challenges, some of which we may not even yet anticipate. Our immediate context includes Covid, state-sanctioned anti-Black violence, wildfires, and a particularly divisive upcoming election. This context means that we may be meeting and working through conditions that encompass physical and mental stress or crisis, economic crisis, family and childcare responsibilities, unstable or chaotic living conditions, and more. These conditions are likely to be in flux, and they will require all of us to extend compassion, grace, and flexibility to each other. Please know that I want you to succeed in this class, but I also want you to stay as safe, healthy, and secure as you possibly can. I am working hard to make the seminar space accommodating, flexible, and generous while maintaining the rigor and content coverage that you need and deserve, and/or I will modify and adjust as needed. If you find that you need additional support, please know that that is not a personal failing of yours, but a function of being a person in the world in 2020 – in that case, please reach out to me. I will never ask you to divulge more information than you are comfortable sharing, but I will do whatever I can to lead with generosity and flexibility.

Language and Course Policies in the Zoom Era

Language. The functionality and integrity of our seminar space, even and maybe especially on Zoom, depends on the care that we give to our language. We should strive for generosity with each other, allowing for the possibility of mistakes and disagreement but remaining accountable for our own language. Mindful of the ways that language itself can do violence and harm, there are a few important bright-line rules. First, respect is mandatory; hate speech is prohibited. Second, absolutely no one in this course will use the N-word, even if it appears in a text we are reading. You need not pretend like you don’t see it; instead, merely say “N” or express it in writing as “N*****” or “N----.” For a more thorough discussion of why I have adopted this policy in all of my classrooms, please refer to Dr. Koritha Mitchell’s excellent podcast on the subject: (https://soundcloud.com/c19podcast/nword). Finally, please take some time to read the document curated
by Dr. Gabrielle Foreman on the Canvas site entitled “Writing About Slavery.” We will discuss this document in class. I encourage you to adopt its practices wherever possible.

**Zoom.** I know it may be awkward at times for us to meet as a full group on Zoom. I hope that our class format (see assignment information on Canvas) will help ease some of the usual struggles of talking over each other, etc. I encourage you to use the chat on Zoom to contribute to the discussions – as the quarter progresses, we may find that some chat practices are more useful and helpful than others, so we will re-assess after the first few sessions. I will do my best to keep our Zooming on track and, but I recognize that none of us expected to be in each other’s homes for seminars. You may see a cat or two in my space, and please do not worry if you have children, housemates, or pets who occasionally make a cameo in yours. It is best if you mute your microphone when not speaking to avoid creating feedback and echoes. You can help make the discussion more comfortable for all of us by leaving your camera on when possible. I know there may be times when you need to turn off the video feed, but it goes a long way toward establishing trust and engagement when we can see each other’s faces. To prevent Zoom fatigue, I’ve scaled back our full group meeting to two hours, and as described in my email to you, you should also sign up for a 15-minute individual check-in to be held each week during the quarter. I hope that this regular, one-on-one communication will help put you at ease and give us a chance to be in dialogue early about the course and your progress. Zoom sessions will not be recorded.

**Participation and Attendance.** Your active participation is required in this course. That participation comes from attending and participating in the weekly Zoom meetings and the individual check-ins. The response paper structure (see instructions on Canvas) will require you to talk at least once during each meeting – that helps normalize talking in class and helps ensure broader participation. That said, our meetings are relatively informal – think of it as a space where we are all figuring these texts out together. Your active participation means that you are doing that—do not feel obligated to try to perform “mastery” of the texts; it tends to be much more productive when the meetings are a place of working through something interesting or challenging. We only have 10 weeks in the term, so it is important for you to attend as many classes as possible. You should still submit a weekly response paper even if you need to miss a class. If you need to miss more than one class out of ten, I consider that a serious red flag – please speak to me right away if you are struggling with or anticipate problems with attendance.

**Late Submissions.** Because they structure our class discussions, weekly response papers are due by the start of class each week. For other formal assignments, there is an automatic 48-hour grace period for submission. If you need longer than this, please talk to me about an extension. If at all possible, please make that request before you have exceeded the grace period to avoid a penalty for your grade. I will be as flexible as possible with deadlines this term, but you will not be able to defer all of the assignments until the end of the quarter. This is because you need to be able to get feedback on assignments before moving on to the next ones and because you need to devote most of your time to the final project as we approach the end of the term. It is also because I need time to review assignments and give feedback to you and the rest of your colleagues.

**Academic Honesty.** Academic dishonesty in any form undermines your integrity, mine, and that of the course. If you have particular questions or concerns about an issue of academic dishonesty, please contact me. **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) 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.
Criteria for Assessment

• Weekly Response Papers (15%)
• Class Participation (20%)
• Ways of Knowing Essay (10%)
• Presentation/Handout (15%)
• Final Paper/Project Proposal and Preliminary Bibliography (10%)
• Final Paper/Project (30%)

Required Texts

Note that we are reading excerpts of some books, and some weeks only half the class is reading a particular text. Check the course schedule to determine which texts you will be responsible for (plus the text you read for your presentation). I leave it to your discretion whether you want to purchase each book in its entirety or work in community with classmates to coordinate purchasing and scanning sections of books. You will need to procure each of the following books (these editions are preferred, but any edition is ok, and I encourage you to shop around):

• Octavia Butler, *Dawn* (ISBN 9780446603775)
• Charles Chesnutt, *The Conjure Woman and Other Tales* (ISBN 9780486404264) (listed in some editions as *Tales of Conjure and the Color Line* or *The Conjure Tales*; it’s the collection of 10-11 short stories)
• Colin Dayan, *The Law is a White Dog* (ISBN 9780691157870)
• Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse* (chapters 6-7 and 10-18)
• Kei Miller, *Augustown* (ISBN 9781101974094)

All other readings/films are available at the locations listed in the course schedule.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (Sept. 29):

• Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse* (chapters 6-7 and 10-18)
• Victor Séjour, “The Mulatto” (PDF)

Week 2 (Oct. 6):

• Colin Dayan, *The Law is a White Dog* (Ch. 2-3)

Presentation #1: Vincent Brown, *The Reaper’s Garden*
Presentation #2: Jessica Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World*
Week 3 (Oct. 13):

- Charles Chesnutt, *Conjure Tales*
- Watch *In Search of Voodoo: Roots to Heaven* (dir., Djimon Hounsou) (available on Amazon Video)

  Presentation #1: Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*
  Presentation #2: Colin (Joan) Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods*

***Ways of knowing paper due via Canvas by 8:00pm Oct. 16***

Week 4 (Oct. 20):

- Pauline Hopkins, *Of One Blood*

  Presentation #1: Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*
  Presentation #2: Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*

Week 5 (Oct. 27):

- Madhu Dubey, “Speculative Fictions of Slavery” (PDF)
- Watch *Space is the Place* (Sun Ra, 1974) (available on YouTube)

  Presentation #1: Tavia Nyong’o, *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life*
  Presentation #2: Michelle Commander, *Afro-Atlantic Flight: Speculative Returns and the Black Fantastic*

Week 6 (Nov. 3): ***VOTE***

- Octavia Butler, *Dawn*
- Justin Mann, “Pessimistic Futurism: Survival and Reproduction in Octavia Butler’s *Dawn*” (PDF)

  Presentation #1: Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World*
  Presentation #2: Theri Pickens, *Black Madness::Mad Blackness*

Week 7 (Nov. 10):

- Erna Brodber, *Louisiana*
- Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse* (Ch. 2, 4-5)

  Presentation #1: Jenny Sharpe, *Immaterial Archives*
  Presentation #2: Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*
Week 8 (Nov. 17):

- Kei Miller, *Augustown*
- Watch *Daughters of the Dust* (dir., Julie Dash) (available on Kanopy)

  Presentation #1: Anne Castro, *The Sacred Act of Reading: Spirituality, Performance, and Power in Afro-Diasporic Literature*
  Presentation #2: Dionne Brand, *Map to the Door of No Return*

  ***Final paper/project proposal due via Canvas by 8:00pm on Nov. 20***

Week 9 (Nov. 24):

- Last names A-H: Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*

  Presentation #1: Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor*
  Presentation #2: Mark Rifkin, *Fictions of Land and Flesh: Blackness, Indigeneity, Speculation*

Week 10 (Dec. 1):

- Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *M Archive: After the End of the World*
- Watch *Hello, Rain* (dir., C.J. Obasi) (available on Amazon Video)

  ***Final Paper/Project due via Canvas by 8:00pm Dec. 8***
  Please note that grades are due Dec. 15