

UNIVERSITY OF ESWATINI
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
FIRST SEMESTER EXAMINATION – FEB. 2021

COURSE TITLE: Comparative Studies in African/Black Poetry

COURSE CODE: ENG 417

TIME ALLOWED: TWO (2) HOURS

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Answer any TWO questions.
2. Each question carries 30 marks.
3. Do not repeat material or write about the same poem more than once.
4. Make sure you adhere to poetic and other conventions.
5. Make sure you proofread your work to avoid loss of marks.

**THIS PAPER IS NOT TO BE OPENED UNTIL PERMISSION HAS
BEEN GRANTED BY THE CHIEF INVIGILATOR**

Question 1

Read the poems below and answer the questions that follow them.

“The Abandoned Old Woman” Stephen Watson (South Africa)

Our mother, old, unable to walk,
lay there, incapable,
alone in her old grass and reed hut.

Before we, her sons,
were obliged to leave her behind,
we blocked up her hut's sides,
closing the openings used as a door,
making use of the struts* *wooden reinforcements*
from the other huts we were leaving,
but leaving the roof open, exposed to the sky,
so she could still feel
some warmth from the sun.
We had made a small fire.
We had gathered for her
as much dry wood as we could.

It was none of our fault;
we were all of us starving.
No-one could help it,
that we had to leave her behind.
We were all of us starving,
and she, an old woman,
she was too weak to go with us,
to seek food at some other place.

“A Letter to a Son” Charles Mungoshi (Zimbabwe)

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.
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) In not more than 10 lines in each case, give a summary of the situation presented in the poems. [8]
- b) Identify the dominant themes advanced in both poems and comparatively discuss them. [8]
- c) Comparatively discuss the parent-child relationship presented in the poems. [8]
- d) Discuss Mungoshi's skilful use of punctuation marks in his poem to create a certain pace and mood (identify the pace and mood) and to underscore the poem's conversational aspect. [6]

[30 marks]

Question 2

- a) As you have realized when doing this course, the interlinked themes of *exile* and *return* feature prominently in the poetry of Angola and to some extent, that of Zimbabwe. In not more than 1½ pages, discuss Roche and Marechera's *respective* treatment of these interlinked themes. [12]
- b) Discuss whether or not the two poets' use of free verse complements their chosen themes or feelings towards their countries' colonial experiences. [4]
- c) Discuss in detail Marechera's use of figurative language to also advance the theme of identity in his poem. [14]

"Poem of Return" Jofre Roche (Angola)

When I return from the land of exile and silence,
do not bring me flowers.

Bring me rather all the dews,
tears of dawns which witnessed dramas.
Bring me the immense hunger for love
and the plaint of tumid sexes in star-studded night.
Bring me the long night of sleeplessness
with mothers mourning, their arms bereft of sons.

When I return from the land of exile and silence,
no, do not bring me flowers...

Bring me only, just this
the last wish of heroes fallen at day-break
with a wingless stone in hand
and a thread of anger snaking from their eyes.

"Pledging My Soul" Charles Marechera (Zimbabwe)

When I was a boy
I climbed onto your granite breasts
smooth and round
I trailed my body
from the small of your back
to your yielding neck
the cup of your breasts
was my pillow
the rivers of your tears
drowned me down in your depths
and the smooth plain of your flat belly
yielded to mine

I was yours
and you were mine.

Now a man
in exile from the warmth of your arms
and the milk of your teeth
the breath of your secret whispers in my ears
shall I not stride back to you with haste
rout all my enemies and bind the wicked husbands-men.
Shall I not kneel to kiss the grains of your sand
to rise naked before you – a bowl of incense?
And the smoke of my nakedness shall be
an offering to you
Pledging my soul.

[30 marks]

Question 3

Read the poems below and answer the questions that follow them.

“My Grandmother is my Love” Eric Mazani (Zimbabwe)

I love my grandmother with the whole of my heart.
Now she is an old, ancient girl her face has changed, of course.
My grandmother of ninety years is my love.
She is a teller of tales.
She is old, bold and always cold.
Indeed, she is never far from a fire-place.
Makadzoka she is called, for she once died.
After some time she rose from death.
Mushakabvudimbu they call her in Shona – half-dead.
My life is in her hands and the life of my family too.
She is half witch, having been taught to cure with herbs.
Her eyes are out but the sense of touch is strong.
The sense of smell is there, for she can smell herbs.
Little, thin grandmother of mine!
Looking so young because of eating so many sweets!
Sugar-sucker! Ten teaspoons full in each cup of tea!
My old *ambuya!* *Makadzoka* is my goddess.
She hates dirt, noise, quarrels and dry food.
She is ever sitting on her mat in the sun
Or otherwise hunting for herbs.
She is ever smiling, but an egg grows in her mouth when
One annoys her.
‘I wish to die and rest’ she says. ‘When will this world end?’
‘I am tired.’

Beside her is a packet of sugar, a sweet sauce of peppered corn.
Her teeth are brown with rust; her nose is sooty with black snuff.

Makadzoka is my love, I shall look into her dimples
The laughing dimples are on her chin. They were supposed to be
Two but there are now a hundred! There are holes where stagnant water
Was scooped out.

Lovely *Mushakobvu*
My grandmother
Is my love.

“Old Granny” Bonus Zimunya (Zimbabwe)

A little freezing Spider:
Logs and arms gathered in her chest
Rocking with flu,
I saw old Granny
At Harare Market;
It was past nine of the night.
When I saw the dusty crumpled Spider—
A torn little blanket
Was her web.

- a) Discuss the portrayal of grandmothers in the two poems. [12]
- b) Explain how the poet in “Old Granny” makes use of imagery in order to convey a deeper meaning. [10]
- c) Contrast this imagery to that used in lines 26 – 30 of the poem, “My Grandmother is my Love.” [8]

[30 marks]

Question 4

Critically examine the role of the poet in an oppressive society as depicted in the three poems below. Structure your discussion as follows: (i) highlight the meaning of each poem, (ii) discuss each poet’s unique response to his situation, and (iii) comment on each poem’s obvious poetic techniques. [30]

“The Distant Drum” Calvin Hernton (USA)

I am not a metaphor or a symbol.
This you hear is not the wind in the trees.
Nor a cat being maimed in the street
It is I who weep, laugh, feel pain or joy.
Speak this because I exist.

This is my voice
These words are my words, my mouth
Speaks them, my hand writes.
I am a poet.
It is my fist you hear beating
Against your ear.

“It is Said” James Matthews (South Africa)

It is said
that poets write of beauty
of form, of flowers and of love
but the words I write
are of pain and of rage

I am no minstrel
who sings songs of joy
mine a lament

I wail of a land
hideous with open graves
waiting for the slaughtered ones

Balladeers strum their lutes and sing tunes of happy times
I cannot join in their merriment
my heart drowned in bitterness
with the agony of what white man’s law has done

“Self” Peter Abrahams (South Africa)

I am a shadow,
Restless,
Roving everywhere.
Dawn greets me
Sneaking from a park bench
And a rendezvous with cold and sky,
I am a bum, hungry and lonely;
Milk vanishes from doorsteps at dawn
As I pass.

I am a prostitute,
Seeking a pick-up from the street.
I have a kid and it cries for bread.
I’m a mother,
Just heard my son died at the front –
A medal and an empty heart.
I’m a toiler, sweating all day,
But somehow I’ve more debts to pay.

I'm in the cold,
A youngster, hungry and thin,
My soul cries for love and laughter,
But I'm on this side of the window;
In there, there's fire and laughter
And the warmth of love.

I'm a poet,
And through hunger
And lust for love and laughter
I have turned myself into a voice,
Shouting the pain of the People
And the sunshine that is to be. (1940]