

BENEATHA'S FEMINISM PERSPECTIVES TOWARD MODERN BLACK WOMEN IN LORRAINE HANSBERRY'S *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*

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Abstract

*This research discusses Beneatha's feminism perspectives toward modern black women. The aims of this research are to find out the Beneatha's feminism perspectives toward modern black women based on Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* and to discover the causes that make Beneatha have different feminism perspectives toward other black women. Library research was conducted to collect the data. The data consist of the ideas related to Beneatha's feminism perspectives toward modern black women in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. In addition, the theories used in this research were the theories of feminism, radical feminism, oppression, and gender role. The approaches used are psychological approach, sociological approach, and moral approach. The data analysis shows as follows: Beneatha wants to be equal with the position of the men, willing to be a stronger woman as the result of being oppressed by male supremacy, wants to be different from the other black women, wants to be honored by the man, and confronts the male power. Furthermore, after analyzing those problems, the researcher found that as a woman she has to struggle to get the same right as a man. The woman has to have a bravery to do what she wants.*

Key Words: *Feminism, oppression, gender role*

1. INTRODUCTION

It is known that literature is an art that can entertain people in the world. Kennedy (1966:5) says that literature is kind of art usually written that concerns us pleasure and illumination. So it can be said that literature is an art as it can express the desire of self-expression. Literature can be a portrait of social life and imagination which include into a certain kind of literary work with language as the medium. Literature includes all written expressions. There are three genres of literature, namely poetry, prose and play or drama. Here, the researcher focuses on analyzing Beneatha's feminism perspectives toward modern black women in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. Beneatha has different feminism perspectives toward modern black women. In 1950's, most black women had to work for living. The blacks rose up to fight against the social systems and public authorities that had taken their right away. As their skin color, the blacks did not have the same right that white people did for along time. Beneatha wants to be a doctor. She also wants to join guitar course in her school but there are some causes that make her dreams difficult come true. The causes are about race, class, education, sexual orientation, and economics. Nowadays, modern black women maintain that they should have the right to choose what they want for themselves as far as their lives go. The topic is chosen because the writer would like to analyze deeply about Beneatha's feminism perspectives toward modern black women.

The researcher applies some theories that are related to this research. They are theory of feminism that focuses on radical feminism, oppression, and gender role. According to Enns (2001:469) recent feminist scholarship proposes that the rich and evolving history of feminism

can be characterized by three "waves". The first wave of feminism, spanning the 17th and 19th centuries, encompassed contributions of feminist who worked primarily within the confines of existing system of rules and laws to achieve equality for women and the right to participate more widely in society. The second wave feminism, spanning primarily the 1960s to 1980s...four major theories associated with the second wave feminism are liberal feminism, cultural feminism, radical feminism, and social feminism. Third wave of feminism, which have overlapped with second wave feminism, have produced elaborations and critiques of previous theories and include post modern, women of color, lesbian, global and generation-X third wave feminism. Hooks (1981: 136) describes that in her book *Ain't I A Woman* that racism in the women's right movement and in the work arena was a constant reminder to black women of the distances that separated the two experiences, distances that white women did not want bridged. When the contemporary movement toward feminism began, white women organizers did not address the issue of conflict between black and white . Charlton (1998: 317) claims that oppression occurs when individuals are systematically subjected to political, economic, cultural, or social degradation because they belong to a social group...results from structures of domination and subordination and, correspondingly, ideologies of superiority and inferiority. Beauvoir (1986: 40) describes that becoming a gender is an impulsive yet mindful process of interpretation a cultural reality laden with sanctions, taboos, and prescriptions. To choose a gender is to interpret received gender norms in a way that organizes them anew.

This research analyzes Beneatha's feminism perspectives, that is want to be equal with the man position and being oppressed by male supremacy. Next, it also explains the causes making Beneatha have different feminism perspective toward other black women. They are willing to be different from the other black women, willing to be honored by the men, and confronting the male power.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The appropriate approaches that are applied in this research are psychological approach, sociological approach, and moral approaches. Meanwhile, this research is a descriptive research. Descriptive research is used to describe characteristic of a population or phenomenon being studied. This type of research is also a group that includes many particular research methodologies and procedures, such as observations, surveys, self-report, and test. Mansen (2008: 5) explains that descriptive research is an effective way to obtain information used in devising hypotheses and proposing association. Moreover, in collecting the data, the researcher applies library research. It means that the data are obtained from printed material as the source of the data. According to Mann (2005: 3) states that library research refers simply to the alphabetical arrangement of articles without regard to their length, and thus is often synonymous with 'encyclopedia'.

3. DISCUSSION

The data that are analyzed are Beneatha's feminism perspectives toward modern black women in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*.

1. Beneatha's Feminism Perspectives

a. Willing to be Equal with the Position of the Men

According to the story, Beneatha wants to be equal with the man. The man in the play tries and tries again to exert the power over her and put her in her 'place'. She wants to have

better job than mama and Ruth. She wants to be a doctor but Walter feels that Beneatha has to focus on herself, not for being a doctor but for being a good wife.

WALTER : 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 quite...

BENEATHA : Well--you finally got it said...It took you three years but you finally got it said. Walter, give up; leave me alone--it's Mama's money.

WALTER : He was my father, too!

BENEATHA : So what? He was mine, too--and Travis' grandfather--but the insurance money belongs to Mama. Picking on me is not going to make her give it to you to invest in any liquor stores--(Underbreath, dropping into a chair.)--and I for one say, God bless Mam for that. (ARITS, Act I, Scene one. 1959: 9)

Beneatha is banned by Walter as she can not be a doctor because there is no black woman that becomes a doctor. He underestimates her that she can not be a doctor. Walter thinks that the cost for medical school is so expensive and Beneatha has no right to get the insurance money. Beneatha just wants to show to the other men that she is capable to continue her study a medical school. She wants to be seen as the leader because she thinks that she has lots of skills.

b. Willing to Be a Stronger Woman as the Result of Being Oppressed by Male Supremacy

Beneatha's schooling is her privilege, yet Beneatha believes that a higher education is her right. Everyone in the family makes a sacrifice so that Beneatha can become a doctor, something pointed out by Walter Lee as they clash earlier in the play. Beneatha is opinionated, especially when it comes to her brother, Walter Lee; she clearly lives up to her name, everything seems to be beneath her.

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 we figured out yet just exactly how much medical school is going to cost?

RUTH : Walter Lee, why don't you leave that girl alone and get out of here to work? (ARITS, Act I, Scene one. 1959: 8)

Beneatha wants to be a doctor because she has a desire to heal. She is asked by her brother Walter to give up on her decision to become a doctor. He said that why Beneatha could not just become a nurse or get married "like other women" but Beneatha still wants to be a doctor. She has many desires in her life. She wants to show to the other black women that she has a right to do what the white people usually do. She really wants to be a doctor and wants to prove that she has a good skill.

2. The Causes Making Beneatha Have Different Feminism Perspectives

a. Willing to Be Different from the Other Black Women

Beneatha is very attractive. After joining a group for riding a horse and photograph,

she starts to join the guitar lesson. Everyone in the family is making a sacrifice so that Beneatha can do everything she wants in her school.

MAMA : Ain't nobody trying to stop you. I just wonder sometimes why you has to flit so from one thing to another all the time. You ain't never done nothing with all that camera equipment you brought home--

BENEATHA : I don't flit! I--I experiment with different forms of expression--

RUTH : Like riding a horse?

BENEATHA : --People have to express themselves one way or another.

MAMA : What is it you want to express?

BENEATHA : [Angrily.] Me! [MAMA and RUTH look at each other and burst into raucous laughter.] Don't worry--I don't expect you to understand. (ARITS, Act I, Scene one. 1959: 14)

She wants to be an impressive woman that can do everything she wants. She wants to be more expressive than Mama and Ruth. She wants to find ways to truly express herself. In the way she expresses herself, she always gets some mocks from Walter that she has to be a good wife in her future, but she always fights his argument. Being different is her way to show to the man that she can compete with the man.

b. Willing to Be Honored By The Men

Beneatha wants to become a doctor and when her brother Walter tells her that she should become a nurse, get a husband, and have kids because that's what women are supposed to do, but she directly becomes very mad. She gets some of the money to pay for her education but he loses the money to an untrustworthy friend and she is devastated. The thing that she wants to get from her brother is his support.

WALTER : Nobody in this house is ever going to understand me.

BENEATHA : Because you're a nut.

WALTER : Who's a nut?

BENEATHA : You-- you are a nut. Thee is mad, boy.

WALTER : [Looking at his wife and his sister from the door, very sadly.] The world's most backward race of people, and that's a fact.

BENEATHA : [Turning slowly in her chair.] And then there are all those prophets who lend us out of the wilderness-- [WALTER slams out of the house.]-- into the swamps! (ARITS, Act III, Scene three 1959: 22)

Beneatha wants to be honored by Walter. By saying "The world's most backward race of people, and that's a fact", it is clear that she does not get a support from him. She always fights with him as he always tries to ask her to be a good wife someday. She really hates her brother as he never supports her in everything she does, including in becoming a doctor.

c. Confronting the Male Power

Beneatha is representation of something that is not usual and unique. She has experienced a gender or racial issue in her life. She sakes the line power by getting an education

and having aspiration beyond what her family has been able to achieve. Less obviously, she thinks she is better than Ruth and her mother too. Beneatha believes that her intellect gives her the power to do something different. In this case Walter Lee becomes the man that always bans and opposes her to be a doctor. She has to confront the male power from her own brother,

WALTER : [Looking at his sister intently.] You know the check is coming tomorrow.

BENEATHA : [Turning on him with a sharpness all her own.] That money belongs to Mama, Walter, and it'd for her to decide how she wants to use it. I don't care if she wants to buy a house or a rocket ship or just nail it up somewhere and look at it. It's hers. Not ours-hers.

WALTER : [Bitterly.] Now ain't that fine! You just got your mother's interest at heart, ain't you, girl? You such a nice girl-but if Mama got that money she can always take a few thousand and help you through school too-can't she?

BENEATHA : I have never asked anyone around here to do anything for me!

WALTER : No! And the line between asking and just accepting when the time comes is big and wide--ain't it! (ARITS, Act I, Scene one 1959: 9)

Beneatha is a symbol of a new generation of educated women who feels not satisfied with traditional gender or racial roles. Beneatha always gets some mocks from her brother as he never supports her to be a doctor. She never asks everyone in her family to make a sacrifice for her but in this case Walter mocks her about what Mama will do with her money. He asserts that Mama will take a few thousand to help her go to the medical school. She says to him that she never asks the family to make a sacrifice for her. She has to confront her brother as the male power to make her dreams come true.

4. CONCLUSION

This research focuses on Beneatha's feminism perspectives. The data are analyzed by using the theory of feminism specially in radical feminism, oppression, and gender role. The method of research is descriptive research. Moreover, the data collecting applies library research. The approaches which are used are psychological, sociological, and moral approaches. The writer finds some Beneatha's feminism perspectives. They are willing to be equal with the position of the man and willing to be a stronger woman as the result of being oppressed by male supremacy. It is clear when Beneatha always wants to find ways to express herself. Beneatha's strengths are her spirit of independence. The fact is that she is a "new woman" who refuses to accept the traditional, spineless female role, and the fact that she is so knowledgeable about Africa that her self-esteem is enhanced. The second is the causes that make Beneatha have different feminism perspectives toward other black women. They are willing to be different with the other black women, willing to be honored by the man, and confronting the male power. It is shown when Beneatha wants to confront her feminism perspective toward her family. She has a strong belief about the quality of being female. She has an idea that all the members of her family must respect her. She wants to be honored by all of the members of her family as a good child and as the most educated black woman in her family.

Finally, after writing this thesis the writer learns that as a woman Beneatha has to struggle to get the same right as a man. The woman has to have a bravery to do what she wants.

Furthermore, everyone has their own dream in their lives but they have to struggle to reach their dream and they have to recognize the importance of family.

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