

Racism Paradox in the Play of Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin in the Sun"

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Abstract

For this research, the writer analyzes about the racism paradox through the play of "A Raisin in The Sun," written by the black famous author, Lorraine Hansberry. The story tells about the lives of an African-American family, the Youngers, who like many other African-American families migrated from the South to the North to leave behind the social, economic and educational oppression. They attempt to improve their financial circumstances with an insurance payout following the death of the father, and deals with matters of housing discrimination, and racism. The writer applies the qualitative research, and library research in doing the analysis of the play. In the analysis, the writer finds the function of paradox that it can reveal the injustice, faced by the black people. They are inferior as treated by the whites in which it is actually so contradicted with the declaration of Independence Day they have. Then why paradox is used in the play, the writer thinks that it becomes a tool for the writer to express what the black people face which is very different from the life of the white people in real.

Keywords

Play; racism; paradox;
american racism paradox;
biography of Lorraine
Hansberry



I. Introduction

It is essential to know about the definition of paradox in order to have a better understanding its relation with the play, entitled "A Raisin in The Sun", written by the black author Lorraine Hansberry.

According to MasterClass staff (2021), in literature paradox is a literary device that contradicts itself but contains a plausible kernel truth, and in poemanalysis.com (2022), it is explained that a paradox is something that seems impossible and contradictory at first but upon closer analysis makes sense. It can even provide readers with needed information to understand a story of a real-life situation. When an author creates a paradox on purpose, they're trying to engage the reader on a deeper level. They do not present the information the reader needs on the surface. Instead, the reader is asked to dig deeper and try to uncover something more meaningful in the present contradiction or seeming impossibility. While paradoxes might seem complicated at first, but they are actually quite common. Development is a systematic and continuous effort made to realize something that is aspired. Development is a change towards improvement. Changes towards improvement require the mobilization of all human resources and reason to realize what is aspired. In addition, development is also very dependent on the availability of natural resource wealth. The availability of natural resources is one of the keys to economic growth in an area. (Shah, M. et al. 2020)

The United States is known as the "melting pot" country that has many different races and cultures. While, according to Arthur Lewis (1970:88), a black intellectual state that the United States has become a Welding Shop country that indicates the United States

consists of several ethnic groups that can live and work together, but unable to unite. While according to Seymour Abrahams (2020), *American Racism Paradox* explores the idea of racism from the day it appeared until today.

In Meriam-Webster dictionary, (2022) is explained that racism is 1 a. fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and those racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race. 2 a. the systemic oppression of a racial group to the social, economic, and political advantage of another; b. political or social system founded on racism and designed to execute its principles.

“*A Raisin in the Sun*”, is a play about an African American family aspiring to move beyond segregation and disenfranchisement in 1950s, in Chicago. They attempt to improve their financial circumstances with an insurance payout following the death of the father, and deals with matters of housing discrimination, racism, and assimilation.

After reading the play and with all the explanations above, really make me want to focus in discussing further about the racism paradox. So, her research is entitled: Racism Paradox in the Play of Lorraine Hansberry’s “*A Raisin in the Sun*” and in relation with the Racism paradox is analyzed about the function of paradox and why it is used in the play

II. Review of Literature

2.1 What is A Paradox?

According to MasterClass staff (2021) the word “paradox” derives from the Greek word “paradoxons,” meaning contrary to expectation. In literature, a paradox is a literary device that contradicts itself but contains a plausible kernel of truth.

For example, in Oscar Wilde’s play *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, the character Lord Darlington says: “I can resist everything except temptation.” Wilde uses the contradicting ideas in this statement to illustrate the character’s inability to resist temptation. And in MasterClass staff, (2021), Paradox is essentially a statement that is both true and untrue at the same time. A paradox has the characteristic of appearing to be believable but upon further reflection is actually a contradiction of ideas. This serves the purpose of revealing deep and hidden truths about a subject.

a. Types of Paradox

There are two types of paradoxes that are defined:

1. A logical paradox is a contradiction that defies logic and is considered unresolvable. The Greek philosopher Zeno of Elea is credited for devising several famous logical paradoxes. In “Achilles and the Tortoise,” Zeno posits that motion is nothing but an illusion. If a tortoise were to get a head start in a footrace with Achilles, the tortoise would hold a lead since Achilles, fast as he might be, would have to continually close the distance between them.
2. A literary paradox is a contradiction that resolves to reveal a deeper meaning behind a contradiction. In John Donne’s “Holy Sonnet 11,” the poet states: “Death, thou shalt die.” Initially, this line appears not to make sense. After all, how can death die? But it can be interpreted to mean that the fear of imminent death does not exist in heaven. (MasterClass staff, 2021).

b. Function of Paradox

Paradoxes can serve many different functions in literature, from revealing truths about characters and planting clues for the reader to from expressing themes and adding humor. Below are a few examples of paradoxes in literature:

1. In William Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*, the titular character says, "I must be cruel to be kind." How can someone be both cruel and kind? This is a good example of how a paradox can add depth to characters: Hamlet believes that by killing Claudius, he is ultimately doing the right thing by avenging his father's murder.
2. In William Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*, the titular character says, "I must be cruel to be kind." How can someone be both cruel and kind? This is a good example of how a paradox can add depth to characters: Hamlet believes that by killing Claudius, he is ultimately doing the right thing by avenging his father's murder.
3. In George Bernard Shaw's play *Man and Superman*, the protagonist Jack Tanner says, "The golden rule is that there are no golden rules." This paradox upends the basic principle of treating others as you would like to be treated and illustrates Shaw's personal contempt for convention.
4. Oscar Wilde's use of paradoxes in *The Importance of Being Earnest* add comedic effect. The ingenue character Cecily Cardew says, "To be natural is such a very difficult pose to keep up." The paradox expresses that posing is unnatural, but keeping up the appearance of being natural is also an act.
5. In *Alice in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll uses paradoxes to define the rules of the nonsensical world and to add humor. In one passage, the March Hare asks Alice if she wants more tea, despite the fact she hasn't had any tea: "'I've had nothing yet,' Alice replied in an offended tone, 'so I can't take more.' 'You mean you can't take less,' said the Hatter. 'It's very easy to take more than nothing.'"

(MasterClass staff, 2021)

c. The Importance of Paradox

Part of why paradox is such a useful literary tool is because it invites the readers to be actively engaged in using logic and working to find hidden meaning in a story. This makes the process of reading much more pleasurable than if all the important information was just revealed without the reader needing to do any mental work. This kind of reading is far less engaging and can come off as dull. Ultimately, paradox invites the readers to use their wit in order to discover hidden ideas or meanings. The result provides a pleasure response for the brain of the reader.

Paradox can be used across genres and works well in prose, poetry, and drama. Paradox is useful for conveying irony and helps to guide readers to make assumptions that assist in moving the plot forward in an engaging manner. Paradox is useful when an author wants to invite the reader to think deeper about a particular subject. This is useful in poetry, especially, as many poems rely on the reader making inferences in order to really pack a punch (WHP, 2019).

d. The Purpose of a Paradox

A paradox is a tool that writer uses to present the unique features of a particular situation. A paradox is used to make the audience really consider the situation it presents. Since the situation in a paradox is contradictory, it causes a pause in reading for additional understanding (Writing Explained, 2022)

e. American Racism Paradox

The History of Racism in America, from Birth to the Present Day. Between Strong Powers and Inequality

According to Seymour Abrahams (2020), *American Racism Paradox* explores the idea of racism from the day it appeared until today. Abrahams points out that, contrary to

popular belief, racism didn't appear because of hatred or ignorance. Instead, it was devised by the brilliant minds of each era. These people wanted to entrench discriminatory policies and the nation's racial disparities in everything from wealth to health.

Here's what *American Racism Paradox* has to offer:

The History of Racism: Discover when racism appeared and how it managed to infect the minds of millions of Americans

From Colonialism Until Today: Find out how racism shaped the society since the 18th century and how it changed to become more heinous than ever before.

A New Type of Slavery: Learn how people of color are slaves to the white supremacist society, even now in the 21st century.

And much more!

Even though racist ideas are easily produced, they can be as easily discredited. Abrahams wrote this book as an additional attempt to fight racism. *American Racism Paradox* sheds a light on the murky history of racist ideas and offers the listener all the tools they need to expose them. The fight against racism is not over; it is just getting started!

2.2 Racism

In Bola.com (2020), racism or racialism is an understanding that feels that one's own race is the highest race than other races. Racism is usually associated with the notion of discrimination of ethnicity, religion, race, custom, class or physical characteristics of a person.

According to Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI, 2020), racism is defined as racialism. Where racialism is prejudice based on national ancestry; one-sided treatment of (ethnic) different nations.

So, racism is an understanding of ethnic, religious, racial, customary (RACIST) discrimination, groups or general physical characteristics for certain (biological) purposes. Racism in general can be interpreted as an attack on attitudes, tendencies, statements, and actions that favor or oppose community groups, especially because of racial identity. Acts of racism occur in various areas of social life, such as education, health services, entertainment, and so on. The existence of such racist behavior can cause divisions, both among each other and certain groups (Bola.com, 2022)

2.3 African Americans in “A Raisin in The Sun”, by Lorraine Hansberry

All throughout American history African Americans have been mistreated and had to undergo great lengths to gain the same rights as their fellow citizens. Although there have been many fights for freedom for Americans in history, the two greatest victories for the African American community were being granted freedom from slavery and the civil rights movement. With these two great advancements, African Americans finally gained equal rights. The exhibit on Abraham Lincoln found at the Nevada State Museum and the play “*A Raisin in the Sun*”, written by Lorraine Hansberry in 1959, share similar qualities in the struggles of African Americans in United States history (123 helpme.com, 2000-2022)

2.4 Biography of Lorraine Hansberry

David Robinson (2021) explained that “*A Raisin in the Sun*” Reveals Playwright Lorraine Hansberry's Black Activism. At the heart of Hansberry's “*A Raisin in the Sun*” is the universal message of the desire for social progress amid the differing opinions on how to achieve it.

“*A Raisin in the Sun*”, is a play about an African American family aspiring to move beyond segregation and disenfranchisement in 1950s Chicago. Despite its specific era, the work speaks universally to the desire to improve one's circumstances while disagreeing on the best way of achieving them.

Lorraine Hansberry (1930-1965) wrote “*A Raisin in the Sun*,” by using inspiration from her years growing up in the segregated South Side of Chicago. Her father, Carl Augustus Hansberry, was a crusader against that very segregation.

Just months before her untimely death, the playwright and activist spoke out against how little society had changed: “the problem is that Negroes are just as segregated in the city of Chicago now as they were then and my father died a disillusioned exile in another country.”

Hansberry's, “*Raisin in the Sun*” is set in a one-bedroom apartment shared by three generations of the younger family: Walter and Ruth, their son Travis, Walter's sister Beneatha, and their mother Lena.

On moving day, a chance to make up for the lost money comes when a white representative offers the family a sum of money to prevent them from integrating a white neighborhood. Walter kicks the representative out at first, but after his friend runs off with the money — leaving the family's dreams in jeopardy — he calls the man back to accept his offer. Trying to justify his decision, Walter screams out to Mama saying that he didn't make this world! It was given to him on that way!” Yet, in the final moments of the play, Walter ultimately rejects the offer, and the younger family leaves for their new home.

The Younger family is waiting for a \$10,000 life insurance check resulting from the father's recent death. The windfall represents a kind of liberation to the family with the central conflict over how to spend the money. Mama (Lena) puts down a payment on a house in an all-white neighborhood (Clybourne Park), while Walter wants to invest in a liquor store. Mama relents, with the condition that they carve out \$3,000 for Beneatha's college education.

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Hansberry became the first Black woman to write a Broadway play. When she set out to write *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry told her husband, Robert Nemiroff, that she is going to write a social drama about Negroes that will be good art.”

Hansberry not only became the first Black woman to write a Broadway play, but she also made the unprecedented decision to have a Black director at the helm (Lloyd Richards). Centered around a total of 10 leading and featured roles for African American actors, “*A Raisin in the Sun*”, made its Broadway debut on March 11, 1959.

“*A Raisin in the Sun*”, was adapted into a Tony award-winning musical in 1975 (*Raisin*) and was filmed for television in 1989 with Esther Rolle as the Younger family matriarch and Danny Glover as Walter.

2.5 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Approaches to Literature

According to Eagleton in Writcrit (2016), intrinsic and extrinsic approaches to literature are employed by critics to evaluate literature according to their own understanding of the world. This article contains a description of both categories of

approaches. In intrinsic approach, words on the page are of utmost importance for him. Intrinsic approach is also called formalism as the critic's basic interest is in the form of the text and for this, the writer has the text from Hansberry's play, "*A Raisin in the Sun*". In comparison to intrinsic approach, the extrinsic approach makes the critic to give more importance to the context of a text. It means that the critic is mainly interested in the background, history, social conditions and biography of the author. He judges the text in relation to the author and his life. The critic moves from the text to the context. In the analysis, the writer applies the biography of Lorraine Hansberry and history of the blacks.

III. Research Method

In doing the analysis, the writer uses the qualitative research. According to Cresswell in Subhan, R, et.al (2021: 2594), this approach is used to explore, and understand central issues. This method was carried out by understanding social symptoms from the perspective of the participant and the researcher.

In collecting the data, the writer uses the library research. So, the writer first finds out the play of Lorraine Hansberry's, "*A Raisin in the Sun*", then read the sentences or words of the play, and at last do the discussion of the play, as it is explained by Natsir in Asmendri, M. S (2020:51). that library research is a collection technique data by reviewing books, literature, notes, and various reports related to the problem to be solved.

Source of data is a play entitled, "*A Raisin in the Sun*". It is a drama in three acts by Lorraine Hansberry, first published and produced in 1959, also debuted on Broadway at the same year. Concerning with the source of data, in Wikipedia (2022), it is said that sources of data are raw data that have not been processed for meaningful use to become information.

IV. Result and Discussion

4.1 The Function of Paradox and the Reason Why Paradox is Used in the Play of Lorraine Hansberry, "*A Raisin in The Sun*".

Before doing the analysis, it is needed for the researcher to show these next two statements first. According to Seymour Abrahams (2020), *American Racism Paradox* explores the idea of racism from the day it appeared until today. He also stated that *American Racism Paradox* sheds a light on the murky history of racist ideas and offers the listener all the tools they need to expose them. The fight against racism is not over; it is just getting started, and Harold Cruise stated that the phenomenal success of "*A Raisin in The Sun*" has to be seen against the background of temper of the racial situation in America (Abrahamson, 1969: 264)

Through the relation between the statements given by Seymour Abrahams and Harold Cruise above, really make the writer wants to discuss about the function of paradox in Hansberry's, "*A Raisin in The Sun*" and also the reason why paradox is used in the play

"*A Raisin in the Sun*" is set in the South of Chicago in the 1950's and portrays the lives of an African-American family, the Youngers, who like many other African-American families migrated from the South to the North to leave behind the social, economic and educational oppression. They attempt to improve their financial circumstances with an insurance payout following the death of the father, and deals with matters of housing discrimination, racism, and assimilation.

So as the writer focus on the discussion about the racism paradox in her research, the function of paradox and why it is used in the play are analyzed as follows:

Data 1

“Walter (Not listening at all or even looking at her) This morning, I was lookin’ in the mirror and thinking about it ... I’m thirty-five years old; I have been married eleven years and I got a boy who sleeps in the living room (Very, very quietly) – all I got to give him is stories about how rich the white people live (Nemiroff, 1988: 34)

This is a good example of how paradox expresses about the character of Walter that has been married for eleven years, but he cannot do much for his family. He can only tell his son the white’s richness. The paradox shows the problem Walter faces is the difference between the Black’s life and the white’s life.

Data 2

“Well, being a colored woman, I guess I can’t help my self
None (Nemiroff, 1988: 34)

The paradox can show how bad a colored woman is treated. Walter’s wife really faces a bitterness of being black. She even cannot do anything for herself.

Data 3

Travis (Eating) This is the morning we supposed to bring
the fifty cents to school
Ruth Well, I ain’t got no fifty cents this morning
Travis Teacher, say we have to
Ruth, I don’t care what teacher say. I ain’t got it. Eat
Your breakfast, Travis
Travis, you think Grandma would, have it?
Ruth Not and I want you to stop asking your grand-
Mother for money, you hear me? (Nemiroff, 1988; 28)

The paradox can express this Black family’s financial problems. It’s so poor that Ruth cannot comply her son’s request for fifty cents that is really needed for his school.

Data 4

Travis (Presently) Could I maybe go carry on some gro-
ceries in front of the supermarket for a little while
after school then? (Nemiroff, 1988: 29)
Ruth Just huh, I said (Nemiroff, 1988: 30)

The paradox can illustrate the Black boy that must work to handle his need for school.

Data 5

Walter A job. (Looks at her) Mama, a job?
And close car doors all they long. I drive a man
In his limousine and I say, “Yes, sir; no, sir; very
good sir; shall I take the Drive, sir?” Mama, that ain’t
no kind of job ... that ain’t nothing at all. (Very

quietly) Mama, I don't know if I can make you understand
(Nemiroff, 1988: 73)

The paradox can express that Walter as a driver just have an inferior position, but he actually wants to be a superior. A driver and the owner of the limousine shows the deep imbalance between the Black's life and the White's life. The problem of the job is not only faced by Walter, but Ruth also complains about it, as it can be seen below:

Data 6

Ruth (Turning and going to MAMA fast – the words pour-ing out with urgency and desperation) Lena – I'll work... I'll work twenty hours a day in all the kitchens in Chicago ... I'll strap my baby on my back if I have to and scrub all the floors in America if I have to - but we got to MOVE! We got to get OUT OF HERE!! (Nemiroff, 1988: 140)

The paradox can show the problem in getting a better job for Ruth. No other job that she can do in America, she can only be working in all the kitchens in twenty hours in Chicago, scrubbing the floors, and washing the sheets. As it is pointed out that: Employment opportunities for Afro-Americans were severely restricted largely to unskilled or menial jobs: porter, maid, cook, chauffeur, waiter Or laundress (Low and Clift, 1981, 751)

Data 7

Walter ..The future, Mama, Hanging over there at the age of my days. Just waiting for me- (Pause) 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 with millions of dollars ... sometimes I see guys don't look much older than me. (Nemiroff, 1988: 73-74).

The paradox can express the white's wealth creates the gap or the social imbalance. The white men are still younger than Walter, but millions of dollars are in their hands. Walter is only as a chauffeur, so he cannot have much more though he really needs it.

Data 8

Walter (Defensively) I'm interested in you, Something
Wrong with that? Ain't many girls who decide -
Walter and Beneatha (In Unison – “to be a doctor”
Walter, have you figured out yet just exactly how much?
medical school is going to cost? (Nemiroff, 1988 : 36)

Beneatha's financial problem cannot support her study to the medical school, because it is very expensive and the blacks only have the scant incomes, as it is stated that;

“In 1900 there were 8, 833, 944 Negroes in the United States. For all practical purposes, therefore, up to the beginning of the present century. American colleges

were closed to American Negroes. This closing was readily made effective, because there was practically no public high school facilities for Negroes, because the ordinary Negro parents in receipt of scant incomes were in no position to provide higher education for their son and daughters (Nearing, 1969: 175)

Besides facing the discrimination in job and education, the blacks are also segregated in housing. Clybourne Park is the area where the Youngers want to live in, but it shows here that actually there is no colored people living there. And from the beginning Ruth disagrees to move to that area.

Data 9

Ruth Clybourne Park? Mama, there ain't, no colored people living in Clybourne Park. (Nemiroff, 1988: 93)

Data 10

Mama Them houses they put up for colored in them areas way out all seem to cost twice as much as other houses. I did the best I could (Nemiroff, 1988: 93)

The paradox can show that if the blacks have no right to buy their house at a cheaper cost. The segregation, faced by the blacks. This segregation is pointed out in the following excerpt,

Negroes buying must ordinarily pay higher prices than whites for the same accommodations (Nearing, 1969: 115)

Those all the bitterness faced by the younger family, nevertheless they do not surrender but they keep on struggling to move to the white's area. They want to break the isolation from the whites, to eliminate the "border line" that separates the blacks from the whites. Up to the present the obstacles can still happen, but they still can exist like "*A Raisin in the Sun*"

The racial phenomenon, such as the discrimination in the job, education, and financial, also the segregation in housing which are found in the play show a very deep differences between the white's life and the blacks' life. While in the declaration of independence, is stated that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History 2009-2019).

So, the function of paradox really presents in the play. And the reason why paradox is used in the play because Lorraine Hansberry as the author of the play can really succeed in using it as her tool in writing the play of "*A Raisin in the Sun*," to expose the fact of the Blacks' bitter experiences in their lives that are so contradicted to the whites' lives.

V. Conclusion

As the analysis has been done, so it can be concluded that:

The function of the paradox is very useful found in the play of "*A Raisin in the Sun*", because it can make the writer of this research understand the hidden sense about the Black's life, that the white people have treated them so inferior. The black people are

discriminated, segregated by the whites in the play, in which it is not accordance with the Declaration of the Independence Day they have.

The reason why paradox is used in the play, I think it is as a tool for Lorraine Hansberry as an author of the play, "*A Raisin in the Sun*", to reveal all the bitter problems that she experiences and sees by herself in the place where she lives and all those things are expressed in her play. The injustice is not found in the life of the black people.

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