

Tutorial letter 202/2/2017

Colonial and Postcolonial African Literatures

ENG2603

Semester 2

Department of English Studies

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1. Feedback: Assignment 02.

BAR CODE

Dear Student

Semester 2: Assignment 02

The insurance money for mama's husband's life insurance seems to have made the Youngers aware of their poverty and the need for them to improve their situation (dreaming). In a carefully worded essay, discuss how each member of the Younger family wanted the money to be used.

In response to the above question, you were expected at least to show your understanding of the text. In your introduction, you were expected to contextualise and analyse the question and then present your hypothesis. In the body of your essay, you were expected to present your arguments in response to the question or justifying your thesis statement. These arguments must be supported with evidence from the text and other relevant sources. In your conclusion, you were expected to summarize all the arguments you presented in the body of your essay.

The structure of an essay should be followed fully irrespective of different arguments and understandings of the texts. Regarding structure, knowing paragraph structure will help you attain a goal of essay cohesion and logic. A paragraph should consist of main idea (which is always the first sentence of paragraph) and supporting ideas (those that follow the main idea which duty is to explain and elaborate the main idea).

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

In your introduction, you were expected to give a background in line with the question of your essay. In your background, you can explain how slavery and racism affected black people in America. You were also anticipated to include your thesis statement. In presenting your thesis statement, you can assert: 'This essay discusses how each member of the Younger family wanted the money to be used as each wanted the money in order to fulfill his/her dream.' Your thesis statement must be supported with ideas that are going to be discussed in the body of your essay. If you have five ideas, you are going to have five paragraphs. Each idea should be discussed extensively in a paragraph.

The second paragraph commences the body of your essay. It is in this paragraph that you are expected to present your first argument in justifying your thesis statement. In justifying your thesis statement, you may argue that: Although it had been Beneatha's childhood dream to be a doctor, the arrival of the insurance money seems to have brought hope for her as Lena Younger reserved a portion for Beneatha's education. This idea must be the first sentence of your paragraph and should be followed by supporting ideas. The supporting ideas/sentences are those sentences that support, explain and elaborate the main idea. The supporting ideas can be between two and four, depending on the availability of ideas. Whatever you are saying, should be supported with evidence from the text and/or other relevant sources. This evidence should be presented in a form of quotes or paraphrased evidence. One of the relevant quotes is when Lena Younger shows her full support or supports Beneatha's dream as she makes it clear that a portion of the money must go to her studies "Some of it got to be put away for Beneatha and her schoolin' - and ain't nothing going to touch that part of it. Nothing" (Hansberry, 2011: 27). (Please do not forget to say something about your quote in relation to the main idea and/or thesis statement.)

In the third paragraph, you should be discussing the second idea. In presenting your second idea, you may argue or say: On the other hand, Walter wants the money to be used in supporting his dream of owning a business. This main idea (first sentence) must be followed by supporting sentences that will explain and elaborate it. These supporting ideas/sentences should be strengthened with evidence from the text and/or other relevant sources. One of the relevant quotes that you can use is when Walter seems to be desperate to pursue his dream and this is manifested when he implored his wife (Ruth) to ask Lena to give the money to him “This ain’t no fly-by-night proposition, baby. I mean we figure it out, me and Willy and Bobo” (Hansberry, 2011: 17). The second quote that you can use as evidence is when Walter goes to an extent of speaking to his mother so that he could access the money “Mama- sometimes when I’m downtown and I pass them cool, quiet-looking restaurants where them white boys are sitting back and talking ‘bout things...sitting there turning deals worth millions of dollars...sometimes I see guys don’t look much older than me” (Hansberry, 2011: 53). (Please do not forget to say something about your quote in relation to the main idea and/or thesis statement.)

In the fourth paragraph, you were expected to present a third idea. In presenting your third idea, you may say: Moreover, Lena Younger’s dream of owning a house one day has also been there for a very long time and it needed to be fulfilled. This main idea must be followed by supporting ideas/sentences which explain and elaborate the main idea. These supporting ideas should be substantiated with evidence from the text and/or other relevant sources. The relevant source or quote that you can use is when Lena Younger says: “Been thinking that we maybe could meet the notes on a little old two-storey somewhere, with a yard where Travis could play in the summer-time, if we use part of the insurance for a down payment and everybody kind of pitch in” (Hansberry, 2011: 27). The second quote that you may want to use in this paragraph is when Lena Younger says to Ruth “But, Lord, child, you should know all the dreams I had ‘bout buying that house and fixing it up and making me a little garden in the back. And didn’t none of it happen” (Hansberry, 2011: 28). (Please do not forget to say something about your quote/evidence in relation to the main idea and/or thesis statement.)

In the last paragraph, that is your conclusion, you were expected to summarise the arguments that you presented in the body of your essay in justifying your thesis statement. Although it is not compulsory to do this, you were expected to indicate that you are concluding. In concluding your essay, if you choose to indicate, you may say: Finally, this essay has argued and showed that each member of the Younger family has his or her way in which he or she wants the money to be used. This indication will be followed by a summary of arguments that you presented in the body of your essay. Your summary of arguments will be followed by your concluding statement in which you may say: In light of the above, this essay showed how each member of the Younger family wanted the money to be used in fulfilling their dreams.

Bibliography

Hansberry, Lorraine. (2011). *A Raisin in the Sun*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
Seven Steps to Heaven by Fred Khumalo

Best wishes

Lento MJ

Read the statement below and answer the question that follows.

The women in *Seven Steps to Heaven* are largely presented as stereotypes and serve only to provide emotional support and sexual gratification to the male characters.

With reference to three female characters in the novel discuss the validity of the above assertion.

TOTAL: 100

A successful response to a question depends on having closely reading the prescribed novel. From close reading, you will understand the story, plotline and come to know the names of characters, and reflect on the roles that the characters play in the society in which they are immersed. The above question is what we call an assertion, an unsubstantiated statement from which you are expected to respond by leading closely-analysed textual evidence. A stereotype is a characterisation in which one set or single quality or human behaviour is emphasised at the expense of other complex human qualities. From this preliminary understanding of the use of the word stereotype you are then required to judge from your understanding of the text whether or not it is true that women serve to “provide emotional support and sexual gratification to the male characters.

The first step to take is, of course, to identify three women for focus and debate as the question suggests you should do, and look at how they behave, how they understand themselves and how they are described by men. You then have to evaluate whether or not the description in the question lends itself as correct characterisation of the women. When you respond to an assertive statement you must use what I call belief qualifier: this is a kind of knowledge which you should have about the text in which you qualify your one answer by using such formulations as “To a greater extent,or to some extent ...it is true that women are weak and depend on men. Now, remember that this formulation must be included as the first sentence in your introduction because it allows the reader of your essay to understand your position that you are going to argue. Normally, an assertion contains some truth; that is why I urge you to say, “To some extent or greater extent....” But, if you are totally convinced that the question is misrepresenting the depiction women in the novel, you can also say that “To some extent, it is not entirely true that in *Seven Steps to Heaven*, women only serve emotional and sexual needs of men. Now, when you disagree, then I expect you to have very strong evidence to support your position.

Having established your position, you then arrange or organise the women whose roles you want to debate in a particular way beginning with discussing the role of the female characters whose human conduct in the novel provide the truth of the assertion. Next you must focus on a female character whom you feel deviates to some extent from the ‘truth’ expressed in the question. Lastly, you should discuss the role of female character or characters whom you think oppose the assertion the ‘truth’ of the question. If you find that some female characters display complexities such as serving men’s emotional and sexual pleasure, as well as at the same time defying men, or appearing to be stronger to some men, say so. This is the place your answer modifies the ‘truth’ of the assertion in the question.

When you begin the actual process of writing, I urge you to provide a synopsis of the novel. This is important, because it allows you to introduce the names of female characters you want to discuss in relationship to the names of some male characters against which you want to measure the truth in the statement of the question. Having done this, you can then focus on the first female characters, revealing how she serves men emotionally, and sexually. Remember to always provide references, especially when you quote verbatim and when you refer to an episode. I prefer that when you are debating the women’s roles, do it one after the other. This means debate one female character and say all what you have to say about her, and then move onto the next female character, and then the third female character. This way, you will be sure not to generalise, or collapse the roles of women because it is true that women respond differently to how they serve emotionally and sexually to men. Some women are too submissive so as to literally render themselves as objects of pleasure, while other women negotiate their servitude by which I mean that although they can serve men, but the women also demand to be recognized as human beings

worth of respect. Also, some women are dependent on men economically which means that their negotiating voice with men is minimised while other women may be of easy virtue but this is how they strengthen their position in relation to men. I have already said that the assertion in the question assumes that women serve men: but in the actual analysis of the novel, you shall find that some men literally are also dependent of women for emotional support. Debate how these men show their dependency and antagonism. Now, below, I will assist you to identify some women characters in the novel, and I will indicate how they are emotionally stranded and dependent on men. The female characters whose roles I am going to highlight are those I believe fit the bill- so to speak. You can identify other female characters in the novel, but I can safely tell you that *Seven Steps to Heaven* is a novel heavily written from the point of view of men; and that you will NOT find many female characters.

Sis Joy.

This is one of the female characters who openly lives her life as sexually dependent on men. She accepts payment for sleeping with men and sees it as a normal way of life. At the same time the way she takes money from men is also depicted as if she is playing and avenging herself on men's ego and appears as if this is her way of punishing men. On page 3 of the novel, a "dark boy" is described as producing a "crisp hundred-rand note" (p3) and gives Sis Joy. It is up to you to argue, in even the contrary, that it is men such as the dark boy who are emotionally dependent on women as the men actually go to the extent of paying to sleep with women. This line of argument is supported by the figure of the Reverend who sneaks into the homes of women he is supposed to minister on but ends up sleeping with them (21). But also, the fact that women like Sis Joy accepts this ascribed role of being prostituted means that they have constructed their identities as based on serving men. Mrs Dube openly condemns some women, calling them, loose and dangerous and people who have "lost touch with their proud African culture of humility and good manners"(22). The irony is that it is a woman who is attacking other women; the second irony is that this talk around the looseness of women is between Mrs Dube and the Reverend who is a predator on weak women. So, as if true to the meaning of her name, Sis Joy is actually living out that name by way of giving herself to whosoever gives her money. Now, can you say that a woman who chooses how much she must be given and which men with which she cohabits with is entirely weak? I leave this to you to ponder on the character of Sis Joy.

Mrs Dube

She is another female character. One would expect good manners from this woman who chastises other women. But we read from the novel and from another woman, Mrs Tembe that Mrs Dube is not a good woman. She is described as having a "'sharp tongue – especially when talking to her husband"(46). A sharp tongue may suggest that Mrs Dube is rude or indulges in gossip. Furthermore, we read that she "beats up her husband"(47). The reader does not come across a Mrs Dube who actually beats up her husband in the novel but the mere fact that these allegations are made against her means that she is a strong woman and not a weak women. Or, you could argue that she is too emotionally violent, lacks rationality and resorts to violence and not dialogue and therefore she is not strong.

Mrs Tembe

She is depicted as a weak character. When her lecherous reverend husband is fired by Church authorities, she breaks down. She thinks the negative effect of her husband costs her, her “status, her privileges”(116). It is true that the husband continues to support her financially, paying the house bills, “Yet all these things did not ameliorate her emotional anguish. She longed for the lost comfort of having a husband and a son around the house. These had been the pillars of her strength”(117). In this quote it is revealed that Mrs Tembe defines herself around the descriptions and definitions created by men. Furthermore her total breakdown is indicated from “Tears that started falling down her cheeks as she remembered the days they'd spent visiting the church...”(p117). The church is a male dominated institution so Mrs Tembe is emotionally dependent on her husband as well as the church. Just like the Old woman Mrs Dube, it seems in the novel, Mrs Tembe is typical of the responses of old women who find themselves emotionally, economically and sexually dependent on men. To this extent, the assertion in the question is true.

Lettie Motaung

This woman is different from other women. She tells Ma that her husband goes around chasing women(86). Lettie is described by Mrs Tembe who is the wife of the reverend that she, Lettie is different from other women: “she was’nt dressed in the slutish outfits – miniskirts, high-heeled shoes, heavy make-up, blood red lips, fluttering eye lashes”(87). The imagery in the description of women suggests they are predators who use their bodies to lure and conquer men. Also notice that part of the stereotype is that women’s clothes is associated with a particular negative behaviour. But we also read from Lettie that women have to be strong, especially against lecherous men: She tells Mrs Tembe that she would punish her husband for leaving the family and wife in pursuit of women. She says: “One has to take some tough decisions sometimes, Which is why I am going to punish your husband once he comes back. He has caused a lot of damage t my business already”(87). Lettie has self-worth, is confident and can actually talk of punishing men. In her speech she reverses the roles of men and women; she depicts herself as strong and talks of men as weak.

Lovey

Another vulnerable and yet strong woman is Lovey. She is vulnerable in so far as she sleeps around with men for financial gain.(95). But the author characterises her as emotionally strong; she is one who leave the reverend to whine and pine. She tells the reverend : “What have I done? Stop behaving like a kid. Be a man with balls. Go home and face the music...Isn’t that what you preach to members of your congregation, to be strong enough to make peace with their Gods, to love and treasure their families”(96). Lettie chastises the reverend for morally falling from spiritual/religious grace to grass. When the reverend continues seeking emotional support from Lettie, she shows her power over him. It is said in the novel that she, “glared at him for a few moments, clambered into the jeans and clicked her tongue in disgust. “Enough shit now. Get out of that bed and let’s go” Lettie shows feelings ‘disgust’, uses bad language like men and ca order men to get out of her bed. She is an ambiguous woman. Weak and strong at the same time.

Men in *Seven Steps to Heaven*

Although men are portrayed as initiating action, running the show, they are dependent on the emotional and sexual pleasure that women can offer or chose to withdraw as and when they feel so. To this extent, men are ae also weak. However, the end of the novel shows that it is men like Sizwe who fought for South African democracy. The men commingle with other liberation forces in Zimbabwe who are depicted as man of action. In other words, on the domestic space men appear to be strong but they are shown as dependent on women for sex, food, and emotional scaffolding. Outside this space, like in the church, or at the war front, during the liberation struggle, men dominated this public sphere.

Conclusion

I have assisted you in showing how to structure your essay, argue and arrive at the conclusion that to some extent, and in the domestic sphere women are portrayed as emotionally and sexual dependent on men. But in the same space some young women tend to re-negotiate this space so that at times women emerge as in control, especially when they force men to pay for sex. Outside the private sphere, women are economically dependent on men, and it is men who dominate defining the values of this space. Men are also depicted as both strong and weak.

I hope you will benefit from my analysis of the question. Good Luck!

Prof M T Vambe