# CHILDHOOD IN CARIBBEAN AND AFRICAN LITERATURE

## SELF-EVALUATION 2020

A major goal of this course is to help you become confident, independent readers of Caribbean and African Literature, capable of creating a context for understanding the work of a specific author, and of articulating, in writing and in conversation with others, what interests you about that author’s work. Please use the criteria below to help you monitor your progress towards this goal over the course of the semester, and to evaluate your performance at the end of the semester. Fifty percent of your final grade will be based on your self-evaluation.

### **PART ONE** of the evaluation asks you to rate the consistency of your performance over the course of the semester. [Note: Part 1 was removed to reduce the length of the document.]

### **PART TWO** gives you an opportunity to comment on specific readings and ideas; to evaluate your contributions to the course; and to describe how the course contributed to your intellectual development beyond the classroom, more broadly. **Answers in this section can help boost your grade as well as someone else’s.** This section should take about an hour to complete.

NAME: Chandra Rhys

YEAR: Class of 2023

MAJOR: Undecided

CLASS PRESENTATION: Nothing’s Mat by Erna Brodber

Group member: M. [Names redacted for anonymity.]

TITLE OF FINAL ASSIGNMENT:

### PART TWO

**Please answer all questions with examples and discussion. Remember that your answers may help your grade as well as that of one of your classmates, so take your time with this section.**

###### Write a short paragraph about what you found most provocative or enlightening in one assigned reading.

My favorite assigned reading is actually the book I presented, Nothing’s Mat by Erna Brodber, and I was fascinated by the theme of recursions and iterations throughout the book. I found it particularly interesting to try to piece together the family tree, or mat, while going through the book, and by the end still not having all the answers. I think this is Brodber’s goal, to exemplify how this family and so many others are “fractile,” as she puts it. Something that also resonated with me is the idea of reincarnations of ancestors among different generations of the family, like Clarise I and Clarise II, and that is something that I would really like to explore in the future.

###### Identify one author, country, theme, or literary device and describe how you engaged with the ideas to which your exploration exposed you in your weekly papers.

I really enjoyed doing an imitation/personal take in my *Annie John* response paper. When reading the book, I found a lot of similarities between the dynamic of Annie and her mother and me and my own mother, and I really wanted to describe a moment in my childhood the way Annie John might have done, or at least describe a moment in my life that could have easily been in Annie’s.

###### Describe how you (or you and your group) prepared for your presentation and what you think the class learned from your presentation.

To prepare for our presentation, M. and I both read the book again and we shared our notes with each other so that we could discuss them and figure out which sections we were the most drawn to and which ones made the most sense for us to present. We then translated our notes into our Google Slides presentation and met once again to discuss our presentation outline and any other remaining questions we may have had.

###### Identify at least two group presentations you consider most memorable and describe what you learned from them.

One of the most memorable presentations this semester was A.’s, on Binyavanga Wainaina’s *Someday I Will Write About This Place*. It was clear that she had a deep understanding of the book and that she really wanted to share with the class why she found it so important. During that presentation, I really appreciated how we delved into certain moments, like when Wainaina describes the Michael Jackson video, because it really helped solidify some of the main themes of the story for me and also helped me identify other similarly important moments when I finished the book later that week. I also found V. and T.’s presentation quite memorable, and I really liked how, since they were able to, utilized our classroom resources and had the class draw a map of Liking’s Village Scene. I think this helped get the class engaged and prepared for a complex discussion.

###### Identify one comment you made during class that you think your classmates found useful and describe the discussion it generated within or outside of the classroom.

I think one useful comment that I made was during our class discussion of *One Day I Will Write About This Place*, by Binyavanga Wainiana. I remember emphasizing the importance of flexibility regarding Michael Jackson, and the resistance to existing in life amongst the rows and columns that Wainaina so frequently brings up throughout the book.

###### Describe at least two comments your classmates made that helped you to understand the material or to take a concept further.

One comment that resonated with me is something that I believe C. said about *Boyhood* by J.M. Coetzee, about how despite being at a relatively privileged position, John still witnesses considerable amounts of violence and trauma in his childhood, for nobody can just live through Apartheid completely unscathed, even if they are white. This idea really informed the way I thought about the book, and inspired many of the topics I discussed in my weekly paper. Another important comment is something I think J. said. I remember him discussing the scene in *The Shadow King* when each body is thrown off the cliff, and the idea that the photographic descriptions mimic real life. Seeing the first couple of dead bodies is harrowing, and the descriptions of these people include more details. But as more and more people are thrown off, an ability to describe them all, to assign them to real life, disappears. They are only flashes of dead bodies that cannot be accounted for, there are just too many, something that can only happen in a real time of tragedy.

###### Describe one memorable conversation you had with someone who was not a member of this class about the ideas to which this course exposed you.

Before writing my weekly response for Nothing’s Mat, I remember talking to one of my friends from home about what exactly to write about. I explained to her some of the main themes of the book; a “fractile” vs. “fractured” family structure, family dynamics repeating themselves again and again over time. She not only helped me decide that I wanted to write about my own family through this lens, but it actually applied to her family in some ways too, her mom’s side coming from The Philippines and moving to Miami, and I began to think about what kinds of families are *not* fractile? What allows for a perfect family tree, if there even is such a thing.

###### Describe two insights about Caribbean and/or African literature that you will take away from this course.

I found the discovery of *The Dark Child’s* inauthenticity to be eye opening, for I remembered the real scarcity of African and Caribbean literature and how each novel we have read not only tells a unique story, but adds a significant amount of insight into African and Caribbean culture, much more so than European literature or even just British literature, for example. Another thing that I found very interesting, that I don’t think is present in the same ways in other literature from around the world, is the phenomena of leaving home and possibly never returning. In nearly all of the books we have read, the end goal for the main characters is to leave home to pursue something greater in life, or at least even if that wasn’t the intention, many main characters end up in that place anyway. I wonder whether *leaving* is really entering a new realm of the world that is taken more seriously, where characters can acquire “real” success, for leaving is portrayed as a success on its own. However, in the case of Princess in *Nothing’s Mat*, she leaves England and ends up making a life in Jamaica. Perhaps it doesn’t matter where they go; maybe leaving is a success for pursuing more knowledge in an unknown place is a difficult thing to do.

###### How did the COVID-19 crisis affect what you will take away from this course?

Obviously, class discussions and presentations have been altered significantly, however I do not feel like the class has been deprived of anything due to the crisis. I think each student has made an effort to maintain the kind of classroom dynamic that existed before we all returned home, and despite our new surroundings, I have found classes to be productive and insightful.