



Tutorial Letter 202/3/2014

Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures

ENG2603

Semesters 1 & 2

Department of English Studies

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

This tutorial letter contains important pre-examination information and feedback on Assignment 02.

BAR CODE



Dear students

The following material is for your feedback on the assignments you submitted for the module. In the main, we are excited by the learning potential displayed by your responses and encourage you to continuously engage with the texts in a meaningful manner.

We have decided to provide you with as much feedback as possible by writing the responses as bona fide essays. You will notice that what we advocate, things such as using textual evidence to buttress your responses, is how the responses advance. So, for instance, in the example of *A Raisin in the Sun*, it makes little difference to write circularly about the theme of 'dreams' in the play without providing concrete textual evidence through direct quotations to substantiate your argument. This is critical, as it allows the marker to see the extent of your critical engagement with the text you had chosen to answer. It is critical, too, to use the e-reserves to augment and expand your understanding of a text as seen through the eyes of scholars of impeccable reputations. Only by engaging with academics' publications can you broaden your horizons rather than an over-reliance on Internet sources which are not vetted by academics and which, for the most part, are notoriously ill-informed and of dubious intellectual merit.

Please go through the feedback material as another avenue in your learning curve. We hope you will engage with this material meaningfully, and do ask questions regarding any aspect of these responses that you do not understand.

Pre-Examination Preparation

Your examinations are scheduled for May/June, and October/November of this academic year. Please consult myUnisa for an update of your examination dates.

The examination paper is composed of two sections: A and B. You have to answer only one question per section but not both questions from the same section. Please be clear on this matter: it is one question per section.

The four texts are distributed across both sections, and there are no compulsory questions. It is imperative, in order to pass the examination, not to try and determine which text/s will be in which section, as this form of 'spotting' leads to under-preparedness and may seriously harm your chances of successfully passing the module. What is important for us as lecturers is that our students be thoroughly prepared for an examination, rather than trying to either spot which books will be favourably positioned, or try and reproduce the assignment questions of particular books in the examination as answers. This will simply not do. Read the texts as thoroughly as you can, and read as much of the e-reserve materials per text as you possibly can as part of your examination preparation.

Please recall that your final mark is composed out of the semester mark, which you obtained for your assignments, plus the mark you will have obtained in the examination itself. It is thus important that you assiduously work at your assignments as well as prepare for the examination.

We wish you the best in your endeavours!

The ENG2603 Team.

ASSIGNMENT 02: *A Raisin in the Sun* or *Seven Steps to Heaven*

Due Dates: First semester: 7 April 2014

Second semester: 29 September 2014

Assignment 02: *A Raisin in the Sun* or *Seven Steps to Heaven*

Answer **ONE** of the following questions.

A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry

Read the following poem and answer the question below:

Lorraine Hansberry's play is closely tied to the concept of the dream in Langston Hughes's poem, 'A Dream Deferred'.

In a carefully structured essay of no more than 2000 words, discuss the impact of dreams in the lives of the characters.

'A Dream Deferred' by Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Things to consider:

Which characters specifically discuss their dreams? What is Mama's dream in life? Ruth's? Walter Lee's? Beneatha's? Do dreams ever become destructive, a substitute for action? OR Is it absolutely essential to keep a dream alive?

OR

Seven Steps to Heaven by Fred Khumalo

Discuss the courtroom observation by defence lawyer, Dries van Wyk, that his client Thulani, keeps calling himself Freedom Cele.

Consider too what he says in the same breath to Zimbabwean State Advocate, Simba Chigumburi (2007: 208), and what this implies about the creative choices the author has taken.

RESPONSE 1: Lorraine Hansberry's play is closely tied to the concept of the dream in Langston Hughes's poem, 'A Dream Deferred'.

In a carefully structured essay of no more than 2000 words, discuss the impact of dreams in the lives of the characters.

Prepared by: Dr. AR Musvoto

The significance of dreams in Lorraine Hansberry's play, *A Raisin in the Sun* (2011), cannot be downplayed because the conflicts that form the plot stem from the characters' struggles to have their various dreams fulfilled. The concept of the dream, as suggested in Langston Hughes's poem, 'A Dream Deferred', which provides the epigraph of the play, is a metaphor for human beings' aspirations in life. Through the use of the dream as metaphor, the poem probes as to what happens when the fulfilment of humans' ambitions is delayed. It is against this background that the aspirations of Hansberry's characters should be considered. The dreams that they hold and the quest to fulfil them, affect and alter their lives in many ways. Furthermore, these dreams, as my analysis of the aspirations of the main characters will demonstrate, have both positive and negative effects on individuals as well as the potential of both liberating and destroying those who hold them.

Before discussing the impact that dreams have on the lives of characters in the play, it is important to highlight that the structure of the plot is shaped by the dreams of four main characters – all adult members of the Younger family. These are Mama, Walter, Beneatha and Ruth. Mama's wish is to fulfil the dream that she shared with her late husband of buying a house for the family, while the dream of her son Walter is to own a business and be able to support his family. Beneatha, Mama's daughter, dreams of studying medicine and becoming a doctor while Ruth, Walter's wife, supports Mama's dream. Although these dreams are different, on their own, they are not necessarily the source of the tensions and conflicts that take place between the characters. Rather, clashes occur due to a cheque of ten thousand dollars – insurance money that has to be paid to Mama, the matriarch of the Younger family, following the death of her husband – which is necessary to support the accomplishment of these competing dreams. It is in this context that these different dreams become a source of conflict in the lives of characters.

The impact of dreams on individual characters' lives depends on the nature of the dream, the individual's values and also factors such as gender and generation. In the case of Beneatha, the ambition to become a doctor is outside the norms and expectations of her society and at once it significantly shapes how some of the family members relate to her. For instance, it is a source of conflict between herself and her older brother Walter who holds stereotypical views of occupations that women should follow in life. Despite this, Beneatha's ambition affords her a platform from which to interrogate such stereotypes and some of the generally accepted views about black women. For example, on the basis of her dream, she is able to challenge Ruth's suggestion that she should marry George Murchison because he is rich.

Get over it? What are you talking about, Ruth? Listen, I'm going to be a doctor. I'm not worried about who I'm going to marry yet – if ever I get married. (32)

In this regard, it becomes evident that Beneatha's dream alters the ways in which she views herself and her society, both in the present and future. It enables her to assert an alternative identity for herself and also to disrupt what is considered the norm for women, thereby broadening the limited spaces in which women's identities are confined. This search for an alternative identity is not only in terms of her dream of becoming a doctor; it is also manifested throughout the play in the manner in which she experiments with different activities, such as playing a guitar, acting and horse riding. This constant fleeing from one activity to another suggests that her other dream, which although overshadowed by the dominant and foregrounded conflicts in the play, is to acquire a fulfilling identity. The quest for such a dream is appropriately symbolised by the name 'Alaiyo' (One for Whom Bread – Food – Is Not Enough) that Assagai often uses to address her.

In contrast to Beneatha, Walter's dream is to start a business. This aspiration is driven by the need to fulfil his identity and role as a man, husband and father who should provide for the family. The continued deferment of this dream leaves him bitter and desperate, in as much as it negatively affects his interaction with the other members of the Younger family. It is in the context of these expectations that Walter deals with his dream and the complications surrounding his quest to fulfil it. The following rant that Walter makes in one of his exchanges with George Murchison highlights the distress engendered by the continued delay in realising his dream:

And you – ain't you bitter, man? Ain't just about had it yet? Don't you see no stars gleaming that you can't reach out and grab? You happy? – you contented son-of-bitch-you happy? You got it made? Bitter? Man, I'm a volcano. Bitter? I am a giant – surrounded by ants! Ants who can't even understand what is that the giant is talking about. (62)

This scene comes after yet another incident in which Walter confesses to Mama that he 'want[s] so many things that they are driving me [him] kind of crazy ...'. (52). This episode is important – it hints at Walter's restlessness and also serves to highlight the extent to which he has been consumed by the lure of the alternative lifestyle and identity that the achievement of his dreams would bring.

The desperation with which Walter pursues his dream transforms his noble idea of providing for his family into an unchecked desire to acquire wealth and power. It also has the uncanny result of distorting his view and judgement of the realities of everyday existence. This is particularly demonstrated in the episode in which, against the warnings of Ruth, he loses all the money (including the money that was earmarked to help Beneatha realise her dream of becoming a doctor) that Mama had entrusted him to keep, to Willy Harris whom he wants to start a liquor business with. Ironically, this incident further scuppers and defers Walter's dream in as much as it manifests his desire to find a quick solution to his problems. The ironic effect of Walter's failure becomes even more pronounced if one considers that earlier on, upon discovering that Mama had invested part of the money in a new house, he accused her of having butchered his dream.

The way in which Walter, who is on a path to destruction, has become a victim of his own dream is further underscored by how he is ready to sacrifice his own dignity and family pride in order to realise financial success. This is cogently expressed in the episode in which he is prepared to acquiesce to the racial prejudices of Mr Lindner to stop the Younger family from moving into their new house in Clybourne Park, a white neighbourhood, for a payment. The extent to which Walter has lost his pride is manifested as follows:

I'm going to feel fine, Mama. I'm going to look that son-of-a-bitch in the eyes and say ... 'All right, Mr Lindner ... that's your neighbourhood out there. You have the right to keep it like you want. Just write the cheque and – the house yours.' And I am going to say ... you people just put the money in my hand and you won't have to live next to this bunch of stinking niggers. Maybe ... I'll get down on my black knees... (112)

The rationale behind Walter's willingness to undergo such a humiliating act is to recover the money that he has lost to Willy Harris so that he can get his dream of attaining financial success on track. Owing to this incident, Walter emerges as an individual whose pursuit of financial freedom has left him with a

shallow sense of the self. In short, one can argue that Walter is a character who has been so traumatised by the prolonged deferment of his dream, such that with each desperate attempt he makes to fulfil it, he ironically makes the dream lose its original significance.

The manner in which Walter's personality has been adversely affected and altered by his dream contrasts sharply to how Mama handles her life-long goal of buying a house for her family. She is an individual who is able to keep a dream alive without sacrificing her values and the dignity of her family and, as evident throughout the play, she does not allow the deferment of her dream to affect her moral fortitude. She balances ambition and self-esteem. For her, the dream of owning a house is designed to bring pride to the family:

'Course I don't want to make it sound fancier than it is ... it's just a plain little old house – but it's made good and solid – and it will be *ours*. Walter Lee – it makes a difference in a man when he can walk on floors that belong to *him* ... (69)

It is such profundity that she derives from her aspirations, coupled with an appreciation of her family's values over generations, (which are lacking in Walter) which enables her to teach her children the importance of both dreams and pride:

Son – I come from five generations of people who was slaves and sharecroppers – but ain't nobody in my family never let nobody pay 'em no money that was a way of telling us we wasn't fit to walk the earth. We ain't never been that poor. (*Raising her eyes and looking at him.*) We ain't been that dead inside. (111)

It is thus no wonder that her dream is the only one that is realised by the time the play ends and becomes the rallying point of the family unit. In this respect, the house that she has always aspired to own, ceases to be merely a dream that has been realised, but becomes a symbol of stability that anchors the diverse and often fleeting ambitions of the different members of the Younger family.

In conclusion, the dreams and aspirations, which form the pivot around which the conflicts in the play revolve, affect each individual character differently. This is so because other critical factors, such as gender and stereotypes affect the individual characters in their processes of trying to relate to their different dreams and to fulfil them.

Bibliography

Hansberry, L . 2011. *A Raisin in the Sun*. London: Bloomsbury.

Response 2: Discuss the courtroom observation by defence lawyer, Dries van Wyk, that his client Thulani, keeps calling himself Freedom Cele. Consider too what he says in the same breath to Zimbabwean State Advocate, Simba Chigumburi (2007: 208), and what this implies about the creative choices the author has taken.

Prepared by: Prof K. Masemola

The response to this question needs to take stock of the issues of stereotyping on the one hand and multiplicity of identities on the other, especially since these frame the discussion in the court room. Considering the running refrain in *Seven Steps to Heaven*, which takes the form of an onion aphorism “When I was young if I made soup...everyone has layers”, a good response is one that tells us who Sizwe is, and who Dries might be. It is noteworthy that Sizwe is writing double is Thulani Tembe, now labelled Prisoner 2005 in the charges for the plotted DRC coup for which he faces execution.

The irony is that the selfsame Thulani Tembe, whom Sizwe wants to save, is said to be dead in Harare. In Chapter Thirty Six, it must be noted, there is a revealing staged ‘dialogue’:

‘The person you’re looking for, he who is two in one, Vusi Mntungwa and Thulani Tembe, is dead’

‘but he can’t be dead. Because I made him. I created him through my writing. I have to kill him. This is why I am here, to see that he is dead.’ (*Seven Steps to Heaven*, p.199-200)

The student must be able to point out here that this is in fact a monologue. Sizwe speaks to himself, interrogates his alter ego.

In turn, after Sizwe’s focus on Thulani Tembe aka Freedom Cele’s allegations of gun running, in the hotel room setting of the following Chapter Thirty Seven, attention is trained on a letter addressed to “Brother”, in which the writer declares:

‘I never left town, I was always there by you, but in your desperation to be me, you could not even recognize me in the street, so entrapped you were in your world of finding out who I really was. But I hope the journey has been worth the trouble. I hope it’s not the end of the journey, keep walking, maybe you will find out who I really am, and who you really are.

Your Brother,

Oneness of Two in Three

(*Seven Steps to Heaven*, p.203)

Given that the Oneness of Two in Three explicitly refers to the exciting postmodern novel-within-a-novel that shot Vusi Mntungwa to fame, it is quite possible to think of *Sizwe* as a book with many leaves, being every page from Thulani Tembe to Vusi Mntungwa to Freedom Cele right through to Sizwe Dube himself. The signature phrase in this book is ‘running away from yourself’. Besides that, the huge head-and-shoulder picture that had been stapled to the back cover was that of Sizwe. What is even more critical about this multiplicity is that Vusi Mntungwa represents the clan name of the actual author Fred Vusi Khumalo. The clan name of Khumalo is Mntungwa, which implies that the author is present in this fictional work, too.

What makes matters explicit is the fact that *Sizwe* had a brawl with the receptionist about the letter, when the receptionist pointed out to him that he wrote it; that the handwriting was his. This gives the analytical context of the given passage. When in the dock for planning the coup in the DRC with other mercenaries, the apparent lookalike of Freedom Cele is termed as deranged. Yet he makes his point clear in the beginning, only to obfuscate his identity later on when he addresses ‘Gentlemen of Zimbabwe, comrades who fought in the chimurenga,’ and then asks challengingly: ‘Do you know who I am?’

At this point both Advocate Dries van Wyk Louw and Advocate Simba Chigumburi are persuaded by evidence that not only is Freedom Cele not linked to mercenaries but also that he is alive and in all probability one person with a split identity. This explains why Dries concludes ‘Counsel, I don’t know what is going on. But I think the the identities of the two men have been fused so much that the men themselves do not know who they are, or what they want to be.’

Best Wishes!