Final Examination

Thursday, 12/13/2018, 3:45-5:45 American Literature

**Instructions**

Using the examination booklet, write four short essays in response to the following sets of paired quotations. Each essay should construct a concise comparative analysis of the pair presented for your consideration. Address similarities as well as differences in imaginative language, stylistic techniques, character development, and/or thematic significance. While you may concentrate on these passages themselves via close reading, you should also situate them in the broader context of the literary works from which they are taken. Try to draw revealing connections between the two excerpts. How does thinking about one passage help you to clarify the other? How do their shared or divergent emphases resound throughout our study of place-based American literature? How do they embody or resolve tensions between roots and routes? Aim to spend about half an hour analyzing each pair of quotations, so that you can complete all four essays in two hours.

**Essay One**

*First Passage*

**They were the morning’s**

**blossoms and would not last.**

**But I go back now in my mind**

**to when I drew the long windrow**

**to the top of the rise, and I see**

**the blue-flowered field, holding**

**in its center the sky-reflecting pond.**

**It seems, as then, another world**

**in this world, such as a pilgrim**

**might travel days and years**

**to find, and find at last**

**on the morning of his return**

**by his mere being at home**

**awake—a moment seen, forever known.**

—Wendell Berry, “V”, *Good Poems, American Places*

*Second Passage*

**… What is important is anyone’s coming awake and discovering a place, finding in full orbit a spinning globe one can lean over, catch, and jump on. What is important is the moment of opening a life and feeling it touch—with an electric hiss and cry—this speckled mineral sphere, our present world.**

**On your mountain slope now you must take on faith that those apparently discrete dots of you were contiguous: that little earnest dot, so easily amused; that alien, angry adolescent; and this woman with loosening skin on bony hands, hands now fifteen years older than your mother’s hands when you pinched their knuckle skin into mountain ridges on an end table. You must take on faith that those severed places cohered, too—the dozens of desks, bedrooms, kitchens, yards, landscapes—if only through the motion and shed molecules of the traveler. You take it on faith that the multiform and variously lighted latitudes and longitudes were part of one world, that you didn’t drop chopped from house to house, coast to coast, life to life, but in some once comprehensible way moved there, a city block at a time, a highway mile at a time, a degree of latitude and longitude at a time ...**

—Annie Dillard, *An American Childhood*

**Essay Two**

*First Passage*

**Thankful for the appeasement of that loneliness which had again tormented her like a fury, she gave herself up to the miraculous joyousness of Harlem. The easement which its heedless abandon brought to her was a real, a very definite thing. She liked the sharp contrast to her pretentious stately life in Copenhagen. It was as if she had passed from the heavy solemnity of a church service to a gorgeous care-free revel.**

**Not that she intended to remain. No. Helga Crane couldn’t, she told herself and others, live in America. In spite of its glamour, existence in America, even in Harlem, was for Negroes too cramped, too uncertain, too cruel; something not to be endured for a lifetime if one could escape; something demanding a courage greater than was in her. No. She couldn’t stay. Nor, she saw now, could she remain away. Leaving, she would have to come back.**

**This knowledge, this certainty of the division of her life into two parts in two lands, into physical freedom in Europe and spiritual freedom in America, was unfortunate, inconvenient, expensive. It was, too, as she was uncomfortably aware, even a trifle ridiculous, and mentally she caricatured herself moving shuttle-like from continent to continent. From the prejudiced restrictions of the New World to the easy formality of the Old, from the pale calm of Copenhagen to the colorful lure of Harlem.**

—Nella Larsen, *Quicksand*

*Second Passage*

**asagai I have a bit of a suggestion.**

**beneatha What?**

**asagai (*Rather quietly for him*) That when it is all over—that you come home with me—**

**beneatha (*Staring at him and crossing away with exasperation*) Oh—Asagai—at this**

**moment you decide to be romantic!**

**asagai (*Quickly understanding the misunderstanding*) My dear, young creature of the**

**New World—I do not mean across the city—I mean across the ocean: home—to Africa.**

**beneatha (*Slowly understanding and turning to him with murmured amazement*) To**

**Africa?**

**asagai Yes! … (*Smiling and lifting his arms playfully*) Three hundred years later the**

**African Prince rose up out of the seas and swept the maiden back across the middle**

**passage over which her ancestors had come—**

**beneatha (*Unable to play*) To—to Nigeria?**

**asagai Nigeria. Home. (*Coming to her with genuine romantic flippancy*) I will show you**

**our mountains and our stars; and give you cool drinks from gourds and teach you the old**

**songs and the ways of our people—and, in time, we will pretend that—(*Very softly*)—you**

**have only been away for a day. Say that you’ll come (*He swings her around and takes her***

***full in his arms in a kiss which proceeds to passion*)**

**beneatha (*Pulling away suddenly*) You’re getting me all mixed up—**

—Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*

**Essay Three**

*First Passage*

**A single knoll rises out of the plain in Oklahoma, north and west of the Wichita Range. For my people, the Kiowas, it is an old landmark, and they gave it the name Rainy Mountain. The hardest weather in the world is there. Winter brings blizzards, hot tornadic winds arise in the spring, and in summer the prairie is an anvil’s edge. The grass turns brittle and brown, and it cracks beneath your feet. There are green belts along the rivers and creeks, linear groves of hickory and pecan, willow and witch hazel. At a distance in July or August the steaming foliage seems almost to writhe in fire. Great green and yellow grasshoppers are everywhere in the tall grass, popping up like corn to sting the flesh, and tortoises crawl about on the red earth, going nowhere in the plenty of time. Loneliness is an aspect of the land. All things in the plain are isolated; there is no confusion of objects in the eye, but *one* hill or *one* tree or *one* man. To look upon that landscape in the early morning, with the sun at your back, is to lose the sense of proportion. Your imagination comes to life, and this, you think, is where Creation was begun.**

—N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*

*Second Passage*

**There are certain seasons, certain sensual prompts, that take me back to the Home Place. Now, as back then, fall is the time when nature speaks most clearly to me. In autumn one is treated to an orgy of sights, sounds, and smells that can be wonderfully overwhelming. The stifling late-summer heat is mercifully cleared by cooler air overnight. Breathing is suddenly easier and the soaking sweat evaporates. You want to inhale deeply enough to take in every molecule wafting on the wind. The tired sameness of September’s deep green fades then flames into October’s vermilion sumacs and scarlet maples, lemon-yellow poplars and golden hickories. In those days of crispness I want to linger long enough to hear every sound and look far enough to see into forever.**

**The season has always drawn a sort of restlessness from me. The Germans have a fine word for it: *zugunruhe*. A compound derived from the roots *zug* (migration) and *unruhe* (anxiety), it describes the seasonal migration of birds and other animals. In this wanderlust I want to go somewhere far away, to fly to some place I think I need to be. Nature is on the move, too, migrating, storing, and dying. Everything is either accelerating or slowing down.**

—J. Drew Lanham, *The Home Place*

**Essay Four**

*First Passage*

**I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray, now. But I didn’t do it straight off, but laid the paper down and set there thinking; thinking how good it was all this happened so, and how near I come to being lost and going to hell. And went on thinking. And got to thinking over our trip down the river; and I see Jim before me, all the time, in the day, and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a floating along, talking, and singing, and laughing. But somehow I couldn’t seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind. I’d see him standing my watch on top of his’n, stead of calling me—so I could go on sleeping; and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog; and when I come to him again in the swamp, up there where the feud was; and such-like times; and would always call me honey, and pet me, and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was; and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had small-pox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the *only* one he’s got now; and then I happened to look around, and see that paper.**

**It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a trembling because I’d got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself:**

**“All right, then, I’ll *go* to hell”—and tore it up.**

—Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

*Second Passage*

**“Tom,” Ma repeated, “what you gonna do?”**

**“What Casy done,” he said.**

**“But they killed him.”**

**“Yeah,” said Tom. “He didn’ duck quick enough. He wasn’ doing nothin’ against the law, Ma. I been thinkin’ a hell of a lot, thinkin’ about our people livin’ like pigs, an’ the good rich lan’ layin’ fallow, or maybe one fella with a million acres, while a hunderd thousan’ good farmers is starvin’. An’ I been wonderin’ if all our folks got together an’ yelled, like them fellas yelled, only a few of ’em at the Hooper ranch——”**

**Ma said, “Tom, they’ll drive you, an’ cut you down like they done to young Floyd.”**

**“They gonna drive me anyways. They drivin’ all our people.”**

**“You don’t aim to kill nobody, Tom?”**

**“No. I been thinkin’, long as I’m a outlaw anyways, maybe I could—Hell, I ain’t thought it out clear, Ma. Don’ worry me now. Don’ worry me.”**

**They sat silent in the coal-black cave of vines. Ma said, “How’m I gonna know ’bout you? They might kill ya an’ I wouldn’ know. They might hurt ya. How’m I gonna know?”**

**Tom laughed uneasily, “Well, maybe like Casy says, a fella ain’t got a soul of his own, but on’y a piece of a big one—an’ then——”**

**“Then what, Tom?”**

**“Then it don’ matter. Then I’ll be all aroun’ in the dark. I’ll be ever’where—wherever you look. Wherever they’s a fight so hungry people can eat, I’ll be there. Wherever they’s a cop beatin’ up a guy, I’ll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I’ll be in the way guys yell when they’re mad an’—I’ll be in the way kids laugh when they’re hungry and they know supper’s ready. An’ when our folks eat the stuff they raise an’ live in the houses they build—why, I’ll be there. …”**

—John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*