



Prometheus Returns Again: Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*

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ABSTRACT

Lorraine Hansberry's first play *A Raisin in the Sun* tells the story of an African American family amidst a racist white-dominant society. It presents decisive affairs that confront black-skinned Americans. The story exhibits the problems of racism, family crash, and black men search for positions within the racist community. Walter Lee Younger is a central character in the drama. His mother is Lena "Mama". His dream is to have good business represented in a liquor store. He believes this business would achieve and solve his economic conditions. In addition, Walter considers the liquor store a way to help the family to get a better life. It is his ultimate goal to obtain the family's financial statehood. This paper shows his dream to be independent with his family. It explores why Walter has described as Prometheus the mythological figure in Greek legendary history as well as Walter's kinship to Prometheus. The study will explore the character of Prometheus and his position in Greek history. The paper examines whether it is right to call Walter Prometheus or not. Finally, the discussion is a trial to discover similarities between Walter and Prometheus.

Keywords:

Lorraine Hansberry's, *A Raisin in the Sun*, Racism, Black Men

Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* celebrates not merely endurance, sheer survival, but a possibility. Each one of the characters in *A Raisin in the Sun* is self-deceiving and self-centered. The pressures of the eternal world have pressed them in the direction of a stereotype because they have internalized that narrowing of possibility which is a fact of their social circumstance. Walter has become shiftless and unreliable, his mother the domineering matriarch, his wife the doggedly enduring drudge, his daughter the self-concerned naive. What they learn in the course of the play is the danger of becoming trapped in their roles as absolutely as they appear to be trapped in their physical surroundings.

1. Who was Prometheus?

The myth and legend of Prometheus are recognized by the study of Greek mythology which rests on icons shown in the family of Titan. This again can be seen in the strive within the one family of Greek gods (between fathers and sons). The titan Prometheus succeeded to be out of the god's war between the god Zeus (Titan) and Cronus and his followers (Olympians).

Prometheus was a Titan, one of the elder gods who had been overthrown by Zeus and his fellow Olympians. The Titans, led by Zeus' father Cronus, had not given up without a struggle, but they had lost the war. Prometheus' brothers, Menoetius and Atlas, had been severely punished—Menoetius cast down

into the dungeons of Tartarus, and Atlas, the largest of the Titans, forced to carry on his shoulders the burden of the heavens for all eternity.

(Waterfield,2012: 13)

As a result of his avoiding the battle, Prometheus remains alive while the other has been exiled to the cells of Tartarus. The struggle presents a major image of the combat between fathers and sons. The strife is allegorical of the wishes of parents for power to live, to pave the way to the increasing requirement, and their duties to eternize their own new communities. The family of Prometheus has depicted in Hesiod's *Theogony* that his father is Iapetus, his mother is Clymene, he has three brothers namely Atlas, Menoetius, and Epimetheus. Epimetheus means afterthought, while Prometheus symbolizes forethought.

Iapetus married a trim-ankled Oceanid nymph, Clymene, and went up to share one bed with her. She bore him Atlas, a stern-hearted child, and proud Menoitios, and Prometheus, subtle, shifting-scheming, and misguided Epimetheus.

(Hesiod, 1988: 508-509)

The root of Prometheus family is stressed by Kathleen Daly, in her book *Greek and Roman Mythology A to Z*, saying:

In the *Theogony*, Prometheus is the son of Iapetus the Titan and the Oceanid Klymene; he has three brothers, Menoitios, Atlas, and Epimetheus, all of whom have suffered at the hands of Zeus. As part of a bigger project to praise the rule of Zeus, Hesiod introduces Prometheus as one who dared to match wits with mighty Zeus but ultimately failed.

(Dougherty, 2006: 30)

In some Greek myth histories, Prometheus first creation is of two stories, the first made Man from clay, the second, creatures are made by gods, and Prometheus and Epimetheus are granted the power to stand still, therefore, Prometheus created Man and endowed him with logical thinking and protect Man.

Prometheus, then, took over the task of creation and thought out a way to make Mankind superior. He fashioned them in a nobler shape than the animals, upright like the gods; and then he went to heaven, to the sun, where he lit a torch and brought down fire, a protection to men far better than anything else, whether fur or feathers or strength or swiftness.

(Hamilton. 1953:66)

As his name refers, Prometheus is seen as wise and more brilliant and the guardian of human art and intelligence. In some other legends, he is the first in creating sacrifice in religion, thus Prometheus is seen in the center of the sacred action in ancient classical Greece like other masterly gods in Athena.

The Greek poet Hesiod related two principal legends concerning Prometheus. The first is that Zeus, the chief god, who had been tricked by Prometheus into accepting the bones and fat of sacrifice instead of the meat....

(Taft, 2014:107)

Due to his wit and his strife to help human survival by granting Man the fire which stands for sciences, Prometheus is regarded by European traditions as the incarnation of intelligence. Prometheus puts his geniality at the service of Man and to help humanity to a better life in the future. He never pays attention to the outcomes of his struggle with Zeus and sided to Man's cause, which eventually leads to his tragic fate.

Prometheus was depicted in *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus, who made him not only the bringer of fire and civilization to mortals but also their preserver, giving them all the arts and sciences as well as the means of survival.

(Taft, 2014:107)

1.1. Prometheus Gift to Man

In the contest of dominance which is headed by Zeus, Prometheus is given the role of leadership. This role was fundamental in the struggle among gods namely the war of gods. As Zeus never taking his opinion in regard to the battle, the situation deteriorated more between Zeus and Prometheus. This impairment is mainly because of the autocratic dealing of Zeus to Man. Seeking the help of the goddess Athena, Prometheus Managed to steal fire and presented it to Man as the reason for Man survival and a sign of superb endowment.

Prometheus was a remarkable figure in Greek mythology. Some stories say that he was the creator of Man. He was certainly the main champion of humankind, bringing the gift of fire and teaching people how to use it.

(Daly,2004: 107)

The grant of fire gives Man light, making food, fire is a means for making fighting weapons, and it provides Man with warmth. Prometheus does not give fire only; he prompts Man how to make his daily use tools specifically those with which Man can defend himself. One of the symbolic meanings of fire is light that represents the enlightenment of Man's mind that is connected to culture, civilization, and new science.

The fire Prometheus stole and gave to men does not so much set a distance between heaven and earth as wrest Mankind from its primitive bestiality. It is seen as a

technical fire with which to master the skills accessible to the industrious mind of Man.

(Vernant,1990:198)

The story is legendary that lasted for ancient and long centuries. In western culture, Prometheus remains an outstanding example of faith, divinity, faithfulness, self-sacrifice, and international hero. Prometheus is the figure who gifted humanity science to make Man's existence easier, a provider of full protection to humanity. He serves as an ideal example to western culture. Spiritually, self-sacrifice is a noble deed which resonates throughout different religions specifically Christianity. In this field, the legend of Prometheus has great identical figures. His battle, thus is a struggle between moral and immoral, liberty of Man against the tyranny of the dictatorship.

Despite his severe punishment, he maintains no sorrow for taking of fire and the help to Mankind. Prometheus is aware that his labor is the foreshadowing of a new life for Man, his action is a turning point that will make difference in Man's future life. Prometheus knows his sacrifice makes Man able to confront the circumference and the environment in which Mankind lives.

This account relates the central role of mind and reason in the historical development of civilized human existence through the development and application of a wide array of technical knowledge. Prometheus' gift of fire is thereby transformed into having placed mind and reason in humans, and discovered all human skill and science.

(Šulek,2011:197)

Throughout the legend, we as readers come to know that Prometheus's story is a representation of poor, and oppressed people under the

tyranny of the state. The legend is the voice of freedom amid the chaos of political oppression.

Rebellious spirit, rejection of evil, and imperfection of the world find their archetypal reflection in the image of Prometheus, fighter for the progress of Man who dared to oppose God himself; he is a spirit, a symbol of strength for struggling humanity, a struggle worth the price of death.

(Meyer-Dinkgrafe.
2010:171)

Prometheus returned to earth to become humankind's great teacher. With his help, humans are encouraged to comprehend their current circumstances, cruise ships and assemble houses, and domesticate wild creatures for food, security, and work. With the gift of the fireplace, he instructed them to use these treasures to amend their lives. Therefore, the weak mortal turns into lord of his land. When humans had this recognition, they became mindful of the divine beings. Thus, humans deify the gods by constructing temples, giving immolation, and making statues.

1.2. Prometheus' Place in Greek mythology

Traditionally, Prometheus is a Titan, a culture saint. He is attributed with the making of Man from mud. He challenges the divine beings by taking fire and offering it to culture as a whole. He is best realized for his champion of humanity and good reason. As a consequence, as Prometheus is a Titan, he is convicted to endless agony by Zeus.

Zeus was enraged when he looked down at the earth and saw fires glowing. "Prometheus has stolen fire, which belongs to the gods alone," he roared. "And he has given our fire to Man. It may make Man too powerful, more powerful even than the gods. I must punish Prometheus.

(Low, 1985:24)

In diverse fictitious myths, Prometheus is released by Heracles. In Greek traditions, as other stories confirm that he found for the first time the tradition of animal's oblation. As he is associated with different gods, Prometheus was of the high position of holy traditions in ancient Greek history. As he is a representation of Man's agony and struggles, mainly his endeavor for learning new ways to improve human life, Prometheus earns a great position in the European culture.

1.3. Prometheus Punishment

According to the Greek history, the penalty of Prometheus came from his help and assistance of humans as he was the creator of Man in some ancient mythological tales. He deceived deities double times. The first by giving fire to Man and then giving the meat of the sacrificed animal and fat and bones to Zeus. Outraged, Zeus took back fire of Man and tying Prometheus up far away on Caucasus mountain. More painfully was letting the vulture eat his liver that grows every day.

The name of Prometheus will, no doubt, remain attached to human liver regeneration because of the richness of the artistic representations of Prometheus' punishment as well as because of the identification of Prometheus as a benefactor of Mankind. Furthermore, some of the descriptions of Prometheus' torture could be used to demonstrate some understanding of the relatively short time required for liver regeneration.

(Tiniakos,
Kandilis, Geller. 2010: 360)

Greek regards liver as the center of wit, reason and the spirit of Man as well. As the liver is regenerated every night, the agony of

Prometheus is continuous and makes him suffer painfully and endlessly. consequently, the retribution is gruesome and outrageous.

To punish the law breaker, Zeus chained Prometheus to a rock on Mount Caucasus, where an eagle or a vulture plucked at his liver all through the day. Prometheus healed every night, so this torture would go on through all eternity.

(Daly,2004: 108)

The tale confirms that Hercules killed the vulture and saved Prometheus. In another myth and according to Hesiod, that Panador was formed by the instruction of Zeus. Panador's destructive traits would cause the Man to suffer and lead his life to lasting distress on earth. These passive features of Panador would take the Man away from the deities. In Mythology, Prometheus is a representation of a hero who attempts to offset Man's fall by knowledge (Blanariu. 2016: 2), as Segal confirms:

The Titan, imprisoned and immobilized on his rock in the Caucasus in punishment for teaching the arts of civilization to mortals-including the arts of writing and counting-holds the center of the stage, an object of magnetic vision to all who approach him.

(Segal 1986: 84)

2. Walter's Predicaments

Prometheus stands as an example of self-sacrifice even at the expense of the loss of his life. Taking fire from gods and offering it to mortals for the sake of liberation makes him a legendary symbol of rebellion. Greek considers Prometheus a figure with exceptional human characteristics. Therefore, these qualities-inventive significance, fortitude in the hardship and punishment and never give up his noble aims- grant the myth continuity and eternity. Furthermore, his self-sacrifice for knowledge deemed the tale the power of change. He empowered the mortals with self-reliance and

new scopes of living. In this way, the story has a great influence on the western and Greek culture.

Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, basically revolves around the life of Walter L. Younger. he is an aspiring, emotional, and enthusiastic dreamer. Walter Lee is always thinking of a work that can redeem him from his misery and financial troubles. He is in hard social conditions and bad economic circumstances.

Thus, among Hansberry's most important male characters are multidimensional figures who are admirable in Many respects, who struggle valiantly against a variety of personal and social pressures, who frequently arouse the audience to cheer on their efforts, and who nevertheless, sometimes callously and sometimes subtly, oppress the women entangled in their lives. Walter gains our sympathy by his struggle against the economic and social pressures of a racist society.

(Carter, 1991, p: 57-58)

Walter Lee is of the idea of good business which would enable him of collecting enough fortune and would become independent. In the meantime, this business would let him get better socially and economically. In this way, he thinks of improving the family conditions as a whole, not just himself. Walter Lee is dreaming of giving his wife all life requirements. On other hand in the play, Walter is shown as lacking the talent that could make him a successful Man in work. It is not just he does not have life skills; further, Walter's lack of good education is clear throughout the drama. This is obvious when Gorge calls him Prometheus, and Walter does not know even what it means.

GEORGE Thanks. Good night. (*Half out the door, he*

reopens it. To WALTER) Good night, Prometheus!

(BENEATHA *and* GEORGE *exit*)

WALTER (*To* RUTH) Who is Prometheus?

RUTH I don't know. Don't worry about it.

(Hansberry.

Act II. I: 74)

In some aspect, the Walter Lee's Character is similar to Prometheus, as has been noticed that Prometheus was tortured severely due to his stealing of fire from gods and gifted it to Man. His punishment was hard because his liver regenerated at night and an eagle would eat it next morning and so on for a long time as he was tied to the mountain. As Prometheus was handcuffed to the mountain, Walter is bound by his social conditions, economic circumstances, and poverty. Prometheus' liver regeneration is similar to that of Walter's pressing dream which would hardly come true. His efforts to bring his dreams to reality are as the same as the attempt of Prometheus to bring happiness and make Man independent of gods. Thus, the liquor shop was the outlet of his financial adversity.

WALTER Yeah. You see, this little liquor store we got in mind cost \$75,000 and we figured the initial investment on the place be 'bout \$30,000, see. That be ten thousand each. Course, there's a couple of hundred you got to pay so's you don't spend your life just waiting for them clowns to let your license get approved-

(Hansberry. Act I, Scene II:21)

The liquor shop is the way of realizing his dreams. It is the only mean by which he believes to get rid of his economic hardship. It is an investment of money in that store that will promote him over his people. The store is the key solution to get respect, reverence, and economic independence. Failure is hunting him anywhere and his work profit is little comparatively with his vast dream. A substitutional plan is his goal to provide his wife and Travis with luxurious life. The family life and the world's chance are his aims which

he wishes to his wife and Travis. Distress, needs, and ethnic oppression are the fact that he strives to get rid of in his life. His dream which comes to a dead-end leads the whole family to a disastrous situation. As a result, he finds peace in drinking alcohol.

2.1. Walter's Alcoholism

Regarding Walter's alcoholism and throughout the play, one just hears about liquor. One night Walter returns back home drunk and unpleasant.

TRAVIS What's the matter, Daddy? You drunk?

WALTER (Sweetly, more sweetly than we have ever known him) No, Daddy ain't drunk. Daddy ain't going to never be drunk again...."

(Hansberry. Scene II:90)

As Travis asks him he answers that he would never drink anymore. His dream is to be an active part of his society and bring good life to his family, this aim would be achieved through having a liquor store. By realizing that his mother would not help him fulfill his dream:

You the head of this family. You run our lives like you want to. It was your money and you did what you wanted with it. So what you need for me to say it was all right for? (*Bitterly, to hurt her as deeply as he knows is possible*) so you butchered up a dream of mine,

(Hansberry. Act II. I:83)

Walter's best place for finding peace was the bar. This goes in contradiction to his mother's will who thinks that the house is the place of peace. Always, he thinks of something new to improve family living which represents society. Improvement and better luxury are his ultimate aim in life. Walter is in constant search of creative ways to better living and independence. Unfortunately, his punishment is for his decision of finding a way of a good life.

3. Prometheus and Walter: A Comparison

Returning back to the legend of Prometheus, and comparing him to Walter, they both have been in search of inventive methods for family and humanity. They are both innovative characters, who took a hard decision and have been tortured for taking these resolutions. Prometheus' penalty is to have been chained and an eagle eats his liver. While Walter's punishment is that the money for the liquor store is stolen by his partner. This consequently leads him to drink. They are both similar when they eventually come to rest and relaxation at the end. The dignity of Walter is preserved by keeping the house. On the other hand, Prometheus is freed from his anguish at the end. Walter is similar to Prometheus, throughout the play, by getting angry with George. At the end of their talk, George named Walter Prometheus. The implication here is that Walter and Prometheus are punished for the wrong act.

The sense of irony is obvious in George's reference to Walter as Prometheus. George is of the idea that as Prometheus is doomed to perpetual suffering, Walter's lack of knowledge and wretchedness are also doomed. Both of the characters are similar in distress.

George simply responds by calling him "Prometheus." In Greek mythology, Prometheus was a Titan known for his intelligence, and George's reference to him serves two purposes; firstly, it insults Walter, establishing an assumption that Walter is ignorant of classical literature and utilizing sarcasm to call Walter stupid. Predictably, Walter does not understand the reference because of his lack of education. The second purpose of this reference is to verify George's western education.

(Baker. 2014:16)

Being convicted, and having the same decision, Prometheus and Water are alike. Walter's imaginative project of the liquor shop is a plan which he thinks is much more

superior to others' ideas and is a profitable scheme good to sustain his family. With this idea, he would make his way into his society. Similarly, by bringing the fire to mortals, Prometheus opposes Zeus to the advantage of Man notwithstanding the punishment which would be received. Walter loses the money he invested in the store and fated to live with his guilt. In a similar Manner, Prometheus is condemned to the hard pain of punishment.

Walter's attempt to get in touch with his grand and marvelous dream, invokes the legend of Prometheus who brings back the fire to help Man in standing independently. In his scathing remarks to Walter who is looking for more influence, George realizes that the world of the white would discipline Walter for his ambition. George's notion is as Prometheus has been punished, Walter would face the same punishment.

3.1. Fire as Boon to Man, Liquor as Dangerous to People

To secure the permanence of the mortals, Prometheus contemplated how to help them. The legend tells that Prometheus loved Mankind, and he believes in their power. Prometheus is in constant thinking that mortals have good traits of being intelligent enough to get high ranks in the world and humans could develop their way into a better life. Therefore, he decided to help them.

Prometheus was not slow to understand the importance of fire to his wards. Fire could make up for his brother's carelessness by giving humans the essential tool for their survival and development. They could cook their food to make it digestible; heat kilns to make pottery; keep warm in winter; forge metals. Fire is the key that opens all these doors and lays the foundation of human life.

(Waterfield,2012: 15)

Prometheus and fire are the symbols of grace. His myth is taken as an example of being the benefactor to humankind. Prometheus fire is a source

of science and knowledge of Man. He granted Man this fire to support life and give strength, it is considered the power which sustains human life.

Prometheus was used as an allegory for the progress of science and materialism especially when the Industrial Revolution came into full bloom. This allegory, based on the symbolic power of fire, must not be confused with the way in which late Eighteenth century and nineteenth century artists made a symbol of Prometheus.

(Corbeau-Parsons, 2013: V)

3.2. Prometheus' Self-sacrifice for Mankind, Walter's Extreme Self-centered Materialism

In Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* knowledge is a central and dominant theme in the play. Prometheus gift of fire to Man means illumination of Man's life. Prometheus's aim is to support Man's ability to stand still in the world. Fire helps mortals in doing better in life, and fire means light in the future of humanity. Prometheus is looking for a way to make Man free from the rule of gods. In fact, fire is a permeant mean to promote humanity. Thus fire is knowledge.

Lightning within the context of the Prometheus myth was used both to animate Man and to provide Man with the means to escape his earthly destiny and become like the Gods. Lightning has also come to be associated with the gaining of knowledge and insight into previously unknown conditions. It is in these aspects of lightning do we see the strongest parallels between the myth of Prometheus and *Frankenstein*.

(Abby, 2008:8)

Knowing the consequence of his act, sacrifice is the only to help Man in advancing the cause of life and to enlighten the future of Man. On the other hand, Walter's dream is to

have a position in his little world. In the end, Walter's intent is exclusively Fortune and richness.

4. Is it Fair of Murchison to Call Walter Prometheus?

Because of describing Walter as being Prometheus is a kind of evaluating of his condition since the condition of how he thinks himself is always right, and his plan is always more excellent than others. However, Walter does not know what is the right business to start with. He thinks himself to be enough intelligent to start any business. In this respect Walter and Prometheus are comparable. Prometheus's plan is partially successful in bringing back fire to Man. But it is a failure since he is captured and tortured. This happens because he thinks of himself as smart and skillful. Pretending cleverness and ignoring the sound reasons of his mother, thus in the end leads Walter to be penalized and let him suffer.

The sarcasm of talk in George's call of Walter as Prometheus is not vague. The reason for the irony is to underestimate Water. As the play proceeds, we as readers come to know the obscurity of this part of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. The conflict of a black family in a white-dominant society is the central motif in the play. A family that forgets the social-based differences between themselves with a low level of education and the supposedly cultured whites who are intolerant of black people. The play narrates the story of a black family who fights to improve its conditions within a racist society. The community considers itself to have an elevated standard of education. The black family compares itself to all these standards. The play shows this contradiction as the main motif more excellently than George's direct claim to Walter as Prometheus. And with this knowledge about Prometheus, Hansberry makes it easy to comprehend George's dialogue. Behind the premier characterization of Prometheus, one must look into the particularity of the penalty he received for granting fire for humanity, this is to simplify Hansberry's use of this legendary character. Therefore, the description of Walter as Prometheus by George is to show how

Walter is sentenced to endless misery and blindness.

5. Conclusion

By focusing on the two characters in the research at hand, the reader finds that there is a great similarity between the legendary character Prometheus, who ventured himself to illuminate the path of Humanity on the one hand, and Walter, the main character in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, who in his turn was looking for a light at the end of the tunnel for a better life for himself and his family on the other hand. Hence, they both carry a lofty goal by thinking about others and how to do their best to achieve these goals.

Both characters are serious about doing their best for the sake of luxury, progress, and the virtuous life of the family and Man. Prometheus believes that giving fire to Man, which is the symbol of life and a tool for the development and advancement of the lifestyles of Man, is the finest form of assistance. Walter eagerly insists on investing the money his mother received after his father's death through the wine shop. This project is the only way out and the best way to improve the life of the family in a comprehensive lifestyle. Both visions are similar in terms of the goal of developing both human life and the family. As Prometheus thought of Man, Walter had a great interest in his family and how to lead it to a better life.

The pain Walter suffered and through events of the play is similar to that experienced by Prometheus. Walter loses the money he invested in the liquor shop the reason he lived moments of pain and bitterness because of the loss. Moreover, Prometheus suffered severe physical pain as a result of the dedication of fire to Man.

Regarding sacrifice, Prometheus sacrificed himself, which is his most precious asset, while Walter sacrificed money, which is a precious legacy and a last chance for the family. Hence, they both sacrificed something precious in order to achieve goals of great importance to them and the people around. The sacrifice here was not absurd and without considerations, but it came from knowledge and awareness of

the magnitude of the risks that Prometheus and Walter could be exposed to.

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