

**Dr. Kevin Meehan**  
**LIT6216-0001 Issues in Literary Study: Caribbean Poetics**  
**University of Central Florida—Spring 2019**

**Contact Info**

Course Meets: Tu 7:30-10:15 pm  
Classroom: TCH 116  
Credits: 3

Office: TCH 253F  
Office Hours: Tu 4-7 pm  
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**The Idea of the Course**

Poetics comes from the Greek word “poiein,” meaning “to make,” and refers broadly to ideas about how literature is made in particular places and times. This seminar will expose students to a range of major authors, genres, periods, and theoretical concepts that have defined Caribbean literature as an evolving field of cultural production during the past two centuries. At the core is a consideration of Silvio Torres-Saillant’s claim in *Caribbean Poetics* that the Caribbean region is a culturally-unified whole with a coherent poetics resting on three pillars: the development of intense historical consciousness, the “religious imperative” with a characteristic inter-penetration of sacred and secular traditions, and the progressive incorporation of vernacular languages into imported and locally-generated expressive forms. In addition to these three theoretical concepts (concerning history, religion, and vernacular language), we will also consider how romanticism, surrealism, magic realism, and social realism have impacted the region through cultural exchanges determined by imperial political economy and migratory movements into, away from, and within the Caribbean region. Genres covered in the class include slave narrative, novel, yard fiction, sci-fi/fantasy, lyric poetry, prose-poetry, film, and several musical forms that impact literary production (calypso, soca, reggae, and son, among others). All of the ideas above will also be considered through the lens of gender to explore the extent to which Caribbean women conform to, depart from, and in many cases establish the pattern for dominant or canonical writing and criticism.

Each week we will focus on an assigned primary text and at least one relevant piece of critical theory. Students will be required to present on the assigned readings one time during the semester; they will frame the seminar with an opening statement, guide us through a series of at least ten discussion questions, and submit a short paper one week following their presentation. There is also a term paper assignment, the focus of which is open to each student (though the paper must touch in some way on the intellectual content of the seminar). A tentative list of primary readings includes the following: Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince* (1831); Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda, *Sab* (1841); Sergio Giral, *El Otro Francisco* (1839/1975); C.L.R. James, *Toussaint L’Ouverture* (1936) and *The Black Jacobins* (1938); Nicolás Guillén, selected poetry (1930-70); Aimé Césaire, *Return to My Native Land* (1939); Jacques Stephen Alexis, *General Sun My Brother* (1956); Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956); Perry Henzell, *The Harder They Come* (1973); Kamau Brathwaite, *Dream Haiti* (1995); Nalo Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber* (2000). Edwidge Danticat, *The Dew Breaker* (2004); Anna Levi, *Madinah Girl* (2016); As a special feature, Anna Levi, the author of *Madinah Girl*, will visit the seminar and respond to our questions and comments about her novel.

## Schedule of Readings

- Jan 8-15** Intro: Theories of Caribbean Literature  
**Meehan** Silvio Torres-Saillant, *Caribbean Poetics* (excerpts)  
Kevin Meehan and Paul Miller, "Caribbean Literature and Popular Culture"  
Derek Walcott, "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory"  
---, "Spoiler's Return"  
John LaRose, "Unemployment, Leisure and the Birth of Creativity"
- Jan 22** C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*  
**Faulconer** ---, *Toussaint L'Ouverture*  
Sylvia Wynter, "Beyond the Categories of the Master Conception: The Counterdoctrine of the Jamesian Poiesis"
- Jan 29** Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*  
**Milham** Kenneth Ramchand, "  
Anna Levi, "Ethnicity in Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*"
- Feb 5** Anna Levi, *Madinah Girl*  
**Nadarajah** C.L.R. James, "Triumph"  
**Hawes** Jean Rhys, "The Day They Burned the Books"
- Feb 12** Perry Henzel, *The Harder They Come*  
**Montalvo**
- Feb 19** Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*  
**Kelley**
- Feb 26** Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda, *Sab*  
**Paniccia**
- Mar 5** Sergio Giral, *El Otro Francisco*  
**Estevez**
- Mar 12** SPRING BREAK
- Mar 19** Jacques Stephen Alexis, *General Sun My Brother*  
**Mooney** ---, "Prolegomena to a Manifesto on the Marvellous Realism of the Haitians"
- Mar 26** Edwidge Danticat, *The Dew Breaker*  
**Dotson**
- Apr 2** Kamau Brathwaite, *Dream Haiti*  
**Pinther** ---, "Sycorax Video Style"  
**Vacarizas** Nicolás Guillén, "Elegy for Jacques Roumain"

**Apr 9** Aime Cesaire, *Return to My Native Land*  
**Parson**

**Apr 16** Nalo Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber*  
**Villa**  
**Little**

## **Assignments**

### Seminar Presentation: 40 points

Students will be required to present on the assigned readings one time during the semester. They will circulate a written document one week prior to the class that frames the assigned readings and any supplemental criticism, and presents a series of at least ten discussion questions. If there is no supplemental criticism listed on the syllabus, the presenter is responsible for finding and circulating at least two pieces of relevant criticism. On the day of the seminar, the student is responsible for reading/talking through an opening statement and then leading us through the discussion questions.

### Short Paper: 20 points

One week following the seminar presentation, students will submit a short paper (minimum 1250 words) that develops an argument about some topic raised during the seminar presentation. Ideally, the seminar will raise additional questions about the assigned readings, shed an interesting light on the readings based on the discussion, prompt further research on a relevant period, author or genre, lead to deeper insights about some aspect of Caribbean poetics, etc. The short paper is designed to focus and codify thoughts about one of these ideas. It can also be suitable for submission as a conference paper.

### Term Paper: 40 points

The final assignment is a term paper (minimum 3000 words), the focus of which is open to each student. Though the focus is open, the paper must touch in some way on the intellectual content of the seminar and reveal a deep engagement with the concepts of Caribbean poetics introduced during the semester. The term paper is also suitable for submission to peer-reviewed journal for possible publication.

## **Grading Scale (100 points total)**

90-100: A

80-89: B

70-79: C

60-69: D

0-59: F

## **Miscellaneous Protocols**

### Grading Standards for Written Work

I expect and require students to use correct MLA parenthetical documentation in all assignments.

If you are unclear, follow direction in the MLA Handbook. I am under no obligation to accept late submissions.

A = Clear and original thesis, excellent use of textual evidence as support for ideas and clear discussion of textual evidence in relation to thesis, no grammar, spelling, or mechanical errors, handed in on time and meets page-length requirements.

B = Thesis and textual evidence, perhaps not very original or thought-provoking, a few errors in spelling, grammar or mechanics, but handed in on time and meets page-length requirements.

C = No thesis or textual evidence, plot summary, many errors in spelling, grammar or mechanics, but handed in on time and meets page-length requirements.

D = Does not meet page-length requirement and/or not submitted on time, no thesis or textual evidence, plot summary, errors in spelling, grammar or mechanics.

### Plagiarism

Four types of plagiarism include:

- Using another student's work, meaning anything from borrowing one phrase to copying an entire paper.
- Submitting a paper or report (or any portion of such a paper) purchased from a commercial source.
- Borrowing the exact words of another writer without acknowledging the debt by quotation mark and either a citation or an overt, explicit reference to the source in the body of your essay.
- Borrowing the ideas of another writer by paraphrasing or rewording without acknowledging the source.

The penalty for plagiarism is automatic failure of LIT6216. Students guilty of plagiarism may be subject to further disciplinary measures. Further guidelines on university policies available at: [www.ucf.edu/goldenrule/](http://www.ucf.edu/goldenrule/) ([Links to an external site.](#))[Links to an external site.](#)

### Statement on Diversity

This course is committed to the fair and respectful representation of a full range of opinions and experiences. The syllabus attempts to incorporate diverse perspectives on race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, nationality, ethnicity, and language, and students are expected to demonstrate sensitivity to and respect for perspectives other than their own.