

Final Exam Questions
Engl 123B, Fall 2015

Your final examination will consist of two essays. One of them will be on a general question covering works from throughout the semester. The other essay will be written on one of the following topics dealing with Bessie Head's *Maru* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* – though you will not find out which one until the exam itself. The idea, obviously, is to get you to think in depth about all of these subjects, even though you will end up writing only on one of them. Writing an in-class essay on literature is much like writing any other essay on literature, with the exception that you are not expected to be able to quote passages from the texts (and, while it is possible to memorize particularly important passages for use on the exam, and you are encouraged to do so if you wish, such a display of recall will not be valued any higher than a detailed description of the same passage—the more detailed, the better). Please come to the exam (with at least one 8½" x 11" exam booklet) prepared to write on one of the following:

1. *Education and Aspiration*. Both novels are centrally concerned with the academic aspirations of their female characters. In Head's fiction, that focus is primarily on Margaret Cadmore, but also includes Dikeledi. In Dangarembga's novel, it touches on Maiguru and Nyasha, as well as Tambu herself. For Margaret and Tambu, an education is all that saves them from a very different life; yet that education, for the former, is literally an experiment, and for the latter is literally an accident. Discuss education as a theme in these works, and one full of implications about gender, class and ethnicity.
2. *Order and Disorders*. In *Nervous Conditions*, Nyasha's anorexia helps to challenge the assumptions of other characters in the novel; in *Maru*, Margaret's ethnicity does the same. These are the central conflicts of the novels, and yet they involve relatively minor characters who are significant primarily for their impact on others, especially Tambu and Maru, respectively. Explain the roles of Nyasha and Margaret, and their "conditions," in bringing the protagonists to their ultimate understanding.
3. *Mothering and Smothering*. As we have often seen previously in this course, mothers play an important role in both these novels. Here, however, the woman Margaret Cadmore calls "mother," in *Maru*, and the mother of the narrator in *Nervous Conditions* are both un-maternal: Tambu's mother is weak and sickly throughout, while the British Margaret Cadmore is coldly dispassionate, undercutting the usual nurturing role and providing, instead, a sense of alienation or misdirection for both daughters. Discuss the effects of these maternally challenged women on their children, and how those relationships translate into larger themes in both novels.