FEEDBACK TUTORIAL LETTER

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ASSIGNMENT 2

LITERARY THEORY

LIT811S
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ASSIGNMENT 2: FEEDBACK TUTORIAL LETTER

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Marker-tutor Details
Tel.: +264 61 207-2285
E-mail: japasi@nust.na

ASSIGNMENT 2: FEEDBACK TUTORIAL LETTER

I have just finished marking your assignment and this short feedback letter serves to highlight some of the pleasing things I witnessed in your assignment, encourage you, challenge you and also give you more direction so as to be fully conversant with some of the aspects that will make you appreciate the course African Literature. Worth noting first and foremost is that the second assignment performance is not as good as expected.

What I need to highlight from the onset is that this assignment was not done well and it demonstrated that you had not put much effort in both the reading of the set texts and the assignment tasks. In addition, what was evident in the assignments was a sense of unpreparedness in the answers. There was a sense of originality in some cases but sadly, this was not indicative of wide research and reading. At this level, a mere analysis of the text with no literature to support the ideas is very inadequate.
Let me again emphasise the fact that at this level, it is not enough to rely on the Study Guide only. The Study Guide is there to just give you directions – to guide you so that you can research more as guided by what is in the Study Guide. Hence, when you make reference to other relevant books and also to the internet sources – I always reward broadly read students. With regards to the questions you did, the Study Guide was therefore not adequate at all for you to explore ad address the question demands fully.

Question 1

Trauma and Resilience

You must give a detailed description of the theory to show that you understand it. For example:

A central claim of contemporary literary trauma theory asserts that trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity. The trauma novel demonstrates how a traumatic event disrupts attachments between self and others by challenging fundamental assumptions about moral laws and social relationships that are themselves connected to specific environments. The literary trauma theory considers the responses to traumatic experience, including cognitive chaos and the possible division of consciousness, as an inherent characteristic of traumatic experience and memory. Trauma refers to a person’s emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual’s sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society. The term “trauma novel” refers to a work of fiction that conveys profound loss or intense fear on individual or collective levels. A defining feature of the trauma novel is the transformation of the self, ignited by an external, often terrifying experience, which illuminates the process of coming to terms with the dynamics of memory that inform the new perceptions of the self and world.

Resilience as a class of phenomena characterised by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation of development and the term is used to describe the positive tone of individual differences in people’s response to stress and adversity - the ability to bounce back from adversity, frustration, and misfortune. It is a theory that is concerned with clarifying the strengths that people have within them, which enable them to rise above adversity. The emphasis is on fortitude, how to survive in the midst of adversity and the subjectivity that emanates in a people so as to surmount adversity and meet the challenges in all their enormity and excesses. Resilience, therefore, emphasises the strengths that the people have, rather than their vulnerability, through exploring the coping strategies that they exhibit.

Resilience originates from the Latin word ‘resiliens’ which refers to the pliant or elastic quality of a substance(Mlambo, 2014)

It was first used by the engineering community particularly referring to physical infrastructure and was related to the concept of being able to absorb and recover from a hazardous event

Resilience is described as both an outcome and a process. It looks at how people make it in spite of difficult circumstances or experiences

It is a positive outcome despite the experience of adversity, the ability to continue to be positive or effectively function in adverse circumstances
The Resilience theory outlines three conjecture, that is, individuals considered resilient;

1) have a positive outcome despite the experience of adversity

2) continue to be positive or effectively function in adverse circumstances

3) recover after a significant trauma (Schoon, 2006)

Resilience is associated with concepts such as; survival, recovery, and thriving depending on the stages at which a person may be during or after facing adversity

A number of variables that characterizes resilience and thriving include positive self-esteem, hardiness, strong coping skills, a sense of coherence, self-efficacy, optimism, strong social resources, adaptability, risk-taking, low fear of failure, determination, perseverance, serendipity, proteanism and a high tolerance of uncertainty

When one has experienced trauma like rape, the person often underestimates own resources and potential and appear easier to see himself as a victim

Resilience addresses the strengths that people and systems demonstrates that enable them to rise above adversity

Examples of application of the theory in literary texts:

Representation of trauma in novels:

1. Athol Fugard’s play “Sizwe Bansi is dead”- the apartheid laws, e.g. Pass laws, racial segregation, the living and working conditions affected great parts of the South African population

Pass laws robbed black South Africans of hope and person hood, they had no official existence beyond what it described, E.g. Sizwe cannot work and live in Port Elizabeth. He lives with fear of being exposed. The racial segregation leads to frustration and anger and ultimately destroys the self-worth. For example, Buntu respond to Robert’s confusion; “No? when the white man looked at you at the Labour Bureau what did he see? A man with dignity or a bloody passbook with an N.I. number? Isn’t that a ghost? When the white man sees you walk down the street and calls out, “hey you John! Come here... to you, Sizwe Bansi ... isn’t that a ghost? Or when his little child calls you ‘Boy ... you a man, circumcised with a wife and four children ... isn’t that a ghost? Stop fooling yourself. All I’m saying is be a real ghost, if that is what they want, what they’ve turned us into. Spook them into hell, man!”

Examples of resilience from the text:

- Sizwe uses a dead man’s identity to get a job
- Styles leaves the Ford Company to run his own photo studio.
- Buntu is able to help his fellow Blackman amidst racism and the raids by the police.
2. Valerie Tagwira’s “The Uncertainty of Hope”- the protagonist Onai suffers from domestic abuse at the hands of her husband. Examples of trauma from the text:

- Onai being woken up in the early hours to discover that burglars have picked on their house to steal their main ‘theft-worthy’ possession, their treasured old black-and-white television set.
- Her husband still being out on his nightly wanderings, she can only gather her children in her bedroom where they cower together while the theft is being perpetrated.
- She and her children are vulnerable and defenceless, “She could not protect her children from the life they were destined to live.
- Slumber refers to a light sleep and is in itself a sign of trauma as she could not sleep because of the barking dogs, the gangs who raided houses and her absent husband.
- The “frayed curtain” is symbolic of her poverty-stricken environment. Other indicators are: the rickety metal gate, the upside-down container, the threadbare blanket etc.

Examples of resilience from the text:
- Onai prayed to God and this gave her the innate strength to be able to carry her children to a safe place.
- She and her children remained silent.
- They cuddle together and the children leaned closer to her for comfort and assurance that everything will be fine.
- The characters in the novel demonstrate the power of positive expectations and how they are resiliently hopeful against all odds, they have the power to change things to survive. For example, Onai the protagonist is a market vendor, a hardworking mother of three. She is determined and resiliently optimistic. Katy, also a market vendor and a black market foreign currency dealer, doing all she can to raise her only child’s school fees.

3. Adichie Chimamanda’s “The Purple Hibiscus”
- The death of Ade Coker, blown to pieces by a bomb delivered when he was at breakfast with his family, the grotesque of Ade Coker’s charred remains spattered on his dining table, on his daughter’s school uniform, on his baby’s cereal bowl, on his plate of eggs, haunts his family and Kambili.

4. Athol Fugard’s Master Harold and the Boys

Examples of trauma:
Sam believed that he and Hally had an inseparable bond, regardless of their racial differences. For, Sam was a father figure to Hally; he had been there to fill the void during Hally’s father’s absence. Until Hally spits in Sam’s face and revealed his racist identity. Now Sam is emotionally traumatised because he believed that Hally was not racist.

Even though Hally’s father was not physically abusing him, he was psychologically abusing. Hally as a small boy was indirectly traumatised, because he had to take care of his father which can be said to be a situational irony. Hally was tired of massaging his father’s legs, which he
referred to as “old grumpy legs. He had caused embarrassment to Hally for always getting drunk and he had to be carried by a black man (Sam)

Sam and Willie were blacks and they worked for the white family as servants. The fact that they are labelled as black already creates a sense of trauma because blacks are seen as inferior, and they will always be in the lower class.

Sam had a room in the back yard, meaning, because he is black and he is a servant, he cannot mix with his masters.

Examples of Resilience in the text:

**Kite flying**

✓ In order to cope with the trauma that Hally had experienced at the hands of his racist, crippled and drunkard father, Sam made him a kite and taught him to fly it.

✓ This made Hally look up to something instead of looking down with shame and drowning in embarrassment, which is traumatic for a little white boy living in the Apartheid era.

**Sam’s room**

✓ Sam’s room in the play symbolises a sanctuary for Hally. This is a place where Hally could go to escape all family troubles. This room was Hally’s place of refuge, he found love, comfort and solace that he needed to survive this conflicting world.

**Education** - Hally to Sam ‘informal education’

✓ Mathematics
✓ History
✓ English
✓ Physics
✓ Man of Magnitude

**Acceptance:**

✓ This refers to tolerating what is perceived as undesirable behaviour
✓ You cannot change the way things are but you can charge the way you perceive it.
  i.e. Willie being an African man is stripped off his manhood by being deprived of the respect he deserves...calling a little boy ‘Master’

This means the victim of trauma mentally and psychologically produces fresh insights and a new sense of purpose and hope
Ballroom dancing - throughout this play Sam and Willie talk about Ballroom dancing, a competition in which Willie is going to take part in.

- Ballroom dancing symbolises a world without collision, freedom and escape.

- Willie and Sam hope and are optimistic to one day see a world without racism and apartheid, a South Africa in which both blacks and whites get along “dance together”, without bumping into each other. Just like the dancers in a ball room.

These are some examples that you may use to illustrate Trauma and Resilience theory.

QUESTION 2

Post-colonial theory is a literary theory or critical approach that deals with literature produced in countries that were once, or are now, colonies of other countries.

It may also deal with literature written in or by citizens of colonising countries that takes colonies or their peoples as its subject matter.

The theory is based around concepts of otherness and resistance. Post-colonial theory thus deals with the reading and writing of literature written in previously or currently colonised countries, or literature written in colonising countries which deals with colonisation or colonised peoples.

The theory looks at the way in which literature by the colonising culture distorts the experience and realities, and inscribes the inferiority, of the colonised people.

It can also deal with the way in which literature in colonising countries appropriates the language, images, scenes, traditions and so forth of colonised countries.

Refer to the contributors to this theory

Homi K. Bhabha "The Commitment to Theory"
Edward W. Said Orientalism
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

Refer to the Post-colonial Literary Criticism Agendas:

According to Barry (1995: 198), there are six agendas of postcolonial literary criticism. The agendas are:

1. rejecting universalist claims by Western norms as they cannot identify cultural and ethnic differences,
2. examining the representation of other cultures in literature,
3. showing how literature tends to be silent concerning with colonization,
4. bringing up issues on cultural difference and diversity and their treatment in literature,
5. celebrating hybridity and ‘cultural polyvalency’, a state when someone belongs to more than one culture, and
6. developing a perspective in which marginality, plurality, and ‘Otherness’ are not seen as lower.
Refer to the concerns of the theory:

1) Reclaiming spaces and places
Colonialism was, above all, a means of claiming and exploiting foreign lands, resources, and people. Enslavement, indentured labour, and migration forced many indigenous populations to move from the places that they considered “home”. Postcolonial literature attempts to counteract their resulting alienation from their surroundings by restoring a connection between indigenous people and places through description, narration, and dramatisation. Thus, literature by colonised peoples attempts to articulate their identity and reclaim their past in the face of that past’s inevitable otherness.

2) Asserting cultural integrity
During colonisation, the indigenous cultures of those countries subjected to foreign rule were often sidelined, suppressed, and openly denigrated in favour of elevating the social and cultural preferences and conventions of the colonizers. In response, much postcolonial literature seeks to assert the richness and validity of indigenous cultures in an effort to restore pride in practices and traditions that were systematically degraded under colonialism.

3) Revising history
Colonizers often depicted their colonial subjects as existing “outside of history” in unchanging, timeless societies, unable to progress or develop without their intervention and assistance. In this way, they justified their actions, including violence against those who resisted colonial rule. Revising history to tell things from the perspective of those colonized is thus a major preoccupation of postcolonial writing.

The characteristics
1) Resistant descriptions
2) Appropriation of the colonizers’ language
3) Reworking colonial art-forms

Barry (1995: 193) states that there are four characteristics of postcolonial literary criticism.

The first characteristic is “an awareness of representations of the non-European as exotic or immoral ‘Other’, which is still related to Fanon’s idea of reclaiming one’s own past or pre-colonial era and thus rejecting the modern or the colonial era.

The second is the concern with colonial language. Since it is originally the colonizer’s language, post colonial writers feel that the language belongs to somebody else. They also feel that the language should not be moved
around, changed, or modified without permission. Therefore, using it will involve an agreement in colonial structures. The third is the recognition of an identity as double or hybrid. It concerns with identity issues. Post-colonial writers often have double identity, one identity as the colonizer and the other as the colonized, and it is reflected in their writings. The last is the emphasis on 'cross-cultural' interactions, as postcolonial writers seem to make a transition from the European models into African or Asian forms. The transition has three phases (Barry, 1995: 195).
- The first is 'adopt' phase, when the writers adopt the European form as it stands because it is assumed as universally valid.
- The second is 'adapt' phase, when the writers adapt European form to African or Asian matters.
- The last is 'adept' phase, when the writers remake the form with its own characteristics, without reference to European form.

Use the above ideas to as a guide to analyse the text from a postcolonial perspective.

Conclusion

Marking your assignments was quite a pleasure. I am happy to say that I also obtained new knowledge from some of them.

To those of you who obtained good marks; let me say that as your Tutor Marker, I am very pleased when students excel like that. Bear in mind that marks are not given but awarded and where there is evidence of hard work it is rewarded handsomely.

For those of you with a mediocre average mark; I would like to urge you to work harder. Success comes with hard work.

Finally, I would like to advise all you to read the Study Guide; make use of it exhaustively, as well as any other reading materials you can find. This will help you to prepare for the exam. In addition, make your own notes as you read to take note of the significant points in every set text.

Please do not hesitate to call or email us if you have any query concerning any of the course topics.

I wish you all the best in your preparations for the exam.

Your Tutor
Dr Juliet Pasi

END OF FEEDBACK TUTORIAL LETTER