

**UNIVERSITY OF ESWATINI**  
**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**  
**FIRST SEMESTER EXAMINATION – DEC 2019**

**COURSE TITLE:** Comparative Studies in African/Black Poetry

**COURSE CODE:** ENG417

**TIME ALLOWED:** Two hours

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

1. Answer **Question 1**, plus **one** other question (**two** in all).
2. Each question carries 30 marks.
3. Make sure you have a clean copy of the poems provided for your use.
4. Do not repeat material or write about the same poem more than once.
5. Make sure you adhere to poetic and other conventions to avoid loss of marks. You also need to proofread your work.
6. This paper is 4 pages long, cover page included.

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

**QUESTION 1**

Read the two poems below and answer the questions that follow them:

(i) **“The Old Woman’s Message”** Kumalau Towali

Stick these words in your hair  
 And take them to Polin and Manuai  
 my sons:  
 the ripe fruit falls and returns  
 to the trunk – its mother. 5  
 But my sons, forgetful of me,  
 are like fruit borne by birds.  
 I see the sons of other women  
 returning. What is in their minds?  
 Let them keep the price of their labour 10  
 but their eyes are mine.  
 I have little breath left  
 to wait for them.  
 I am returning to childhood.  
 My stomach goes to my back 15  
 my hands are like broomsticks,  
 my legs can fit in the sand crab’s hole.  
 I am dry like a carved image  
 only my head is God’s.  
 Already I sway like a dry falling leaf 20  
 I see with my hands –  
 Oh tell Polin and Manuai to hurry  
 and come to my death feast.

(ii) **“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, 5  
 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, 10  
 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. 15

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, 20  
 and she, an old woman,  
 she was too weak to go with us,  
 to seek food at some other place.

- a) In not more than 7 lines in **each case**, give a summary of the situation presented by each poem. [6]
- b) Identify the persona of each poem. [2]
- c) Identify and briefly discuss the poems' three recurrent themes. [9]
- d) Do you identify with the situation presented by the poems? Discuss briefly. [3]
- e) List two other poems from the handout dealing with the same subject and themes. [2]
- f) In your view, which of the two reproduced poems is richer in linguistic devices or techniques? [1] Discuss briefly to illustrate your choice. [4]
- g) Are the poems conventional in form or free verse? [1] List three aspects of form to support your response. [2]

[30 marks]

## Question 2

The theme of exile and return is recurrent in Angolan poetry:

- a) Comparatively discuss the delineation of this theme by first examining the poem below and, thereafter, two others found in the handout. [20]
- b) Comparatively discuss any obvious aspects of form or structure in the three poems. [10]

### **"Regressado, Yes I Am" Makuzayi Massaki (Angola)**

*Regressado*, yes I am  
 For my gestures reveal my ties  
 to the land of my memory

*Returnee from exile after independence*

*Regressado*, yes I am  
 For return has always been the goal  
 of my life in exile

*Regressado*, yes I am  
 For it was there from whence I return  
 that I organized the struggle  
 to liberate this land

*Regressado*, yes I am  
 For my name rhymes with Kimpa Vita,  
 Nzinga, Buta, Ekwikwi and Mandume

*Heroes of the struggle against Portuguese rule*

*Regressado*, yes I am  
 For only where my ancestor sleeps  
 can I build my house

*Regressado*, yes I am  
 For I have done nothing else but return  
 to my point of departure.

### **Question 3**

Discuss with the aid of illustrations from two or more poems how, although set in different areas and eras, both Negritude poetry and Black Consciousness poetry exhibit similar thematic preoccupations. [30]

### **Question 4**

- Discuss Vera Bell's approach to the theme of the African ancestral past in her poem, "**Ancestor on the Auction Block**". [10]
- Discuss how the same theme is treated in Mafika Gwala's "**The Children of Nonti**" and Mazisi Kunene's "**In Praise of the Ancestors**". [10]
- Account for the different approaches. [10]

[30 marks]

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I limped to the place where I stay which is not home.  
A home is something else,  
A home is people.

For me, there was nobody.  
No friends,  
Just a Native Shelter,  
Just Soweto  
Far away ...

Pain is indeed a lonely and personal thing.

**“White Lies” Stanley Motjuwadi (South Africa)**

Humming Maggie.  
Hit by a virus  
the Caucasian Craze,  
sees horror in the mirror.  
Frantic and dutifully  
she corrodes a sooty face,  
braves a hot iron comb  
on a shrubby scalp.  
I look on.

I know pure white,  
a white heart,  
white, peace, ultimate virtue.  
Angels are white  
angels are good.  
Me I'm black,  
black as sin stuffed in a snuff-tin.  
Lord, I've been brainwhitewashed.

But for heaven's sake God,  
just let me be.  
Under cover of my darkness  
let me crusade.  
On a canvas stretching from here  
to Dallas, Memphis, Belsen, Golgotha,  
I'll daub a while devil.  
Let me teach black truth.  
That dark clouds aren't a sign of doom,  
but hope. Rain. Life.  
Let me unleash a volty bolt of black,  
so all around may know black right.

**“My Name”** Magoleng wa Selepe (South Africa)

Look what they have done to my name...  
the wonderful name of my great-great-grandmothers  
Nomgqibelo Ncamisile Mnqhibisa.

The burly bureaucrat was surprised.  
What he heard was music to his ears:  
‘Wat is daai, sê nou weer?’  
‘I am from Chief Daluxolo Velayigodle of ema-  
Mpodweni  
and my name is Nomgqibelo Mnqhibisa.’

Messiah, help me!  
My name is so simple  
and yet so meaningful,  
but to this man it is trash...

He gives me a name  
Convenient enough to answer his whim:  
I end up being  
Maria...  
I...  
Nomgqibelo Ncamisile Mnqhibisa.

**“The Children of Nonti”** Mafika Gwala (South Africa)

Nonti Nzimande died long, long ago  
Yet his children still live.  
Generation after generation, they live on;  
Death comes to the children of Nonti  
And the children of Nonti cry but won’t panic  
And there is survival in the children of Nonti.

Poverty swoops its deadly wings. But tough,  
strong and witty are the children of Nonti.  
The wet rains fall. The roads become like  
the marshed rice paddies of the Far East;  
And on these desolate roads there is song  
Song in the Black voices of the children of Nonti.

Someone marries  
The bride does not hide her face under the veil;  
The maidens dance near the kraal

Dance before the 'make it be merry' eyes  
of the elders. The elders joshing it  
on their young days.  
There is still free laughter  
in the children of Nonti.

An ox drops to the earth, then another;  
Knives run into the meat. Making the feast  
to be blood-filled with Life.  
The old, the dead, are brought into the Present  
of continuous nature in the children of Nonti.  
Got to be a respecting with the children of Nonti.

When a daughter has brought shame  
The women show anger; not wrath.  
And the illegitimate born is one of  
the family.  
When a son is charged by the white law  
The children of Nonti bring their heads together  
In a bid to free one of the children of Nonti.

There are no sixes and nines be one  
with the children of Nonti. Truth is truth  
and lies are lies amongst the children of Nonti.  
For when summer takes its place after the winter  
The children of Nonti rejoice  
and call it proof of Truth  
Truth reigns amongst the children of Nonti.

Sometimes a son rises above the others  
of the children of Nonti. He explains the workings  
and the trappings of white thinking.  
The elders debate;  
And add to their abounding knowledge  
of black experience.  
The son is still one of the black children of Nonti  
For there is oneness in the children of Nonti.

And later, later when the sun  
is like forever down;  
Later when the dark rules  
above the light of Truth  
The black children of Nonti will rise and speak.  
They will speak of the time  
when Nonti lived in peace with his children;  
Of the times when age did not count



above experience. The children of Nonti will stand  
their grounds in the way that Nonti speared his foes  
to free his black brothers from death and woes;  
They shall fight with the tightened grip  
of a cornered pard. For they shall be knowing that  
Nothing is more vital than standing up  
For the Truths that Nonti lived for.  
Then there shall be Freedom in that stand  
by the children of Nonti.  
Truthful tales shall be told  
Of how the children of Nonti pushed their will;  
And continued to live by the peace  
The peace that Nonti once taught them.

**“In Praise of the Ancestors” Mazisi Raymond Kunene (South Africa)**

Even now the forefathers still live  
They are not overcome by the power of the whirlwind.  
The day that sealed their eyes did not conquer them.  
Even the tall border that stands over them  
Casts only a humble shadow over their resting place.  
They are the great voice that carries the epics.  
The ancestors have come to listen to our songs,  
Overjoyed they shake their heads in ecstasy.  
With us they celebrate their eternal life.  
They climb the mountain with their children  
To put the symbol of the ancient stone on its forehead.  
We honour those who gave birth to us,  
With them we watch the spectacle of the moving mists.  
They have opened their sacred book to sing with us.  
They are the strange truth of the earth.  
They came from the womb of the universe.  
Restless they are, like a path of dreams,  
Like a forest sheltering the neighbouring race of animals.  
Yes, the deep eye of the universe is in our chest.  
With it we stare at the centres of the sky.  
We sing the anthems that celebrate their great eras,  
For indeed life does not begin with us.

**“At War With the Preacher” Senzo Malinga (South Africa)**

My armful of goat skins  
Captures the eyes of the preacherman;  
I meet him on the shop verandah.  
He tells me I have to change

my evil ways;  
I go home cursing,  
Declaring war against the preacherman.

Later he comes to my place  
Accuses me of deflecting people  
from the right way to Heaven;  
I in turn call on my gods  
To deliver their godly anger  
upon this insolent preacherman;  
For I do not live  
That I may go to Heaven,  
But that I may have supper tonight.

**“We Shall Return, Luanda” Ngudia Wendel (Angola)**

Luanda, you are like a white seagull  
on the ocean crest —  
bright streets under the white sun,  
flight of green palm trees...  
but we have seen you grow black, Luanda,  
since the bitter fourth of February  
when the blood of combatants for liberty  
was spilled in your streets —  
in your bright streets,  
Mother Luanda.

We remember that day  
your streets seething with crowds  
like the Cuanza in flood.  
Our rage thundered louder than the cannon  
in the executioner’s fortress.

And we went to the attack through a hail of lead  
and we died in your streets —  
in your bright streets,  
Mother Luanda.

Through battle we won victory  
on that bitter day,  
hundreds of our black brothers  
were stretched out for eternity in your streets.

We came through the bush  
through the long tropical rains,

the wounded moaned on their stretchers  
ammunition belts stained their backs,  
legs were caught fast in treacherous swamps,  
but we came on to see you,  
our Mother Luanda.

But you stranger and hangman  
have drowned Luanda in blood,  
you have fed on the living body for ages  
like the bush tick.  
Now you tremble and cling to your sandbags  
and steel helmets  
and the shelter of machine-guns  
wisely, for you know  
that the moment of reckoning  
is nigh.

One day we shall come out of the bush  
through the smoke of the last explosives  
and we shall see you, Luanda,  
the ships in the bay –  
big-bellied ships, hurriedly packed  
with the last of the murderers...  
That day is not over the hills, far away,  
it is close at hand  
our black brothers give their lives for it.  
We shall return, Mother Luanda!

**“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.

**'Ancestor on the auction block' Vera Bell (West Indies)**

Ancestor on the auction block  
Across the years your eyes seek mine  
Compelling me to look.  
I see your shackled feet  
Your primitive black face  
I see your humiliation  
And turn away ashamed.

Across the years your eyes seek mine  
Compelling me to look  
Is this creature that I see  
Myself?  
Ashamed to look  
Because of myself ashamed  
Shackled by my own ignorance  
I stand  
A slave.

Humiliated  
I cry to the eternal abyss  
For understanding  
Ancestor on the auction block  
Across the years your eyes meet mine  
Electric  
I am transformed  
My freedom is within myself.

I look you in the eyes and see  
The spirit of God eternal  
Of this only need I be ashamed  
Of blindness to the God within me  
The same God who dwelt within you  
The same eternal God  
Who shall dwell  
In generations yet unborn.  
Ancestor on the auction block  
Across the years  
I look

I see you sweating, toiling, suffering  
Within you loins I see the seed

Of multitudes  
From your labour  
Grow roads, aqueducts, cultivation  
A new country is born  
Yours was the task to clear the ground  
Mine be the task to build.

**“In Memoriam”** by Leopold Sedar Senghor (Senegal)

Sunday  
The crowding stony faces of my fellows make me afraid.  
Out of my tower of glass haunted by headaches and my restless  
Ancestors  
I watch the roofs and hills wrapped in mist  
Wrapped in peace... the chimneys are heavy and stark.  
At their feet my dead are sleeping, all my dreams made dust  
All my dreams, blood freely spilt along the streets, mingled with blood  
from butcheries.  
And now, from this observatory, as if from the outskirts of the town  
I watch my dreams listless along the streets, sleeping at the foot of the  
hills  
Like the forerunners of my race on the banks of the Gambia and  
Salum  
Now of the Seine, at the foot of the hills.  
Let my mind turn to my dead!  
Yesterday was All Saints, the solemn anniversary of the sun  
In all the cemeteries, there was no one to remember.  
O dead who have always refused to die, who have resisted death  
From the Sine to the Seine, and in my fragile veins you my  
unyielding blood  
Guard my dreams as you have guarded your sons, your slender-limbed  
Wanderers  
O dead, defend the roofs of Paris in this Sabbath mist  
Roofs that guard my dead  
That from the dangerous safety of my tower, I may go down to the  
street  
To my brothers whose eyes are blue  
Whose hands are hard.

**“Viaticum”** Birago Diop (Senegal)

In one of the three pots  
the three pots to which on certain evenings  
the happy souls return

the serene breath of the ancestors,  
the ancestors who were men,  
the forefathers who were wise,  
Mother wetted three fingers,  
three fingers on her left hand:  
the thumb, the index and the next;  
I too wetted three fingers,  
three fingers of my right hand:  
the thumb, the index and the next.

With her three fingers red with blood,  
with dog's blood,  
with bull's blood,  
with goat's blood,  
Mother touched me three times.

She touched my forehead with her thumb,  
With her index my left breast  
And my navel with her middle finger.  
I too held my fingers red with blood,  
with dog's blood.  
With bull's blood,  
with goat's blood.  
I held my three fingers to the winds  
to the winds of the North, to the winds of the Levant,  
to the winds of the South, to the winds of the setting sun;  
and I raised my three fingers towards the Moon,  
towards the full Moon, the Moon full and naked  
when she rested deep in the largest pot.  
Afterwards I plunged my three fingers in the sand  
in the sand that had grown cold.  
Then Mother said, 'Go into the world, go!  
They will follow your steps in life.'

Since then I go  
I follow the pathways  
the pathways and roads  
beyond the sea and even farther,  
beyond the sea and beyond the beyond;  
And whenever I approach the wicked,  
the Men with black hearts,  
whenever I approach the envious,  
the Men with black hearts  
before me moves the Breath of the Ancestors.

**"Africa"** David Diop (Senegal)

Africa my Africa  
Africa of proud warriors in ancestral savannahs  
Africa of whom my grandmother sings  
On the banks of the distant river  
I have never known you  
But your blood flows in my veins  
Your beautiful black blood that irrigates the fields  
The blood of your sweat  
The sweat of your work  
The work of your slavery  
The slavery of your children  
Africa tell me Africa  
Is this you this back that is bent  
This back that breaks under the weight of humiliation  
This back trembling with red scars  
And saying yes to the whip under the midday sun  
But a grave voice answers me  
Impetuous son that tree young and strong  
That tree there  
In splendid loveliness amidst white and faded flowers  
That is Africa your Africa  
That grows again patiently obstinately  
And its fruit gradually acquires  
The bitter taste of liberty.

**“The Vultures” David Diop (Senegal)**

In those days  
When civilization kicked us in the face  
When holy water slapped our cringing brows  
The vultures built in the shadow of their talons  
The bloodstained monuments of tutelage  
In those days  
There was painful laughter on the metallic hell of the roads  
And the monotonous rhythm of the paternoster  
Drowned the howling on the plantations  
Oh the bitter memories of extorted kisses  
Of promises broken at the point of a gun  
Of foreigners who did not seem human  
Who knew all the books but did not know love  
But we whose hands fertilize the womb of the earth  
In spite of your songs of pride  
In spite of the desolate villages of torn Africa  
Hope was preserved in us as in a fortress  
And from the mines of Swaziland to the factories of Europe  
Spring will be reborn under our bright steps.

**“Easter Dawn” Kofi Awoonor (Ghana)**

That man died in Jerusalem  
And his death demands dawn marchers  
From year to year to the sound of bells.  
The hymns flow through the mornings  
Heard on Calvary this dawn.  
    the gods are crying, my father's gods are crying  
    for a burial – for a final ritual –  
    but they that should build the fallen shrines  
    have joined the dawn marchers  
    singing their way towards Gethsemane  
    where the tear drops of agony still freshen the cactus.  
He has risen! Christ has risen!  
    the gods cried again from the hut in me  
    asking why that prostration has gone unheeded.  
The marchers sang of the resurrection  
That concerned the hillock of Calvary  
Where the ground at the foot of the cross is level.  
    the gods cried, shedding  
    clayey tears on the calico  
    the drink offering had dried up in the harmattan  
    the cola-nut is shriveled  
    the yam feast has been eaten by mice  
    and the fetish priest is dressing for the Easter service.  
The resurrection hymns come to me from afar  
touching my insides.  
    Then the gods cried loudest  
    Challenging the hymnners.  
    They seized their gongs and drums  
    And marched behind the dawn marchers  
    Seeking their Calvary  
    Seeking their tombstones  
    And those who refused to replace them  
    In the appropriate season.

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