

# **Tutorial letter 202/1/2017**

## **Colonial and Postcolonial African Literatures**

### **ENG2603**

#### **Semester 1**

#### **Department of English Studies**

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1. Feedback: Assignment 02.

BAR CODE

Dear Student

## **Semester 1, Assignment 02**

In cognizance of the Younger family's economic status and gender relations within the family, in a well-argued essay, discuss how racism and gender contributed to the situation the Youngers find themselves in.

Firstly, the above question required you to show your understanding of the text. You were expected to have an introduction, body and conclusion in your essay. In your introduction, you could have provided a background of the topic and announced your thesis statement. In the body of your essay, you were expected to present your arguments in response to the question. These arguments could have been supported with evidence from the text and other relevant sources. In your conclusion, you were anticipated to summarise all the arguments you have presented in the body of your essay.

Moreover, knowing paragraph structure will help you attain a goal of essay cohesion. A paragraph should consist of main idea (which is always the first sentence of paragraph) and supporting ideas (those that explain and elaborate the main idea).

Below is an example of an essay that attempts to answer the question. This essay is written with mindfulness that students have different understandings of the texts and therefore will present diverse arguments. Presentation of dissimilar point of views is natural. It is important that all these sentiments be supported with evidence from the text and other sources. This essay should serve as a mere guide.

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

The first paragraph is always an introduction. In your introduction, you are expected to give a background-information in relation to the given topic. In the case of the Younger family being affected by racism and gender discrimination, you may want to show how slavery and racial discrimination had affected black people in America. The latter may include the bad conditions black people had to endure. After the background information, you are also expected to present your thesis statement in this paragraph. In presenting thesis statement, you can say: "This essay argues that racism and gender discrimination have contributed immensely to the difficult situation the Youngers find themselves in." The latter sentence in quotes introduces the ideas that you are going to discuss in the body of your essay. If you have five ideas, it means you are going to have five paragraphs in the body of your essay.

The second paragraph of your essay marks the beginning of the second part or body of your essay. In this paragraph and in justifying your thesis statement, you may argue that Racism has negatively impacted the lives of black people in America as it impoverished and made them to be perceived as subhuman. This main idea will be presented as the first sentence in your second paragraph of the essay. The main idea should be followed by sentences that will explain and elaborate it (main idea/first sentence of the paragraph). In your elaboration, you may want to reveal that because white people did not perceive black people as human beings, white people felt that they could not live together with black people in the same location. A relevant quote that explains white racism is when Mrs Johnson says: "You mean you ain't read 'bout them coloured people that was bombed out their place out there" (Hansberry, 2011: 75). Another quote that explains this hatred is when Mr Lindner asserts: "What do you think you are going to gain by moving into a neighbourhood where you just aren't wanted and where some

elements- well- people can get awful worked up when they feel that their whole way of life and everything they've ever worked for is threatened" (Hansberry, 2011: 91). Please note that each and every quote taken from the text and other relevant sources should be referenced like the above one. Always say something about a quote you have used in relation to the main idea and/or thesis statement.

The third paragraph in the body of your essay, should present the second idea that further justifies your thesis statement in response to the assignment topic. As a second idea, you may argue that "Racism has also made sure that black people do not get good jobs as good jobs were only reserved for white people and this has impoverished young blacks such as Walter." As in the previous paragraph, the main idea should be your first sentence. This main idea should also be explained and elaborated. This elaboration and explanation can be done in three to five sentences (supporting sentences). Please remember to support your arguments with evidence from the text and other relevant sources. One of the relevant quotes or evidence from the text is when Walter tells his mother how white people get access to opportunities "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 this quote in relation to your main idea and/or thesis statement.)

In the fourth paragraph, you may want to discuss an idea on gender discrimination. The main idea in this paragraph may be that, hyper-masculinity has also contributed to inauspicious conditions of the Youngers as it brought some instability in the family. As in other paragraphs in the body of your essay, this will be explained and elaborated in three to five supporting sentences. Please make sure that you support your claims/ideas with evidence from the text. One of the relevant quotes you may use in this paragraph is when Lena Younger asked Walter to be the head of the family "I'm telling you to be the head of this family from now on like you supposed to be" (Hansberry, 2011: 81). This could be seen as a turning point and a time when Walter started to feel empowered. Regarding the latter, Walter looks down upon his wife and his mother as inferior beings and this comes out clearly when he argues: "We one group of men tied to a race of women with small minds" (Hansberry, 2011: 19). The second relevant evidence is when Walter tells Beneatha she cannot be a doctor, but a nurse: "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). What Walter says here could be perceived as the society's attitude which has to do with what women can and cannot be.

In the fifth paragraph, you may argue that some women like Ruth also believe it is man's responsibility to look after the family and not women's. "They said Saturday and this is just Friday and I hopes to God you ain't going to get up here first thing this morning and start talking to me 'bout no money- 'cause I 'bout don't want to hear it" (Hansberry, 2011: 11). (Please do not forget to say something about this quote in relation to your main idea and/or thesis statement.)

In the conclusion of your essay, you are expected to indicate that you are concluding. This is where you summarize all your arguments that you presented in the body, showing how you arrived at the conclusions you are making. In conclusion, this essay has argued with evidence in the above paragraphs that racism and gender have contributed to the situation which the Youngers find themselves in. You may continue your summarizing of your arguments exhibiting how they justify your thesis statement. In your conclusion, you are not expected to introduce anything new.

## Bibliography

Hansberry, Lorraine. (2011). *A Raisin in the Sun*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing

Best wishes

Lento MJ

### **Seven Steps to Heaven by Fred Khumalo**

Besides the obvious reference to Ramu the Hermit's sense of release of his "long-suppressed desire whirled around his groin" (*Seven Steps*, 129), and the return of the 'holy' Reverend Tembe of the Anglican Church from the clutches of the shebeen femme fatale, Sis Lovey, the novel also concretizes a life-changing fact that gains significance because of a historical fact: "I lost my virginity on the same day that Mandela was released from prison" (94).

Critically discuss the different meanings of release throughout *Seven Steps to Heaven*.

This question seems straight forward and clear, but you have to focus on more than the two characters indicated in the question. Thereafter, you can expand your explanation of the meaning of release by considering other characters. In this feedback, I will focus on Ramu, Sizwe, Reverend Tembe, Thembi and of course Mandela. The word release means to set something free, and this happens in the political, cultural and spiritual spheres of our lives. Release suggests that there is a threshold that has been crossed and that people are adapting to new life-styles. You must also be aware that the consequences of being released from something can be both positive and negative. In your essay you may evaluate the extent to which each of the characters you have chosen is positive or negative release. Now, to say release, whether positive or negative is a judgmental issue. We are teaching you to judge, but you must have facts and evidence to be able to make sound evaluations.

### **Ramu**

In *Seven Steps to Heaven*, Ramu is initially depicted as stoic, resolute and an unbending devout Muslim. He is portrayed as a hermit or recluse. More importantly, the irony is that although he wants to think that he is a man of Allah, the reader is also offended by Ramu's negative perceptions of women. We read that "He wished Kali, goddess of death, could at that very instant come and wipe out all the sluts like the women next door, bitches who had reduced their bodies – God's temples- into mere mattresses for all men to loll on indiscriminately for a price. Ramu appears like he is a religious purist; his descriptions of women reveal that he has low opinion of the kind of women who eke out a living as sex workers. What is staggering is the imagery of women's bodies as having changed from "God's temples' to 'waste bins'.

Although Ramu is depicted as a moralist, we as readers also shudder that his prescription on women is punishment by death. This is an extremist position to take; furthermore, Ramu is a bigot because he does not think that the men with whom most women sleep with should be killed by the mysterious power of Kali. However, an incident that occurred and left Ramu injured by the police changed him. First, he says he was "brought up under strict Muslim conditions" (124). The irony is that it is one of the female prostitutes who risked her life, picked Ramu from where he was lying in the street (127) and took him to her room. Upon entering her room, Ramu insults the woman for touching what he calls his holy body. Ramu finds himself lying in bed with a prostitute. He is not ashamed of it for himself but, believes Lord Krishna would be sad. Ramu's company with a "woman notorious for her loose morals, a self-confessed, self-advertising, self-praising prostitute" (128) takes a different direction when he is offered a drink

by this woman. The woman is not hypocritical. When Ramu sees the woman wearing thinly covering night gown, his manhood is aroused; he looked at her 'breasts', and 'buttocks' and also saw that where the woman's thighs join there was a "dark mound of flesh"(127). These body parts are symbols of the woman's sexuality. Furthermore, his experience with a woman shows him taking a "glimpse of a naked woman posing in positions he'd never imagined possible" (129). Sexually, and psychologically this sets Ramu free from the strictures of his religion. He is excited, and like all human beings would believe; he ejaculated suggesting that despite his loath of the woman, Ramu is attracted to her. This comes out clearly from the description that first, Ramu was confused by the beauty of the naked woman's body and evidence that he responded positively to this display by the woman is that "His long-suppressed desire whirled around his groin and exploded out of his penis in torrents, like preserved oil from a burst pipe"(129), Images like 'desire', 'groin', 'penis' 'torrents' thick like 'preserved oil' like a 'burst pipe' are signs of emotional and sexual release. This brings its own consequences which is that culturally and socially, Ramu emerges with a new and positive appreciation of the woman that he initially despised.

## **Mandela**

In *Seven Steps to Heaven*, the author seems to suggest that Nelson Mandela is probably NOT the longest serving prisoner of the apartheid system. However, he is characterized as closely linked to the oppression of black people and so his political release was a historical moment: it ushered in political release and freedom to the masses. Thulani who tells us about the meaning of Mandela's release suggests that South Africa was not entirely set free but that African freedom was compromised. He says: "his release is the beginning of a long process of betrayal of our course. He was released on their own terms, on the terms of the white world"(92). What is implied in this statement is that every form of release involves negotiation with whatever forces that previously held the one as prisoner. This animated exchange is further underscored by Kokoroshe for whom Mandela's release "is an important symbol ....The struggle, which has brought the apartheid government to its knees, was given impetus by the Release Mandela campaign. But of course no single individual holds the key to our liberation, not Mandela, not the name of Steve Biko, not Sisulu" (92). From this brief but politically motivated debate what comes out is the refusal to deify Mandela. The struggle belongs to the masses and this conclusion is important because elites have tended to see their role in the struggle as more important than anyone else's. In other words, it can be argued that the text mystifies and locks up people in false notions of the masses or the mass struggle.

## **Sizwe**

The release of Mandela facilitates other different forms of releases. For example, Sizwe says that he "lost" his virginity on the same day that Mandela was released from prison"(94). In losing one identity Sizwe acquires another identity. The South African Elections of 1994 "marked the end of apartheid" but it also released or allowed or "marked the return of the country to the fold of the international community after more than three decades of isolation as a result of its segregationist, violent regime"(177). In other words, some of the negative aspects such as inequalities were set free or allowed to continue in the post-apartheid period. In Sizwe's conversation with Patrick, Sizwe notes that in 1994 "five hundred prisoners including the rapist Freedom Cele" were released. But (Sizwe) whose non-de guerre is Freedom Cele has a negative history; he had been in jail for 105 counts for raping women and there is no evidence that his release would make him reform, and repent. Other characters such as Hendrik Labuschagne, a white man who had also been in jail for bank robbery sees his release as giving him a second chance to change his life. Other people like Thulani does not want to be released because he has committed crimes and as such feared reprisals.

## **Thembi**

She is a black woman who is in love with a white man called Patrick McGuinness (145). He is Irish doing a Masters in Literature. Thembi thinks she has crossed the racial divide and is released to love a man of her choice. Patrick, however, romantically loves black men and women. Patrick crosses his lovers, sleeps both with “gay and straight people” (154). For Patrick, he has been released to cross the racial barrier as well as the sexual barrier and sleeps with Sizwe. In a new South Africa, gay rights are protected. The fact is that Patrick can now sleep with black women, white women, black men and white men. For him, these forms of freedom show that South Africa has truly released people from past cultural and political constraints.

## **Reverend Tembe**

Reverend Tembe also feels released from his religious and cultural obligations. Firstly, he is in a romantic relationship with Lovey. Although he feels set free from his family, he is vulnerable to Lovey’s manipulation and authority over him. She chastises him for whining and pining. 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 falling from grace. When the reverend continues seeking emotional support from Lettie, she shows her power over him. Lettie shows ‘disgust’, uses bad language like men and can order men to get out of her bed. She is an ambiguous woman, who is depicted as weak and strong at the same time. Although men are portrayed as initiators of action and managers of the show, they are dependent on the emotional and sexual pleasure that women can offer or choose to withdraw as and when they feel so.

## **Conclusion**

There are several meanings associated with the word release in a South African context. Release suggests that people feel set free by the new dispensation. Individuals and groups of people are impacted differently by the release. But what is noteworthy, is that the author of *Seven Steps to Heaven* is that the releases are complex. People need to be re-educated to take responsibility of the idea of being set free.

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