

UNIVERSITY OF SWAZILAND

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE

MAIN EXAMINATION DECEMBER 2012/2013

TITLE OF PAPER: ADVANCED STUDIES IN AFRICAN NOVEL AND AUTO/BIOGRAPHY

COURSE CODE: AL 313/ IDE AL 313

TIME ALLOWED: 3 HOURS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. ANSWER THREE (3) QUESTIONS, ONE FROM EACH SECTION.. EACH QUESTION CARRIES 25 MARKS.
2. NOTE THAT QUESTION 3 IN SECTION B IS COMPULSORY
3. EACH QUESTION SHOULD BE COMMENCED ON A FRESH SHEET.
4. DO NOT REPEAT MATERIAL OR WRITE ABOUT THE SAME TEXT AT LENGTH MORE THAN ONCE.
5. DO NOT BRING ANY READING MATERIAL IN TO THE EXAMINATION HALL.
6. IN THE ASSESSMENT OF THIS PAPER, CLARITY OF EXPRESSION AND OVERALL GOOD USE OF ENGLISH EARNS MARKS.

THIS PAPER IN NOT TO BE OPENED UNTIL PERMISSION HAS BEEN GRANTED BY THE INVIGILATOR

SECTION A

THEORY

ATTEMPT ONE QUESTION IN THIS SECTION

QUESTION 1

Write short notes on the following. Each is worth 5 points

- a. Memory as meaning-making
- b. Why is the issue of one's identity so complex?
- c. The fluidity of the boundary between autobiographical and novelistic writing.
- d. What does it mean to talk of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* as a subjective novel?
- e. Discuss the "autobiographical" features in *Ambiguous Adventure*.

QUESTION 2

In *The Empire Writes Back* . . . the critics identify what they call "Anglophone social and functional theory" in African literature. Discuss the impulses and features of this literary concept. (25 points)

SECTION B

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Ezekiel Mphahlele – *Down Second Avenue*.

QUESTION 3 COMPULSORY

The blurb of Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* remarks that the book is "a compelling mix of humour and pathos." Study excerpts A and B below, and identify and analyze the elements of humour and pathos in each excerpt.

Excerpt A

My uncle was a big, tall, bony man of about twenty-three at the time. Although he had moments of kindness and pity, he could be just as ruthless as his mother and his elder sister, Bereta. He enjoyed seeing me panic on the back of a bucking donkey as a learner. He laughed heartily when a donkey deliberately entered a mimosa bush in order to unseat me. He loved to send me to drive baboons out of a mealie-land for the fun of seeing them rain mealie cobs on me.

'If you meet a female baboon on the road,' he used to say, 'and you both stand still to look at each other, it'll tell you to get out of the way.'

'And then?' I'd gasp.

'And then, my frightened boy, you'll fall as ill as you've never done before, thin down to a ghost and the last thing you'll see, my frightened little boy, will be female baboon saying, Get out of my way. That will be when you die if I'm your uncle and you're my nephew.'

It scared the breath out of me. His broad mouth and laughing eyes told me he would never come to my rescue.

Yet another thing that stamped the nightmare of those days in Pietersburg was vermin. Bugs and lice. My grandmother had very clean habits, like the rest of the villagers who boasted that they were Christians. 'Dirty as a heathen' was a popular phrase. But no one thought he could do anything with bugs. Big, flat, grey bugs with miniature contour lines on their backs. They fell from the grass thatching at night for their raid. You heard them fall on the mud floor with a thud. You tossed and turned and scratched your naked body and heard others sleepers on the floor scratch themselves, as if they were scratching pots, and groan and mumble. If you tried to catch the bug it dropped off at a mere touch. We sprinkled water on the mud floor before spreading out grass mats and other bedding, but it didn't help. In summer we slept out in the yard, which was enclosed by mud walls and had a smooth floor. But we couldn't do this too often because snakes were many. In winter the bugs disappeared and in summer they came back with a vengeance. It never occurred to anyone that there might be a vermin killer.

Excerpt B

Marabastad is gone but there will always be Marabastad that will go on until the screw of the vice breaks. Too late, maybe, but never too soon. And the black man keeps moving on, as he has always done the last three centuries, moving with baggage and all, forever tramping with bent backs to give way for the one who says he is stronger. The Black dances and sings less and less, turning his back on the past and facing the misty horizons, moving in a stream that is dammed in shifting catchments. They yell into his ears all the time: move nigger or be fenced in but move anyhow. They call it slum clearance instead of conscience clearance – to fulfill a pact with conscience which says: never be at rest as long as the Black man's giant shadow continues to fall on your house. Before the house came down in which he had hired a room, Siki the tubercular guitarist, coughed, as old Rametse said, like the twang of his guitar strings, and coughed and coughed until the blood came out and he died. Many Sikis will be born yet but few will die the way he died with his fingers entangled in the broken strings of his instrument. Some say they heard him that last time. Katrina, his eternal lover who paid his rent, wept sorely for him and grandmother said that Siki had gone to the place where rent is asked for and where they would give him many more guitars to play to God. Rebone left us too, after mother. A mysterious disease swept her off in a whirlwind. I know now she loved me and wanted me more than I imagined and that her married life was – what does it matter now? Like her father, she had lived lustily. Ma-Lebone has gone my son, grandmother told me, Ma-

Lebone has gone: remember the one who lived opposite us in Second Avenue and failed to rear husbands and daughters-in-law, the mother of that goat called Joel who sucked from his mother until her death weaned him.

SECTION C

NOVEL

ATTEMPT AT LEAST ONE QUESTION IN THIS SECTION

Ayi Kwei Armah – *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.

QUESTION 4

Literary critics have a high regard for *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, while the general readership find it a tiresome read and one that is often disgusting. How are both readerships justified in their response to this novel?

QUESTION 5

Cheik Hamidou Kane – *Ambiguous Adventure*

The debate on the merits or otherwise of embracing European modernity is captured by the following speech

“If I told them to go to the new school,” he [the chief] said at last, “they would go *en masse*. They would learn all the ways of joining wood to wood which we do not know. But, learning, they would also forget. Would what they would learn be worth as much as what they would forget? I should like to ask you: can one learn *this* without forgetting *that*, and is what one learns worth what one forgets?”

Analyze to the above quote with particular emphases on the last question.