



ENGL 106-001

# Dark Matters: African American Science Fiction

Autumn 2013 | Drew University | Edmond Y. Chang

ENGL 106  
Section 001  
TuTh  
11:50 AM-  
1:05 PM  
BC 204  
Autumn 2013  
Drew University  
Dr. Edmond Y.  
Chang



"You can handcuff my wrists, and shackle my feet. You can bind me in chains, throw me in your deepest darkest dungeon... but you can't enslave my thinking...for it is free like the wind."  
—Jaye Swift

"One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."  
—W.E.B. DuBois

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "study of the writers in the African American literary tradition...in light of their historical time and place, major themes, conclusions about the nature of black experience in the United States and their contributions to this literary tradition and to the American literary canon?" And even more difficult, how might we consider the fields, formations, and possibilities of "African American Literature" through science fiction or speculative fiction? Sheree Thomas, editor of the 2000 collection *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora*, said, "The science fiction and fantasy genres have always offered readers, bold, extraordinary ways by which to examine society. The results have often been visionary, with writers acting as unflinching voyeurs who deliver engaging, sometimes scathing critiques of our traditions, values, nightmares, and dreams." This class, then, will explore the intersections of literature, genre, media, race, gender, sexuality, class, and technology. Texts may include W.E.B Du Bois, Pauline Hopkins, George Schuyler, Ralph Ellison, Samuel Delany, Steven Barnes, Octavia Butler, Derrick Bell, Jewelle Gomez, Nalo Hopkinson, and Nisi Shawl.

A REQUIREMENT for this class is a well-developed curiosity about the world, about the culture we live in, and about the cultural productions we imagine, produce, and consume. In other words, this class is about reading, critiquing, and analyzing our culture through literature. Our understandings of identities, meanings, and power, as well as the intersections of cultural and social locations like race, gender, class, nation, and sexuality, can be excavated through the analysis of the texts we create and consume. This class will spend the semester reading, thinking, writing about various fictions and how and what these texts argue, reveal, narrate, hide, perpetuate, and complicate the world we live in.

FINALLY, as a class, we will engage the techniques and practices of reading and enjoying literature. We will identify and develop different ways to read different kinds of texts—from fiction to scholarship to visual and digital—and understand and develop strategies, habits, and perspectives of reading, thinking, and writing. Foremost, we will read with pleasure and for pleasure. We will also rhetorically read, close read, read for analysis. And lastly, we will read and deploy literature as theory, as dramatizing the concerns, wonders, struggles, and politics of lived life and experience.

## Requirements & Grading

Your grade should not be the sole exigence or motivation for this class. It is the hope of the course that you walk away from English 106 with something more. Find some pleasure and some edification and some knowledge from this class (or any class really) and success is usually not far behind. With that in mind, your grade will be a reflection of engagement, effort, close reading, critical thinking, writing, and participation.

"I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me."  
—Ralph Ellison

"First sentences are doors to worlds."  
—Ursula K. Le Guin



## Required Course Texts & Materials

- ENGL 106 Course Reader (available in Sitterly 108)
- Hopkins, Pauline. *Of One Blood*.
- Schuyler, George. *Black No More*.
- Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*.
- Delany, Samuel. *Aye, and Gomorrah*.
- Barnes, Steven. *Dream Park*.
- Butler, Octavia. *Dawn*.
- Hopkinson, Nalo. *Brown Girl in the Ring*.
- Web access and an active Drew email account.



## Course Requirements

- Response Papers (50%)
- Presentation (10%)
- Critical Review (10%)
- Class Participation (30%)

"Politicians should read science fiction, not westerns and detective stories."  
—Isaac Asimov

"I like to tell the truth as I see it. That's why literature is so important. We cannot possibly leave it to history as a discipline nor to sociology nor science nor economics to tell the story of our people. It's not a ladder we are climbing, it's literature we're producing, and there will always be someone to read it."  
—Nikki Giovanni

"The future is already here — it's just not very evenly distributed."  
—William Gibson

## Critical Response Papers (50%)

The majority of the writing you will do for this class is in the form of short, critical, analytical response papers. These single-spaced, one-page writings serve as reactions to, close readings of, analyses of, and articulations of the texts and connections you see, read, and talk about in class. These responses are more than just summaries or personal reactions and will be graded on clarity, focus, coherence, critique, and your ability to concisely formulate arguments. You will be required to generate a response paper approximately every other week for a total of 8. See the response paper prompt for more details.

## Critical Context & Question Presentation (10%)

You will be a required to sign up for an oral presentation individually or in small groups. For your presentation, you will read the texts assigned for a particular week, research a topic relevant to the texts, generate a critical question, and get class discussion started for the day. You will be required to create a single-spaced, 1-page handout copied for the whole class. Topics (usually biographical, historical, or theoretical context) will be assigned to you or your group. Presentations are 5-7 minutes and may include media.

## Critical Review (10%)

You will be required to write a short, 500-750 word, single-spaced critical review of a text not covered by the course that you believe fits the critical, theoretical, and intellectual stakes of this class. You will locate a text, close read the text, and generate an academic critique and assessment of the text's value for study. In other words, what text might you include in a class like ours? You **must** have your text **approved** by the instructor. The critical review will be turned in and published on the course blog and is due by the last day of instruction.

## Participation and Preparedness (30%)

Preparedness and participation forms a large component of your final grade. It is essential that you prepare for class, attend class, and participate. Missing class may seriously compromise your ability to do well in this class. Moreover, negative participation will hurt your participation grade. Participation is determined by 1) your **respectful** presence in class and interactions with me and others, 2) your **willingness** to discuss, comment, and ask questions, 3) your **preparation** for class, which includes bringing required materials to class and doing all of the assigned reading for class, 4) your **engagement** in group work, and 5) your care and use of the class *moodle*—henceforth called the "class blog"—bookmark the address, check and comment regularly, think of the blog as an extension of class:

<https://moodle.drew.edu/2/course/view.php?id=439>

Finally, failure to turn in homework, incomplete assignments, or late papers will negatively impact your participation grade.

## Attendance

**Attendance is required.** If you are absent, you miss the explanation of an assignment, the discussion of a reading, the chance to participate, and overall, the class as a community of learning. Also, you are expected to be in class on time. Class will start immediately at the appointed time. In the first minutes of class I may make important announcements, establish the agenda for the day, begin immediately with an important lesson, or field questions. If you come in after we start class, even by only a few minutes, you are late and will be mark as such. Chronic or conspicuous attendance problems will negatively affect your



"With our short sight we affect to take a comprehensive view of eternity. Our horizon is the universe."  
—Paul Laurence Dunbar

"I was attracted to science fiction because it was so wide open. I was able to do anything and there were no walls to hem you in and there was no human condition that you were stopped from examining."  
—Octavia Butler

"I don't pretend we have all the answers. But the questions are certainly worth thinking about."  
—Arthur C. Clarke



## Response Paper Formatting

1) 1" margins top, bottom, left, and right on each page.

2) Single-spaced block header with your name, date, course, my name.  
For example:

Student Name  
ENGL 106  
September 3, 2013  
Chang

3) Response (week number and title (e.g. Week #2: Race in *The Great Gatsby*).

4) Response papers are single-spaced and can be in block paragraph format.

5) Standard Times Roman Font, 12 point only.

6) Correct MLA citation and bibliographic format.  
Bibliography if necessary.

overall participation grade for the class. **Moreover, absences for more than ten class session (60% of class time) will result in a failing grade regardless of reason.** If you know you are going to or must miss class, please let me know (via email) as soon as possible and make any necessary arrangements. When you do miss class, always find another student to get class notes or see me during office hours in order to make up missed work in a timely manner. You are always responsible for all material covered during your absence.

## Assignment Format

All papers must be typed or produced on a word processor. All documents should be saved in Microsoft Word format; if you do not have access to Word, then save your documents in RTF or Rich Text Format.

All papers must follow the manuscript format outlined by the assignment. **All papers must use MLA citation and documentation conventions.** All papers must be neatly printed (in black), stapled in the top, left-hand corner if necessary, and should not be three-hole punched. Papers that do not follow these format guidelines will not be accepted. They will be returned unread to you. Papers will be regarded as late until they are resubmitted in the proper format. Response Papers and the Critical Review have different manuscript guidelines detailed by their assignment prompts.

**Always make a backup copy of every paper you turn in,** lest you be one of the unhappy people whose paper is eaten by the computer. You may even want to take the precaution of e-mailing your paper to yourself as an attachment at least a couple of times during the drafting process and certainly **BEFORE** you exit the document for the last time and leave the computer. This way, even if you lose your flash drive or your paper gets mysteriously erased, you still have a copy in your e-mail files.

## Evaluation Rubric

Over the course of the semester, your assignments will receive feedback and comments that will identify what you are doing well and what still needs improvement. Your grades assess your fulfillment of the assignment, the quality of work, detail, analysis, and argumentation, overall effort, and finally, style, polish, and risk taking. Consider the following evaluation rubric as signposts or a kind of legend to your progress and evaluation:

- **Outstanding (A/A+):** Offers a very highly proficient, even memorable demonstration of the trait(s) associated with the course or assignment goal(s), including some appropriate risk-taking and/or creativity.
- **Strong (B+/A-):** Offers a proficient demonstration of the trait(s) associated with the course or assignment goal(s), which could be further enhanced with revision, additional support, and creativity.
- **Good (B-/B):** Effectively demonstrates the trait(s) associate with the course or assignment goal(s), but less proficiently; could use revision to demonstrate more skillful and nuanced command of trait(s).
- **Acceptable (C/C+):** Minimally meets the basic course or assignment requirement, but the demonstrated trait(s) are not fully realized or well-controlled and would benefit from significant revision.
- **Inadequate (D/D+):** Does not meet the course or assignment requirement; the trait(s) are not adequately demonstrated and require substantial revision on multiple levels.

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."  
—Maya Angelou



## Late Assignments

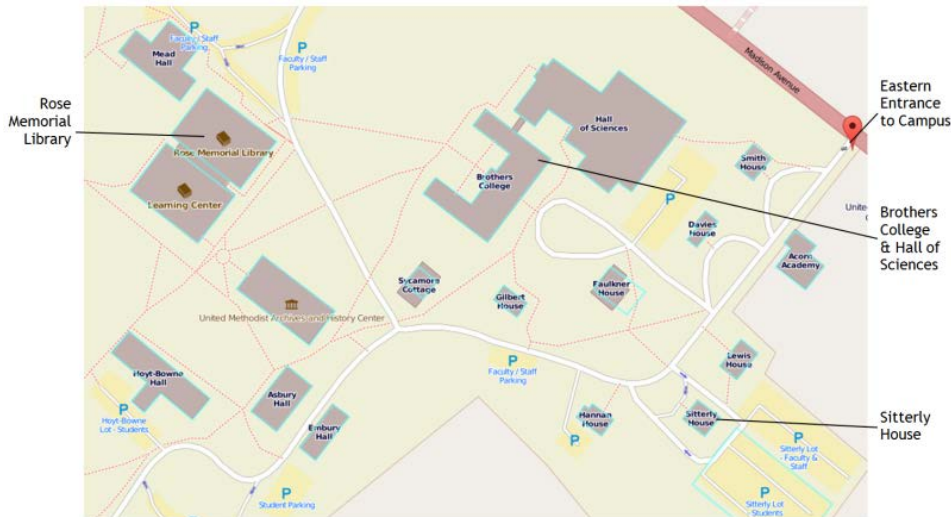
All assignments must be done completely and turned in on time. Late assignments will be penalized half a grade for every day that they are late. So, if your essay is late by one day and you received a B- for your work, then your final grade would be a C+. Moreover, I will not comment on late work. However, you still need to complete late work or you will receive a zero. If you miss class on the due date of a paper, you must notify me and make arrangements to get the paper to me as soon as possible. **Unless previously arranged, I DO NOT accept assignments via email.** Remember that a paper has not been officially handed in until it is in my hands. Never turning anything in late is always the best policy.





## Finding Help

My office and office hours are listed in the left sidebar. I am available during that time and by appointment to help you. I encourage you to come see me early in the semester even if it is just to talk about the class, about the assignments, or about school in general. I may ask you to meet with me when I think a conference would be useful. My office is located on the third floor of Sitterly House (southeast of Brothers College), Room 303. See <<http://www.drew.edu/map/buildings/sitterly-house/>>.



## Contact Ed

Office:  
Sitterly 303  
Office Hours:  
TTh 9-11:30 AM or by  
appointment  
E-mail:  
[echang@drew.edu](mailto:echang@drew.edu)  
AIM or Google Talk:  
EDagogy

I am also available electronically by email and the course blog. Email and the blog are the best means of contacting me. I will do my best to answer your emails and blog posts, usually **within twenty-four hours**. If there is an emergency and you need to reach me, please contact the main English office in Sitterly 108. Furthermore, when time permits, I will supplement my office hours with virtual hours via AOL Instant Messenger or Google Talk (**nickname: EDagogy**); if I am logged in, during reasonable hours, you are more than welcome to discuss the class or ask questions. Please, when you initiate an IM conversation for the first time, please identify yourself to me; also, be **patient** because my responses may not be immediate.

You can find additional writing help at the Drew University Writing Center, a good resource for this class and other classes. The Writing Center is located on the first floor of Brothers College (opposite Java City) and offers a variety of services including help with papers, brainstorming ideas, help with reading, and research. See <<http://www.drew.edu/writingstudies/writing-center>> to make an appointment and for more information.

Further resources, both on- and off-campus can be found on the Links page of the course website: <<http://www.edmondchang/104/links.html>>.

## Learning (With) Technology

Unless you have an official accommodation, the use of technology in our classroom is a privilege, not a right. Mobile devices like phones, media players, and cameras should be off and put away. Computers and tablets should be used for note-taking, in-class work, and readings only. Print is generally preferred for course texts and readings, but full-size e-versions are acceptable provided the student is able to readily highlight, annotate, and index. Finally, be conscientious and respectful in the use of the course website and social media and post no material from class to the internet or non-class sites without explicit permission from the instructor and the class. Keep in mind these three

"The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them."  
—Ida B. Wells



"When I read great literature, great drama, speeches, or sermons, I feel that the human mind has not achieved anything greater than the ability to share feelings and thoughts through language."  
—James Earl Jones

"But there are certain very practical things American Negro writers can do. And must do. There's a song that says, the time ain't long. That song is right. Something has got to change in America—and change soon. We must help that change to come."  
—Langston Hughes

"Imagination is more important than knowledge."  
—Albert Einstein



"If one is lucky, a solitary fantasy can totally transform one million realities."  
—Maya Angelou

rules: 1) Use the Right Tool for the situation and the task—keep it simple and elegant, 2) Practice Best Practices—it must improve or enhance your learning, 3) Be a Good Neighbor—it cannot distract or detract from others' learning. Inappropriate use and abuse of technology in class will result in the taking away of technology privileges for the offending student and/or class as a whole.

## Academic Integrity

All students are required to uphold the highest academic standards. Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's thoughts and writing—as long as you cite them. Many students do not have a clear understanding of what constitutes plagiarism, so feel free to ask questions at any time. For our class, plagiarism includes:

- a student failing to cite sources of ideas
- a student failing to cite sources of paraphrased material
- a student failing to site sources of specific language and/or passages
- a student submitting someone else's work as his or her own
- a student submitting his or her own work produced for another class

If you have any doubt about how to cite or acknowledge another's writing, please talk to me. It is always better to be safe than sorry. Any case of academic dishonesty will be dealt with according to the guidelines and procedures outlined in Drew University's "Standards of Academic Integrity: Guidelines and Procedures." A copy of this document can be accessed on the CLA Dean's U-KNOW space by clicking on "Academic Integrity Standards." **Play it smart, don't plagiarize!**

## Accommodations

Should you require academic accommodations, you must file a request with the Office of Disability Services (BC 119B, 973-408-3962, [anambiar@drew.edu](mailto:anambiar@drew.edu)). It is your responsibility to self-identify with the Office of Disability Services and to provide faculty with the appropriate documentation from that office at least one week prior to any request for specific course accommodations. There are no retroactive accommodations. The deadline to request Letters of Accommodations for all students currently registered with the Office of Disability Services is 09/10/2013.

**syl-la-bus: *n* 1: a summary outline of a discourse, treatise, or course of study or of examination requirements  
2: subject to change**

Chang / ENGL 106-001 / Autumn 2013 / Drew Washington

### Week 1: September 2-6

Introduction to the Course & Syllabus  
Sheree R. Thomas, "Introduction: Looking for the Invisible"  
Samuel R. Delany, "Racism and Science Fiction"  
Walter Mosley, "Black to the Future"  
Octavia Butler, "The Monophobic Response"

### Week 2: September 9-13

Pauline Hopkins, *Of One Blood* (1902)

### Week 3: September 16-20

Charles W. Chesnutt, "The Goophered Grapevine" (1887)  
W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" (1903) & "The Comet" (1920)

Week 1 or 2 Critical Response (CR) is recommended.

Tue 9/3  
First Day of Classes

#### September

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

**Week 4: September 23-27**  
George Schuyler, *Black No More* (1931)

Week 5 or 6 CR is recommended.

**Week 5: September 30-October 4**  
Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)

**Week 6: October 7-11**  
Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (cont.)

Mon 10/14 &  
Tue 10/15  
Autumn Break

**Week 7: October 14-18**  
Samuel Delany, "Aye, and Gommorah..." (1967) & "Driftglass" (1967)  
& "Time Considered as a Helix of Semi-Precious Stones" (1968)

**Week 8: October 21-25**  
Samuel Delany (cont.)

**Week 9: October 28-November 1**  
Steven Barnes, *Dream Park* (1981)

**Week 10: November 4-8**  
Octavia Butler, *Dawn* (1987)  
Derrick Bell, "The Space Traders" (1992)

**November**

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

Wed 11/27-  
Fri 11/29  
Thanksgiving Break

**Week 11: November 11-15**  
Octavia Butler, *Dawn* (cont.)

**Week 12: November 18-22**  
Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998)

**Week 13: November 25-29**  
Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring* (cont.)

**Week 14: December 2-6**  
Nisi Shawl, "Shiomah's Land" (2001) & "Maggies" (2004)  
Nalo Hopkinson, "Correcting the Balance" (2012)

12/9 Critical Review  
Due

**Week 15: December 9-13**  
12/9 Last Day of Instruction  
12/10 Reading Day  
12/11 Reading Day  
12/12 Finals Begin

**October**

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Week 10 or 11 CR is recommended.

**December**

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				