

Tutorial letter 202/1/2018

Colonial and Postcolonial African Literatures

ENG2603

Semester 1

Department of English Studies

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BAR CODE

Dear Student

SEMESTER 1, ASSIGNMENT 02

***A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry**

Using the characters of Walter Younger, Beneatha, Ruth and Lena Younger, write an essay in which you discuss how the arrival of the insurance money enhanced gender stereotypes in *A Raisin in the Sun*.

This question seems to be straightforward and un-restricting, as it permits the student to think about the furtherance of gender stereotypes even beyond the arrival of the insurance money in the Younger household. This is in as much as it permits the discussions of gender stereotypes prior to the incident. This question does not limit the students to focus only on the characters that are mentioned in the question. Students can expand as much as they want by adding other characters whom they consider worth discussing in response to the essay question. However, this feedback letter will pay more attention to Walter, Beneatha, Ruth and Lena Younger.

To help you understand the essay question, the word enhance means to increase, heighten or strengthen. In the context of your assignment question, it means the intensification of gender stereotypes that are oppressive and discriminatory, particularly to women. In the light of this explanation, this essay question wants the students to show through discussion the manner in which the insurance money worsened gender stereotypes in *A Raisin in the Sun*. To conclude that the arrival of this money did indeed enhance gender stereotypes may be excessively critical as one or more students may argue otherwise. We encourage presentation of different views and arguments in a literature module, especially when corroborated with cogent evidence from the primary text. Before we discuss these characters, it is vitally important that we subtly touch on the structure of an essay.

The essay structure

An essay is expected to have an introduction, body and conclusion. Your introduction should be the size of a paragraph, where you say in your own words what the essay question requires you to do, as well as state what you are going to do in the body of your essay, and how. Remember that part of your task here is done, as the question already instructs you to analyse the text. That is already part of the 'how'. In certain kinds of questions, this is where you are going to state whether you are going to argue for or against. In other words, the introductory/opening paragraph charts the direction your essay is going to take. Once you have completed your introduction, the next step of your essay is the body.

The second paragraph marks the beginning of the body of your essay. The body of an essay comprises the paragraphs between an introduction and conclusion. This is where you present your arguments in response to the question. Each paragraph in the body of an

essay represents an idea that justifies a thesis statement/what you set out to demonstrate in relation to the assignment question. Once you are done with presenting your well substantiated ideas/arguments which are contained in paragraphs, you go to the last step, conclusion.

In your conclusion, you are expected to summarise the arguments/ideas that you presented in the body. You briefly demonstrate how you arrived at the interpretations or conclusions you made in relation to aspects of what your assignment question requires you to address. These various conclusions within your essay should lead to an overall conclusion/finding on the central requirement of your response, which several lower level conclusions along the way of your essay writing leading logically to it. Such a major conclusion should link with what you have declared to pursue in your first/opening/introductory paragraph, which you established as what your assignment question requires you to do.

The characters

Walter Younger

Literature is polyvalent in nature and, accordingly, various and contrasting ideas or arguments are anticipated. In the light of this assertion, it is worth noting that Walter is also a victim of patriarchy. This implies that Walter is born in a society where patriarchy is upheld and women are expected to conform to social expectations. Gender stereotypes about male superiority and female inferiority have been inculcated in Walter, both by his parents and society. Consequently, Walter perceives taking care of his family and playing a role of family-head as his entitlement due to his being a man. From this point of view, he perceives himself as superior to women in his family.

Since Walter has imbibed these gender stereotypes and social expectations, he starts acting superior as he believes that his dream of the liquor business is better than everyone else's dream. This is firstly manifested when Walter perceives being a doctor as not good for women. Hence his dialogue, "Who the hell told you you had to be a doctor? If you so crazy 'bout messing 'round with sick people- then go be a nurse like other women- or just get married and be quiet..." (Hansberry, 2011: 22). Although this perception is upheld by both Walter and the society, it has become enhanced in the Younger family both before and after the money has arrived. This is so because Walter sees his business dream as urgent and more important than others,' as he believes that it will help him take care of the family as a man of the house. This is evident when Walter asks if anyone has any knowledge about fees in medical school: "Have we figured out yet just exactly how much medical school is going to cost?" (Hansberry, 2011: 20).

Walter's feeling of superiority as a man resurfaces when he realises that he does not get enough support from Ruth. He shows this by belittling her (Ruth) and other black women's thinking in general: "We one group of men tied to a race of women with small minds" (Hansberry, 2011: 19).

Beneatha

This is a young girl who is a victim of gender stereotypes, which intensifies with the arrival of insurance money that the Youngers receive. Beneatha's dream of becoming a doctor takes a knock when Walter and the society show disapproval of a woman becoming a doctor. It is overtly known and believed that women should be nurses. Despite such a bias, Beneatha is not derailed from pursuing her dream of becoming a doctor.

Beneatha's dream takes another huge, unanticipated setback when Walter loses the money, including money that was supposed to be saved for her education. This can be attributed to Lena's upholding of gender stereotypes. It is because Lena has put Walter in charge of all the money, including money for Beneatha's education, that Beneatha's dream has been unruffled, leading to despair in her life. The above two scenarios confirm the link between gender stereotypes and the deferment of Beneatha's dream as a result of gender stereotypes.

Ruth

Walter's wife, Ruth, finds herself between a rock and a hard place, as she has to choose between supporting her husband's business dream and Lena's dream of buying a house. Although she seems to support Lena's idea of buying a house, her situation is made complicated by Walter's persistent request that she should impel Lena to support his business idea with a portion of insurance money. Her role in upholding gender stereotypes is made to appear minimal by Walter's persistent call for her backing, in spite of her full support for Lena's idea of a house.

Apart from the circumstances, especially in the initial stages of the play, of her own right Ruth contributes to the enhancement of gender stereotypes. She reminds Walter that as a man he is expected to bring money home, and that she will entertain no excuse for not having money on a weekend: "They said Saturday and this is just Friday and hope's to God you ain't going to get up here first thing this morning and start talking to me 'bout no money- 'cause 'bout don't want to hear it" (Hansberry, 2011: 11). This is a heavy burden or gender stereotype men are to endure as they are expected to put bread on the table for their families, irrespective of their conditions.

Lena Younger

It is important to acknowledge the fact that Lena Younger belongs to a generation that does not only uphold male superiority, but also promotes it and sees nothing wrong in doing so. Lena affirms such an assertion when she concedes that her husband, Walter Lee (senior), is as despicable as he is unkind to women: "Crazy 'bout his children! God knows there was plenty wrong with Walter Younger- hard-headed, mean, kind of wild with women- plenty wrong with him. But he sure loved his children..." (Hansberry, 2011: 28). This further confirms that Lena has no problem with Walter (her son) looking down on women and generally acting superior.

Moreover, Lena, in the light of the above paragraph, puts Walter as head of the family for he believes that men are supposed to lead their families: "I'm telling you to be the head of this family from now on like you supposed to be" (Hansberry, 2011: 81). This exposes Lena's own belief that women are not suitable to head their families. Lena's belief that indeed men are supposed to be in charge is further revealed when she decides to put the money under Walter's control without reservations: "Monday morning I want you to take this money and take three thousand dollars and put it in a savings account for Beneatha's medical schooling. The rest you put in a checking account- with your name on it. And from now on any penny that come out of it or go in it is for you to look after (Hansberry, 2011: 81).

The above scenarios concretise a claim that the arrival of the insurance money indeed intensifies gender stereotypes in the Younger family.