

PERCEPTIONS OF CHILDHOOD IN AFRICAN AND CARIBBEAN LITERATURE

Amherst College

English

Spring Semester, 1987

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The following books may be purchased at Jeffrey Amherst bookshop. Copies will also be placed on reserve at the Robert Frost Library. Books will be discussed in the order listed:

Joseph Zobel, *Black Shack Alley* (Three Continents Press)

Michael Anthony, *The Year in San Fernando* (Heinemann, pbk)

Jamaica Kincaid, *Annie John* (Farrar, Strauss & Giroux)

Camara Laye, *The Dark Child* (Farrar, Strauss & Giroux)

Nafissatou Diallo, *A Dakar Childhood* (Longman)

Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm*

Ngugi wa Thiongo, *The River Between* (Heinemann)

Ian McDonald, *The Humming Bird Tree* (Heinemann)

Ismith Khan, *The Jumbie Bird* (Longman)

Mbulelo Mzamane, *Children of Soweto* (Ohio University Press)

Wole Soyinka, *Ake: The Years of Childhood* (Random House)

Derek Walcott, *Another Life* (Three Continents Press)

Sistren, *Lionheart Gal* (The Women's Press)

Erna Brodber, *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (New Beacon Books)

Simone Schwarz-Bart, *The Bridge of Beyond* (Heinemann)

Course Requirements

Students are expected to read all of the set texts in time to participate actively in seminar discussions. Grades will be assessed on the basis of student's classroom performance and three written assignments.

1. An informally structured journal in which students relate the perceptions of childhood in the texts discussed to their personal experiences.

Length: Optional

Due date: Journals should be kept up to date throughout the course and handed in at the end of the semester: Friday, May 8th.

2. An in-class presentation of one of the required texts, introducing fellow students to the work of the author and the social and literary context out of which the text was written.

Length: 10 pages or 30 minutes speaking time.

Students will work in twos or threes on these assignments. The final written version should be handed in one week after the oral presentation.

3. A literary analysis of the construction of gender, class and/or religious and ethnic identities in a work by an African or Caribbean author not included on the course.

Length: 15 - 20 pages

Due date: May 11th.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Erna Brodber. *Perceptions of Caribbean Women*. Cave Hill, Barbados: ISER, 1982.

Daryl Dance. *Fifty Caribbean Writers: A Bio-bibliographical Critical Source Book*.

Ngugi wa Thiongo. *Homecoming*. London: Heinemann, 1972

Kenneth Ramchand. *The West Indian Novel and Its Background*. London: Faber, 1970

Wole Soyinka. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. London.

Hans Zell. *A Reader's Guide to African Literature*. London: Heinemann 1985.

READING SCHEDULE.

January 27 Introduction: Course description: Bibliographic information. Refer to Maps of Africa and the Caribbean (Litho).

In-class journal assignment.

PART I: CHILDHOOD

February 2 The world of the Caribbean child.

Read: Black Shack Alley

Watch: the film, Sugar Cane Alley

9 Limitations and possibilities of the child narrator

Read: The Year in San Fernando

Refer to: Ramchand's chapter on the novels of childhood in *The West Indian Novel and its Background*. (litho)

16 Constructions of gender in literature and society.

Read: Annie John

Refer to: Merle Hodges' introduction to *Perceptions of Caribbean Women* by Erna Brodber (litho).

23 Whose childhood? Autobiography as representative experience.

Read: The African Child and A Dakar Childhood

Refer to: Mbye Cham's article "Islam in Senegalese Literature and Film" (litho)

Watch: the film *Tauw* by Ousman Sembene.

PART II: ADOLESCENCE

March 3 The narrative of change: Creativity vs. Conformity in the White Settler experience.

Read: The Story of an African Farm

Refer to: Relevant sections from Ruth First's study of Schreiner (litho)

10 Gender as destiny? Plot determinants in the novel of cultural confrontation.

Read: The River Between

Refer to: Margaret Marshment's article, "Literature and Ideology" and selections from Jane Tapsubei Creider's *Two Lives: My Spirit and I* (litho).

17 The metaphor of childhood in South African literature.

Read: Children of Soweto

Refer to: Material from *This Child is not Dead* (litho)

Watch: the film, *Six Days in Soweto*.

SPRING RECESS

March 31 The Caribbean novel of initiation.

Read: *The Jumbie Bird* and *The Humming Bird Tree*

Refer to: Ramchand's essay (see Feb. 9) and Rhonda Cobham's essay on "The Jumbie Bird: A Reassessment" (litho).

PART III: MATURITY

April 7 Restructuring the past: Autobiography as art.

Read: *Ake*

Refer to: Richard Priebe's article "On Form and Ideology with specific attention to *Ake*." (litho)

Watch: Slides on Yoruba culture.

14 The artist as metaphor

Read: *Another Life*

Refer to: Walcott's essay, "Leaving Home" and Baugh's chapter on Walcott's "Early Life and Influences" (litho).

21 Mastering language: Mastering life

Read: *Lionhart Gal*

Refer to: Ford-Smith's introduction to the volume.

28 History as Vision:

Read: *Jane and Louisa will Soon Come Home* and *The Bridge of Beyond*.

Refer to: Merle Hodge's essay (see Feb. 16) and excerpts from Filomina Steady's *The Black Woman Cross -Culturally* (litho)

May 5 Perceptions of Childhood in African and Caribbean literature. Review of course and discussion of conclusions.

11 **FINAL PAPER DUE.**