## 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 1was removed to reduce the length of 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.

### 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.

Coetzee’s *Boyhood* immediately comes to mind when I think of our discussions this semester. I found this novel deeply moving, in large part because I took a class on Apartheid last semester and was very familiar with South African history but had not read any narratives of childhood during the Apartheid era. The degree of violence, fear, and unspoken rules in this novel offered an emotional way into understanding life in South Africa that, for example, legal papers did not. In class, however, people did not seem as moved by the work and were critical of Coetzee because of his privilege and his relative isolation from people struggling, for example, in the Bantustans. These comments, however, highlighted how successful Apartheid was at separating people. I came to appreciate Coetzee’s work as a historical artifact and gained greater insight into how violence and deception characterized daily life.

##### 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.

For my weekly paper on Mengiste’s *The Shadow King,* I considered how numerous women in the novel experienced dissociation from their body as both a response to trauma and a way of managing it. Though I did not write about it in my paper, I was particularly interested in this theme because I have come across it in other works; regardless of cultural contexts, leaving ones’ body is a universal experience in instances of trauma.

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

[My group member] and I really loved Kincaid’s *Annie John* and preparing for the presentation was a pleasure. We discussed the novel together outside of class and considered the themes we noticed and the emotions the novel evoked. We compiled quotations that related to themes and from there we crafted our presentation as well as a handout. I believe that our presentation enabled our class to delve deeper into the literary mechanisms Kincaid used to evoke emotion.

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

The two presentations that are most memorable are the first two that attempted to render elements of their respective books visually. In Trey and Vanessa’s presentation on *Love-Across-A-Hundred-Lives* they mapped out the relationships the characters had to each other. Looking at the web of relations made me understand the way reincarnation functioned in the book. Similarly, in Charissa’s presentation, the first thing she did was ask us to draw Camara Laye’s childhood home. It had never occurred to me to try and visualize what it looked like and I was struck by how difficult I found it. Drawing it out made it suddenly seem more real and heightened the biographical nature of the work.

##### 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.

This semester I have been taking an Anthropology class called “The Photograph” which had a big influence on me when I read Mengiste’s *The Shadow King.* I mentioned this during class and shared some of Roland Barthes’s words from his work *Camera Lucida* and the fact that early anthropological photography was deeply racist*.* I believe that one of the quotations I shared was that Barthes asserts that “in every photograph is a catastrophe” and an interesting discussion in which we considered whether this is true, and how it might apply to Mengiste’s work, emerged.

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

I so wish I remembered specific comments people made but, alas, I do not. What I do remember, however, was that J., C., and A. [redacted names for anonymity] all read aloud beautiful and personal papers in class which provided me insight into their lives and relationship to the material. I remember T.’s contagious enthusiasm for *Love-Across-a-Hundred-Lives* which inspired me to read it after we had finished discussing it (I wasn’t able to finish it before class that week).

##### 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 absolutely loved *Love-Across-a-Hundred-Lives* and told many of my friends to read it. I loved it because of how I was swept up into the narrative and how the language felt so different than what I was used to.

I also brought up *The Shadow King* in my Anthropology class and mentioned how the work tied perfectly into so much of what we had discussed about colonialism, violence, agency, race, and gender in regard to photographs.

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

Caribbean and African literature is extremely diverse. At the same time, however, it’s important to approach such works as though they are familiar, to attempt reading them from a cultural insider’s perspective, rather than an outsider. The themes that appeared often and which I am left thinking about are mother/daughter relationships and how difficult they are, repetition and music in language, and humor as a coping mechanism.

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

I feel like our class was just about to get really close and our discussions had increasing depth when we had to leave campus due to COVID-19. The transition to Zoom was difficult and it just wasn’t possible to have the same sort of discussions or intimacy. Consequently, I believe that I wasn’t able to get as much out of our discussion of the books. That said, despite the distance, COVID-19 reassured me that there is nothing greater than reading books that are thought provoking and emotionally moving and sharing that experience with others.

##### OTHER:

Thank you so much for a wonderful semester! I so appreciate the amount of time and care you put in to editing my weekly papers as well as our class discussions, especially during COVID-19. I know that L., C., and I felt so fortunate to take this class with you and were especially thrilled when you gave us a hard time. I hope we weren’t too distracting.

Copy of presentation: [removed to maintain anonymity]

Handout:

Transition in Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John*

**Childhood as “paradise”**

“As I did this, I would occasionally sniff at her neck, or behind her ears, or at her hair. She smelled sometimes, of lemon, sometimes of sage, sometimes of roses, sometimes of bay leaf. At times I would no longer hear what it was she was saying; I just liked to look at her mouth as it opened and closed over words, or as she laughed. How terrible it must be for all the people who had no one to love them so and no one whom they loved so, I thought.” 22

“Sometimes when i gave her the herbs, she might stoop down and kiss me on my lips and then on my neck. It was in such a paradise that I lived” 25

**The End of Childhood: “You are getting too old for that”**

“‘ You just cannot go around the rest of your life looking like a little me.’ To say that I felt the earth swept away from under me would not be going too far. It wasn’t just what she said, it was the way she said it” 26

“A person I did not recognize answered in a voice I did not recognize. . . ‘You and I don’t have time for that anymore.’ Again, did the ground wash out from under me? Again, the answer would have to be yes, and I wouldn't be going too far” 27

“Sometimes we would both forget the new order of things and would slip into our old ways.” 29

“I could never let those hands touch me again; I was sure I could never let her kiss me again. All that was finished.” 32

“She wore her hair pinned up in the same beautiful way, exposing the nape of her beautiful neck’ her bent-over back looked strong and soft at the same time, and I wanted to go and rest my whole body on it the way I used to; her long skirt covered her beautiful, strong legs, and she wore shoes that exposed beautiful heels.” 103

**Death**

 “My mother would come back from the dead girls house smelling of bay rum – a scent that for a long time afterward would make me feel ill. . . I could not bear to have my mother caress me or touch my food or help me with my bath. I especially couldn’t bear the sight of her hands lying still in her lap” 6

“If my mother died what would become of me?” 88

“I missed my mother more than I had ever imagined possible and wanted only to live somewhere quiet and beautiful with her along, but also at that moment I wanted only to see her lying dead, all withered and in a coffin at my feet” 106

**Water**

“I could hear the small waves lap-lapping around the ship. They made an unexpected sound, as if a vessel filled with liquid had been placed on its side and now was slowly emptying out” (148)

Extra passages: bathing with mother (14); story of swimming in ocean with mother (42-43)

**Estrangement**  
“I don’t see them now the way I used to, and I don’t love them now the way I used to. The bitter thing about it is that they are just the same and it is I who have changed, so all the things I used to be and all the things i used to feel are as false as the teeth in my father’s head.” (133).

“But it was just three years, three years in which i had grown up and looked critically at the people around me. I no longer wanted to be like Eddoes. He was so weak and thin. . .Titus Hoyt was stupid and boring, and not funny at all. Everything had changed.” (Naipaul, 172)

**Inundation Without Understanding**

*See pages 32 and 83 (laughter)*

**Indigenous and Imposed Culture**

*See page 117-118*

**Rain Dream Scene**

*See page 112*

**On Form**

*See page 60*