## 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: Julissa Fernandez

YEAR: 2022

MAJOR: SWAGS & BLST

CLASS PRESENTATION: (Please list the names of the members of your group here)

J. [Names redacted for anonymity]

TITLE OF FINAL ASSIGNMENT: Nervosa

### 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.

I found the Jamaica Kinkaid reading “Girl” to be the most “provocative” reading. Not only because of her stylistic methods and choices, but also because of the way in which it made me feel. Her repetition and use of the word “slut” amidst the implicit and explicit lessons given to her by her mother made me feel both her anger and shame and also the power of the word. It was easy for me to take this piece and tie the story it presents to my own life. Furthermore, it seemed almost everyone in the class could relate to the story, showing its transcendence beyond Caribbean childhood.

#### 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 felt that I best engaged with both Wainaina and Naipual’s writing styles. Where Wainaina engages with and plays with the power of singular words, Naipaul’s strength lies in his sentence structure. I enjoyed attempting to rewrite pieces from both of these authors. Through my engagement of their literary devices in my rewrites, I was able to allow myself to creatively influence my own writing in ways in which I hadn’t before. In my Wainaina rewrite, I wrote of social distancing by toying with the word “distant” in the same structure of a Wainaina piece from his novel. On the other hand, I took Naipaul’s sentence structure and wrote a short (3 line) piece describing my family. The difficulty of the rewrites allowed me to really focus on the effect the literary devices had on my writing and subject matter. Writing about myself or my experiences made these rewrites only slightly easier, if only because of the ease at which the subject matter presents itself to me.

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

J. and I first read most of the novel “Boyhood” by Coetzee. We then began to research the historical background of South Africa before and during Apartheid, where and when the novel was set. We also read analyses of “Boyhood” by other authors. With this background knowledge, the subject of the novel became more clear and we were better prepared to present to the class. I believe the class learned that not all African childhoods are the same because Boyhood was written by a white, Afrikaans man and this disrupts the notion that to have an African childhood you must be a black African. It seemed like initially, it was not only me and J. who were confused as to why we were reading a novel on the African childhood of a White man.

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

V. and T.’s presentation on Werewere Liking’s “Love Across a Hundred Lives” was among the most memorable presentations for me. The novel’s discussion and presentation of reincarnation throughout familial generations made it difficult to understand and keep up with. By presenting a diagram or visual representation of the intergenerational reincarnation and the character’s ties with each other, the novel became that much easier to comprehend. I also felt like it was a great way to engage the class and the theme of reincarnation within the novel.

A.’s presentation on Wainaina’s “One Day I Will Write about this Place” was also memorable because of her excitement about the novel. At that point, I had read most of the novel but had not finished it. Her presentation made me want to finish the novel and also read some of Wainaina’s other pieces. Furthermore, I learned a lot about the cultural references within the novel, the most memorable one being the Michael Jackson music video. Her presentation helped me to understand the disruption these references caused within the novel and Wainaina’s life and the way in which they represented key memories of Wainaina’s childhood.

#### 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.

After reading Jamaica Kinkaid, I made a comment about how within Caribbean childhood specifically, there is a consciousness across all Caribbean childhoods. Although not all are the same, there are enough similarities that I feel like I can relate to many of my Caribbean friends, no matter where they are from and the differences in culture or language. Outside of class, my friends and I often talk about this relation. It’s similar to how many Latinx folk can relate to each other because of this shared identity, but the threads that tie the Caribbean together are stronger, perhaps because of locality and history of colonization. An example my friends and I often talk and laugh about is that we can all relate to a Caribbean-American upbringing and our parents spankings, family cookouts, going back to the mother land, plantains, oxtail…

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

One comment that was extremely helpful was C.’s diagram of the setting in “The African Child”. I felt she did a great job of explaining the importance of the setting in the novel and also why the diagram looked as so, even though we all struggled to replicate it in the beginning of class.

Another comment that I felt was helpful was E.’s comment on the “Shadow King”. She described the importance of the presence and lack of photographs within the novel. She described the significance of the descriptions of photographs and how it was an intentional choice by Mengiste. Her comments helped me to understand how actual photographs would have changed the novel’s concept and also how the descriptions allowed for more insightful dissection of these photographs. With the descriptions, the photos are no longer one-dimensional. They are multi-faceted; and multi-dimensional, we as readers are forced to draw our attention to every detail, rather than quickly glancing the picture’s subject matter as we are drawn to do with photographs. I also started to think about how having war photos in the novel might take away from rather than contribute to the people and the stories Mengiste mentions.

#### 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.

I spoke to one of my friends about “Boyhood” and about the experience of Coetzee as a white, South African. This was after giving the presentation and having class. My friend and I discussed the idea that not all African childhoods are the same and the significance of Coetzee, a white man, writing about Apartheid. She was curious as to why his novel was awarded, where other voices, such as those of Black South Africans, remain unheard. I didn’t have an answer for her, because I also did not want to minimize Coetzee’s experiences as a South African.

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

1. Caribbean and African childhoods are not singular or linear. They have textures beyond initial notions of these childhoods, and we need to disrupt the notion that all Caribbean and African childhoods are the same. The authors showed that although there definitely are similarities, there are also major differences from one story to the next.
2. Another insight, or really a question, I will continue to think about is about the longevity of childhood. When does childhood truly end? In many of the novels we read, like Naipaul, it seemed childhood ended when the protagonist left the Caribbean for schooling abroad. I also think about the way in which the novels about childhood maintain longevity as long as they are printed, and the ways in which this longevity may disrupt or acquiesce to our generation and future generation’s conceptions of childhood.

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

Although focusing on courses was very difficult during this time, I am glad I had my courses to keep me grounded during quarantine. I don’t think it affected what I will take away from the course because classes continued more or less as usual over Zoom, but I do think I am grateful for our class and my classmates during this time. Class gave us something to connect over in a time where it is difficult to make those connections we would normally have on campus.