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UNIVERSITY OF SWAZILAND
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
SUPPLEMENTARY EXAMINATION – JULY, 2014

COURSE CODE: IDE-ENG404

COURSE NAME: Advanced Studies of African Literature

DURATION: 2 HOURS

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Answer TWO questions, one from each section.
2. Each question carries 30 marks.
3. Make sure you adhere to both literary and poetic rules.
4. Make sure you proofread your work to eliminate grammatical errors and resultant loss of marks.

THIS PAPER SHOULD NOT BE OPENED UNTIL TOLD TO DO SO
BY THE INVIGILATOR.

SECTION A – NOVEL

Question 1

- a) In a well- argued essay, discuss the ‘dangers’ which Tambu in Nervous Conditions has to avoid as she relocates from the homestead to the mission school and later to the Young Ladies’ College of the Sacred Heart. [20]
- b) Do you find her experiences unique or equally applicable to any modern African child who also has to leave her rural home to further his/her studies? [10]

Question 2

- a) Discuss the contrasting roles of Aissatou and Ramatoulaye in So Long a Letter, especially the stand that each takes towards her broken marriage. [10]
- b) What contrast is advanced through the portrayal of Young Nabou and Binetou’s marriages to older men? [10]
- c) Briefly summarize the insights gained from the portrayal of the four characters and comment on the extent of their universality. [10]

Question 3

Relate the experiences of Tshidiso and her classmates in Mending Season to the novel’s title.

SECTION B – POETRY

Question 4

Read the poem below and answer the questions that follow it:

“A Letter to a Son” Charles Mungoshi

Now the pumpkin is ripe.
 We are only a few days from
 the year’s first mealie cob.
 Taken in the round it isn’t a bad year at all –
 if it weren’t for your father.
 Your father’s back is back again
 and all the work has fallen on my shoulders.

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Your little brothers and sisters are doing fine at the day-school. Only Rindai is becoming a problem. You will remember we wrote you – did you get our letter? – you didn't answer – you see, since your father's back started we haven't been able to raise enough money to send your sister Rindai to secondary school. She spends most of the time crying by the well. It's mainly because of her that I am writing this letter.

I had thought you would be with us last Christmas then I thought maybe you were too busy and you would make it at Easter – it was then your father nearly left us, son. Then I thought I would come to you some time before the cold season settled in – you know how I simply hate that time of the year – but then your father went down again and this time worse than any other time before. We were beginning to think he would never see another sowing season. I asked your sister Rindai to write you but your father would have none of it – you know how stubborn he can get when he has to lie in bed all day or gets one of those queer notions of his that everybody is deserting him!

Now, Tambu, don't think I am asking for money – although we had to borrow a little from those who have it to get your father to hospital and you know how he hates having to borrow! That is all I wanted to tell you.

I do hope that you will be with us this July. It's so long ago since we last heard from you – I hope this letter finds you still at the old address. It is the only address we know.

YOUR MOTHER

- a) Summarize the situation presented by the poem, especially the main reason(s) which have prompted the persona to write to her son. [10]
- b) From clues given in the poem, describe Tambu's character. [5]
- c) What aspects of content give this poem a strongly African character? [6]
- d) Although written in prose-verse, there are certain poetic devices used in the poem. Identify 3 of these and discuss them. [9]

Question 5

After summarizing the sense of the following elegy, discuss how through skillful use of imagery it projects an African perspective about death. [30]

“My Story Is on the Leaves” Sarah Mkhonza

(In memory of Sheana Khumalo who died at the hands of her husband)

Write my story on the trees
Dig it out from down there
Where it lies with me in the grave
Spread the red ochre on the trees
Powder them with red
And write on every leaf

I want to rustle in the wind
My welts like veins on a leaf
Written on all the mountains
For I no longer live contained

Plant me on every meadow
Like grass I want to sway
Cast me on the rivers
My leaves floating on the river
Going into all corners
That float undirected
Like leaves after a flood
For they cluster on the banks
Like confused thoughts
Disturbing sad stories
Knowing the killer of their teller

Tell my story daily
Wash my tears off me
For I died too young
To live and leave the very world
That buries my story
Here in silence from all

They will talk to the wind
When they see storied trees
That once grew on a branch
That beat me and scarred me
And left me bleeding on the earth
Till to death off I went
Only to be revived

In the words of the dead
Who are speaking in the trees

Make up what went down
My face, my head, on the crown
Of tall trees and short ones
Tell of my muffled cries with dignity
The way my corpse went down
Leaving an unmoving silence
To be revived by you.