

**ENGL. 215.003:
Reading Literature: Camp
Final Exam**

Due:

- *When*—Friday 5/1 by 11:59 PM (unless otherwise discussed; I'm happy to grant extensions, within reason)
- *Where*—On Blackboard under "Assignments"/ "Final Exam": please upload your responses in a Word or pdf document.

Guidelines:

**** All of your responses MUST be in your own words****

- ***Source Consultation:*** This exam is open book, open note. While I can't prevent you from turning to Wikipedia or Schmoop for help on this exam, I will say that I will be looking for responses that reflect what we have covered and discussed in class. You should be able to complete these questions using:
 - Your own copies of the reading and notes from the course
 - Class powerpoints (including from the first half of the semester)
 - Weekly "summation" emails I have sent over the second half of the course.
- ***Questions:*** I will be holding my usual virtual office hours on Wednesday and checking email, so don't hesitate to be in touch if you have a question. I can't coach you on what to write but if you have questions about what is being asked of you, I am happy to clarify.
- ***Formatting:*** Please double-space your exam and submit it in a Word document or a pdf. As you type up your responses, please be sure that you include a heading that indicates what section of the exam you are responding to.

****Very important:** Did I mention that all of your responses **MUST** be in your own words? They must.

I. Passage Identification (15 points, 5 points apiece): Select three of the of the following passages and 1) identify what work they come from 2) use specific details from the passage to justify your identification and 3) explain the significance of the passage for our thinking in this course.

A

One can't attend a writer's conference without having to pay penance to the vaunted African-American oral tradition. Ironically, whenever a fellow panelist says to me, "Mr. Beatty, you've been awful quiet, can you say a little something about the African-American oral tradition?" I like to mime a reenactment of a toothless, mute, and gagged African captive asking his slave ship bunkmate to stop stepping on his toes. What is never

B

You said this: that I was just like a cat;
Whoever wanted to singe a cat's skin
He could be sure the cat would then stay in; 350
And if the cat's skin were so sleek and gay,
She'd not stay in the house for half a day;
Both she'd go, before the day was dawning,
To show her skin and to go caterwauling.
That is to say, if I am gay, sir shrew, 355
I'll run to put my poor old clothes on view.

C

Traitor! (*cried she*) as soon as she had read them, 'tis thus our silly, fond, believing sex are served when they put faith in man. So had I been deceived and cheated, had I like the rest believed, and sat down mourning in absence, and vainly waiting recovered tendernesses.—How do some women (*continued she*) make their life a hell, burning in fruitless expectations, and dreaming out their days in hopes and fears, then wake at last to all the horror of despair?—But I have outwitted even the most subtle of the deceiving kind, and while he thinks to fool me, is himself the only beguiled person.

D

"Sho' nough." Kenya mugged at the audience and they laughed again. "Before we talk about the book, we want to hear a little bit about you. You're not from the South, are you?"

"No, I'm from Ohio originally. Akron. When I was twelve I went to visit some relatives in Harlem for a couple of days and that's what the novel comes from."

"The language is so real and the characters are so true to life. Girl, I just couldn't believe this was your first book. Where'd you go to college?"

"I went to Oberlin for a couple of years, then moved to New York."

...

E

"Yes, you're right. She's amazing. Marvelous," he muttered.

Everyone else in the room was deliberately not staring. About Helga there sputtered a little staccato murmur of manufactured conversation. Meanwhile she could think of no proper word of greeting to the outrageous man before her. She wanted, very badly, to laugh. But the man was as unaware of her omission as of her desire. His words flowed on and on, rising and rising. She tried to follow, but his rapid Danish eluded her. She caught only words, phrases, here and there. "Superb eyes . . . color . . . neck column . . . yellow . . . hair . . . alive . . . wonderful . . ." His speech was for Fru Dahl. For a bit longer he lingered before the silent girl, whose smile had become a fixed aching mask, still gazing appraisingly, but saying no word to her, and then moved away with Fru Dahl, talking rapidly and excitedly to her and her husband, who joined them for a moment at the far side of the room. Then he was gone as suddenly as he had come.

...

II. Sontag Mix and Match (10 points, 5 points apiece)—Choose two passages from the excerpts of course texts below and two passages from Sontag. Pair the course text with a passage from Sontag. In a response of several sentences, explain how the image or passage from our course text illustrates or otherwise engages with Sontag’s point about camp.

Course texts:

A. From Larsen, *Quicksand*, p. 51:

Turning from the window, her gaze wandered contemptuously over the dull attire of the women workers. Drab colors, mostly navy blue, black, brown, unrelieved, save for a scrap of white or tan about the hands and necks. Fragments of a speech made by the dean of women floated through her thoughts—“Bright colors are vulgar”—“Black, gray, brown, and navy blue are the most becoming colors for colored people”—“Dark-complexioned people shouldn’t wear yellow, or green or red.”—The dean was a woman from one of the “first families”—a great “race” woman; she, Helga Crane, a despised mulatto; but something intuitive, some unanalyzed driving spirit of loyalty to the inherent racial need for gorgeousness told her that bright colors *were* fitting and that dark-complexioned people *should* wear yellow, green, and red. Black, brown, and gray were ruinous to them, actually destroyed the luminous tones lurking in their dusky skins. One of the loveliest sights Helga had ever seen had been a sooty black girl decked out in a flaming orange dress, which a horrified matron had next day consigned to the dyer. Why, she wondered, didn’t someone write *A Plea for Color*?

B. From Trecartin, *Center Jenny*



C. Portrait of Harlem Renaissance singer Bessie Smith by the photographer Carl Van Vechten



D. Chaucer, General Prologue portrait of the Wife of Bath:

A good WIFE was there from nearby to BATH; 445
It was a pity she was deaf by half.
In cloth-making she had such a talent
She far passed those from Ypres and from Ghent.⁴⁹
And throughout all her parish, there was no
Wife who might first to the offering go 450
Before her; if one did, so mad was she
That she lost any sense of charity.
Her coverchiefs of fine linen were found;
I dare swear that they weighed a full ten pounds,
The ones that, Sundays, sat upon her head. 455
Her stockings were all fine and scarlet red,
Quite tightly laced, her shoes quite soft and new.
Bold was her face, and fair, and red of hue.
All her life, she was a worthy woman,
Husbands at the church door, she'd had five then, 460
Not counting other company in youth—
No need to speak of that now, to tell the truth.

Sontag Passages:

a.

7. All Camp objects, and persons, contain a large element of artifice. Nothing in nature can be campy. . . . Rural Camp is still man-made, and most campy objects are urban. (Yet, they often have a serenity—or a naïveté—which is the equivalent of pastoral. A great deal of Camp suggests Empson's phrase, "urban pastoral.")

b.

17. This comes out clearly in the vulgar use of the word Camp as a verb, "to camp," something that people do. To camp is a mode of seduction—one which employs flamboyant mannerisms susceptible of a double interpretation; gestures full of duplicity, with a witty meaning for cognoscenti and another, more impersonal, for outsiders. Equally and by extension, when the word becomes a noun, when a person or a thing is "a camp," a duplicity is involved.

c.

38. Camp is the consistently aesthetic experience of the world. It incarnates a victory of "style" over "content," "aesthetics" over "morality," of irony over tragedy.

d.

54. The experiences of Camp are based on the great discovery that the sensibility of high culture has no monopoly upon refinement. Camp asserts that good taste is not simply good taste; that there exists, indeed, a good taste of bad taste. (Genet talks about this in *Our Lady of the Flowers*.) The discovery of the good taste of bad taste can be very liberating. The man who insists on high and serious pleasure is denying himself.

e.

55. Camp taste is, above all, a mode of enjoyment, of appreciation—not judgment. Camp is generous. It wants to enjoy. It only seems like malice, cynicism. (Or, if it is cynicism, it's not a ruthless but a sweet cynicism.) Camp taste doesn't propose that it is in bad taste to be serious; it doesn't sneer at someone who succeeds in being seriously dramatic. What it does is to find the success in certain passionate failures.

III. Short Essay (15 points)— In your final Blackboard post, I asked you to choose a text that you thought of over the course of completing work for this class or that resonates with one of our course texts in some way and describe the text you chose (who made it, when is it from, what happens in it) and explain how it reminded you of one of our course texts. Here I am asking you to develop your last Blackboard response into a short essay of 1-2 pages. In this essay, expand your explanation of how your focal texts interact by incorporating some analysis of how you see parody, caricature, or a camp sensibility operating in both texts. Be sure to refer to details from class (lecture, discussion, and/or powerpoints).

Extra Credit (up to 5 points; can be applied to the course as a whole, not just the exam)— Choose one of the images below and, in a substantive paragraph, discuss its relationship to camp AND either “Afrosurrealism” OR “anti-camp.” How does the image evoke a camp style or sensibility and how might that sensibility overlap with or diverge from Afrosurrealism or anticamp?



Katy Perry at the “Camp” Met Costume Gala, 2019



Sun Ra (1914-1993), American composer and musician, promotional image