ENG 62B
Contemporary African Literature, Global Perspectives
“Remembering the Future”
Fall 2020
MW 12-1:30PM

Joshua Williams

Email: jdmwilliams@brandeis.edu
Office Hours: W 2-4PM or by appointment
Sign up: https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/hwwey
Zoom: Office Hours: https://brandeis.zoom.us/j/93361539094
Class: https://brandeis.zoom.us/j/92486838600
(for complete login information, see pg. 9)

This course provides an entry point onto the endlessly rich world of contemporary African literature. We will engage with novels, plays, poems and films from across the continent that have appeared – with only two exceptions – in the last decade, and that consequently address some of the most pressing concerns of our political, social and ecological moment. Paradoxically, perhaps, most of the authors represented here inflect their accounts of the
present with retellings of the past and premonitions of the future – sometimes both at once. Freely blurring the lines between realism, science fiction, fantasy, war reportage, autobiography and satire, these works carve out space for new voices and new ideas. Students will be encouraged not only to develop a deeper appreciation for contemporary African literature, but also to participate actively in the cultural ecosystem that has grown up around it online by writing reviews, expanding and correcting Wikipedia entries, and producing their own podcast episodes on relevant topics of their choosing.

By the end of the semester, students will have:

: gained a deeper understanding of contemporary African literature
: familiarized themselves with African history and politics
: refined the skills involved in the analysis of novels, poetry, plays and films
: practiced effective strategies for oral presentations and discussion facilitation
: shared their ideas with the global community of readers of African literature
: expanded their digital literacy across multiple platforms and modes

**COURSE SCHEDULE**
*(Subject to Change)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aug. 26</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 31 &amp; Sep. 2</td>
<td>Real Futures &amp; Imagined Pasts</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Arimah, <em>What It Means When a Man Falls from the Sky</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep. 3</td>
<td>Due: Process Letter 1</td>
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<td>Sep. 9 &amp; 10</td>
<td>Oceanic Africa</td>
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<td>Owuor, <em>The Dragonfly Sea</em> (1)</td>
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<td>Sep. 14 &amp; 16</td>
<td>Owuor, <em>The Dragonfly Sea</em> (2)</td>
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<td>Sep. 21 &amp; 23</td>
<td>The Postcolonial City</td>
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<td>Ondjaki, <em>Transparent City</em> (1)</td>
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<td>Sep. 30</td>
<td>Ondjaki, <em>Transparent City</em> (2)</td>
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<td>Oct. 5 &amp; 7</td>
<td>Literature &amp; Struggle</td>
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<td>Mtwa, Ngema &amp; Simon, <em>Woza Albert!</em></td>
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<td>Whaley, <em>The Rise and Shine of Comrade Fiasco</em></td>
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<td><em>Guest Presentation from Ainehi Edoro, editor of Brittle Paper</em></td>
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<td>Oct. 8</td>
<td>Due: Process Letter 2</td>
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<td>Oct. 12 &amp; 14</td>
<td>Women &amp; Revolution</td>
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<td>Mengiste, <em>The Shadow King</em> (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 19 &amp; 21</td>
<td>Mengiste, <em>The Shadow King</em> (2)</td>
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*Special Q&A with Maaza Mengiste*

**Oct. 26 & 28**  
**Violence & the Body**  
Bitek, *100 Days*  
Shiferraw, *Your Body is War* and *Fuchsia* (selections)

**Nov. 2 & 4**  
**History, Nostalgia & Change**  
Serpell, *The Old Drift* (1)

**Nov. 5**  
**Due: Proposal for Final Project**

**Nov. 9 & 11**  
Serpell, *The Old Drift* (2)

**Nov. 16 & 18**  
**America through Diasporic Eyes**  
Dawes, *Nebraska*  
Udofia, *Sojourners*

**Nov. 30 & Dec. 2**  
**Alien Futures**  
Kahiu, *Pumzi*  
Blomkamp, *District 9*

**TBA**  
**Due: Final Project & Process Letter 3**

**READINGS**

The Arimah, Owuor, Ondjaki and Dawes texts are available through the campus bookstore – and, of course, elsewhere online as well. The Bitek and the Serpell are also available through the bookstore but the library has e-book copies of both that you can access for free if you like. All other readings can be found on Latte. It is your responsibility to read everything assigned for a given week by the Monday class session of that week. Please make sure to have all reading easily accessible during class meetings and come prepared for in-depth discussion.

Because the books we are reading this semester are quite new, there is comparatively little written about them. Here, however, is a short list of recommended secondary sources that I may draw into our conversation as we go. Feel free to read on your own – and ask me for additional suggestions if you have specific interests.

- Burnett, “The Great Change and the Great Book”
- Dery, “Black to the Future”
- Eshun, “Further Considerations of Afrofuturism”
- Goyal, “Playing with the Book”
- Kahyana, “A Ugandan Poet Remembers the Rwanda Genocide on Facebook....”
- Martin & Moorman, “Imagining Angola in Luanda with Ondjaki”
- Mbembe, *On the Post-Colony and Necropolitics*
- Mengiste, “Bending History” and “Unheard-Of Things”
Nyawalo, “Afro-futurism and the Aesthetics of Hope”
Nyong’o, Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life
Ogunyemi, “Womanism”
Owuor, “Reading Our Ruins”
Sides, “Seed Bags and Storytelling”
Womack, Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture

ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments should be submitted on Latte by 11:59PM Eastern Time on the day they are due.

Process Letters: Because this course will be student-graded (see “Assessment,” below) I ask that you submit a process letter to me at the beginning, middle and end of the semester. In each of these letters, you will reflect on the intellectual labor you have done and have still to do, assessing yourself according to the criteria you feel are most relevant to your circumstances and goals.

Wikipedia Intervention: On *at least two* different occasions during the semester, use what you have learned to make a substantive correction or additon to Wikipedia. The rationale here is simple: because these works are so new, very little has been written about them. Share your knowledge and contribute to building an even more robust online community around African literature, culture, history and politics. Submit documentation of your intervention (a screenshot will suffice) when you have made it.

Discussion Facilitation: You will be responsible for leading part of one classroom discussion this semester. In advance of doing this, please prepare one to three pages of notes and submit them to me by Sunday night the weekend before the class session you have chosen. These notes can comprise passages from the text(s) you want to analyze in depth, interpretive claims you want to make, questions you want to ask, etc. Prompt submission of these notes is important so that I can plan accordingly. In class, you will be expected to facilitate approximately twenty minutes of our group discussion. Please note that you should *not* prepare a presentation of any kind. This exercise is meant to be dialogic, interactive and informal. Before the first student-led session of the semester, I will conduct a workshop on effective discussion facilitation, and you will receive feedback on your session after the fact.

Review: Write a two-page review essay that builds on the work you did to prepare to facilitate discussion. This paper should present your own thoughts about the text(s) that you read, although you can and should build on ideas that emerged during class discussion as well. If it helps, model your writing on the sort of book, play and film reviews that appear in major newspapers, magazines, culture blogs, etc. It is due on the Thursday of the week following the class session in which you served as a discussant. After you submit it, you are encouraged to get it out there, in part or in full, on Goodreads, Amazon Reviews, Medium, Brittle Paper, LitHub, Twitter, Facebook, etc.

Final Project: For your final project in this class, you will write and produce a twenty-minute podcast episode on a topic of your choosing related to this course. This could take
the form of an interview, a history lesson, an in-depth review, a set of shorter reviews linked together, a personal reflection, etc. Our class podcast will be made available online, so your episode should be clear, insightful and polished in a way that is accessible to the general public. Please start thinking about this project early in order to ensure success. Midway through the semester, I'll ask you to write up a one- to two-paragraph proposal to orient me to your thinking so that I can advise you about how best to direct your energies.

ASSessment

In keeping with the principles of antiracist, crip and decolonial pedagogy, this course will be student-graded. That is to say, you will determine your grade for this course based on your particular situation and objectives. While I reserve the right to alter the final grade students assign themselves, I very rarely disagree with their self-assessments. When I do, it is more likely that I will intervene to raise an unnecessarily modest final grade than to lower one I feel is inflated. In order to scaffold this process of reflection, self-critique and self-evaluation, you will submit three process letters to me over the course of the semester. Much more detail about these will be forthcoming when the time comes to write them. The final process letter, which should be submitted at the same time you send me your podcast episode, should contain the grade you feel you have earned overall.

Despite the fact that my courses are ungraded, students often ask me for a rubric. The following is a rough accounting of how the various aspects of this course might be weighed, but you should feel free to depart from this as needed.

| Class Participation: | 10% |
| Wikipedia Interventions: | 10% |
| Discussion Facilitation: | 20% |
| Review: | 20% |
| Final Project: | 40% |

Rest assured that although I am not grading your work, I am reading it closely and responding to it in depth. You will receive substantive feedback and critique on all argument-driven assignments and a mix of affirmative and interrogative feedback as appropriate on all personal reflections.

THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

This semester, due to circumstances beyond our control, we will be conducting class online. While a great deal is lost in the shift from in-person to online learning, some things may well be gained. I ask that we all do our best to cultivate and maintain compassion, understanding and a sense of humor as we collaboratively navigate our new environment. While many of my usual course policies remain in effect (see below), the following are particular to working online.

Zoom Classroom & Office Hours. Our class sessions will take place on Monday and Wednesday afternoons from noon to 1:30PM Eastern Time, as laid out in the course
schedule above. Class will take place in this Zoom room. My office hours will take place on
Wednesdays from 2 to 4PM Eastern Time in this Zoom room. (For complete login
information for both rooms, please see pg. 9.) Please sign up for office hours here. If you
can’t make any of the remaining timeslots, email me to schedule an appointment.

Communication. Because it will be that much more difficult for you to get in touch with
me this semester than it would be if we were meeting in person, I will try to be diligent about
responding to emails and Latte messages. Please allow me 24 hours to respond to any
message you send during the work week and 48 hours to respond to any message you send
over the weekend. If it takes me slightly longer than that to get back to you, please be
forgiving. Know that this means that you cannot count on my being able to respond to
extremely last-minute questions or requests in time – and plan accordingly. Also please note
that while I will happily email you or meet with you on Zoom to discuss issues specific to
you, I will use Latte to make announcements and send messages to the entire class.

Time Zones & Asynchronous Teaching. Because some of you may be joining us from
parts of the world that are not on Eastern Time, it may be difficult for you to accommodate
our regular class schedule without significant hardship. If that is the case for you, please
reach out to me at the beginning of the semester and we will work something out.

Attendance. Given the difficulties of our present moment, I have decided not to institute
an attendance policy this semester. Part of your self-reflection for this course should involve
thinking about how much time and energy you can devote to this work. That said, if you feel
at the outset that you cannot regularly attend class or if you know you will have to be late
more often than not, please reach out to me so we can discuss whether it makes sense for
you to enroll. Of course, if unforeseen or emergency situations arise mid-semester that affect
your ability to be remain fully engaged in the work of the seminar, please reach out as soon
as possible so that we can arrive at a solution.

Participation. Participation can take many forms in the virtual classroom. Sharing your
ideas either verbally on the call or non-verbally in the chat is only the beginning. I am
entirely open to other forms of offline participation and am happy to discuss possibilities
with you as the semester unfolds. Please continue to reflect on your participation and the
forms it can take in your process letters.

Accessible Design. In addition to my commitment to supporting students with specific
disability accommodations (see below), I am working to ensure that the course as a whole
employs best practices for accessible design. Many of the technologies involved are new to
me, so please feel free to make suggestions if something is not working or if there is more
that I can do.

Attention & Fatigue. I am sure you are aware by now that spending hours a day on Zoom
is quite taxing. I encourage you to do all you can to take care of yourself by standing,
moving, stretching, etc. as needed during class time. I would also suggest that you consider
taking notes on paper if that is practicable for you. A great deal of research has suggested
that taking notes “by hand” improves comprehension and retention – and, importantly, it
will routinize taking momentary breaks from your screen. I understand, further, that you will
likely have readings and other documents open on your screens during class time. While I
have no desire – or ability – to police you on this front, I do ask that you keep your attention on course materials as much as possible and remain a part of the (virtual) room in which you find yourself. That said, I am the first to acknowledge that there many neurodivergent modes of maintaining focus, so please feel free to do whatever you need to do to sustain your attention and ward off fatigue, providing it does not impinge on your fellow students’ ability to do the same.

Privacy. You are not required to have your video camera on during our Zoom sessions. Joining us on an audio-only connection or using a virtual background is entirely acceptable and will not be taken to mean you are not actively participating in the course.

Technology. If you encounter technological difficulties (no or slow or unreliable internet connection, computer malfunction, etc.) that prevent you from joining us, please reach out to me so that I can troubleshoot. There are resources available at Brandeis to help ensure that all have access.

**GENERAL COURSE POLICIES**

**Credit Hours.** I have designed this course and its workload with Brandeis policies about credit hours in mind. For your reference: “Success in this four-credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of nine hours of study time per week in preparation for class.”

**Academic Integrity.** Academic integrity is the cornerstone of everything we do in this course. Be generous and conscientious when quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing, referring to or otherwise reproducing the ideas of others. When in doubt, use footnotes to reference any thoughts that were inspired by another source – and come see me if you have questions. Please consult [Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities](#) for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. It’s highly unlikely that I will do this, but I reserve the right to ask you to submit work to [TurnItIn.com](https://www.turnitin.com) software to verify originality. Allegations of alleged academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the director of academic integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. [Citation and research assistance](#) can be found on the [university library website](#).

**Office Hours.** You are not required to meet with me outside of class, but I highly recommend taking the initiative to speak with me one-on-one at least once over the course of the semester. Office hours are of course a great time to talk through any difficulties you are having with the material, the assignments, the classroom dynamic, etc. – but they are also useful if you simply wish to test and refine your ideas, get feedback on your writing or allow me to get to know you a bit better (and vice versa). If you cannot make my regularly scheduled office hours, send me an email and we will find another time. If office hours are in great demand, you may have to wait for a few minutes in my virtual waiting room. If they are in extraordinary demand, I will institute a sign-up system.

**Students with Disabilities.** Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, please talk with me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as you can. I want to support
you. In order to provide accommodations, I need the letter more than 48 hours in advance. I want to provide your accommodations, but cannot do so retroactively. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support at (781) 736-3470 or access@brandeis.edu.

**Course Materials.** If you are having difficulty purchasing course materials, please make an appointment with your student financial services or academic services adviser to discuss possible funding options and/or textbook alternatives.

**Online Anonymity.** This class encourage the use of tools that may disclose your coursework and identity to parties outside the class. To protect your privacy, you may choose to use a pseudonym/alias rather than your name in sharing such work with the public. Alternatively, you may choose to submit your work only to me and forego public engagement entirely. Please come see me if anonymity is a concern.
**ZOOM LOGIN INFORMATION**

**Class Zoom Meetings**
Join from PC, Mac, Linux, iOS or Android: [https://brandeis.zoom.us/j/92486838600](https://brandeis.zoom.us/j/92486838600)

Or iPhone one-tap (US Toll): +13017158592,92486838600# or +13126266799,92486838600#

Or Telephone:
Dial:
+1 301 715 8592 (US Toll)
+1 312 626 6799 (US Toll)
+1 646 558 8656 (US Toll)
+1 253 215 8782 (US Toll)
+1 346 248 7799 (US Toll)
+1 669 900 6833 (US Toll)
Meeting ID: 924 8683 8600
International numbers available: [https://brandeis.zoom.us/u/abIvpoZPQ1](https://brandeis.zoom.us/u/abIvpoZPQ1)

**Office Hours Zoom Meetings**
Join from PC, Mac, Linux, iOS or Android: [https://brandeis.zoom.us/j/93361539094](https://brandeis.zoom.us/j/93361539094)

Or iPhone one-tap (US Toll): +16465588656,93361539094# or +13017158592,93361539094#

Or Telephone:
Dial:
+1 646 558 8656 (US Toll)
+1 301 715 8592 (US Toll)
+1 312 626 6799 (US Toll)
+1 669 900 6833 (US Toll)
+1 253 215 8782 (US Toll)
+1 346 248 7799 (US Toll)
Meeting ID: 933 6153 9094
International numbers available: [https://brandeis.zoom.us/u/ade8JJYt8c](https://brandeis.zoom.us/u/ade8JJYt8c)