

Literature and life

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The magic of reading is that it brings you to another place and feeling. At times it can make you smile with character, and other times make you cry with him. Sometimes it may even allow the reader to identify with the characters. Reality can often be a lot like a piece of literature, in that a person may be going through the exact same thing, or something similar, and be feeling the same way. It is effortless to view the tough and unspoken racism demonstrated in Nadine Gordimer's "Country Lovers" as well as how the girl feels in Patricia Smith's *What It's Like to Be a Black Girl (For Those of You Who Aren't)*.

In both readings you get a sense of the hardship the characters faced because of racism, the things that people may do or allow to happen because it is so hard. Racism is something that we see, hear about, and maybe even experience in our everyday lives. It may be something that we do not speak about, just like in the short story "Country Lovers." The main characters Paulus and Thebedi were raised together since they were kids, Paulus was a white boy and Thebedi, a black girl. They played together and spent most of their childhood days with one another.

As time goes by and they begin to grow up and the distance between the two also grow apart. However, the bond created between them as children is still there. Both Paulus' and Thebedi's parents never forbade them from seeing each other but there was always this unspoken knowledge that they knew it was wrong because they always seemed to be hiding the fact that they did spend time together. An example of this would be when Paulus came home from school and brought Thebedi a gift " She told her father the

missus had given them to her as a reward for some works she had done-it was true she sometimes was called to help out in the farmhouse.

She told the girls in the kraal that she had a sweetheart nobody knew about” (Clugston, 2010). Both Paulus and Thebedi know that it is not okay to hold on to the relationship they had as kids. But they cannot help the feelings that have grown for each other over the years. “ The schoolgirls he went swimming with at dams or pools on neighboring farms wore bikinis but the sight of their dazzling bellies and thighs in the sunlight had never made him feel what he felt now when the girl came up the bank and sat beside him, the drops of water beading off her dark legs the only points of life in the earth-smelling deep shade.

They were not afraid of one other; they had known one other always” (Clugston, 2010). They had strong feelings for one another and consummated them by having sexual relations. This went on for a while, and eventually Thebedi became pregnant. At this point her hand was asked for in marriage by Njabulo, since they had already had sexual relations her now husband did not question her being pregnant. “ The infant was very light and did not quickly grow dark as most African babies do. Already at birth, there was on its head a quantity of straight, fine floss” (Clugston, 2010).

When Paulus found out that Thebedi had a baby, and that it was his, he didn’t want anyone to find out. “ Don't take it out. Stay inside. Can't you take it away somewhere? You must give it to someone—” (Clugston, 2010). Because in the time period interracial relationships were looked down upon, and were unacceptable, Paulus felt like he had to do something before anyone found out the baby was his. When Paulus came to see the baby the

next time Thebedi stayed outside as he killed their baby. The authorities came because they had heard there was a white looking child that was killed and brought charges against Paulus.

There was not enough evidence to convict but the fact of the matter is that he killed his child and Thebedi did nothing to stop it. Thebedi could have prevented the baby's death but seems to feel powerless against Paulus. I believe there is also a part of her that feels this way is better for everyone, this way they don't have to deal with the reality of their baby and how socially unacceptable it is. At the same time, I can't imagine it being easy knowing her baby, with the man she had extreme feelings for, is now dead and he is the one responsible.

I believe even women today sometimes feel powerless against their men. I don't think it would be taken to the extent of killing a child, but some men dictate the relationship and how things should be. Even though interracial relationships are more socially acceptable nowadays, it is still difficult sometimes for people of different races to be together. Another instance of racism is shown in the poem *What It's Like To Be a Black Girl (For Those of You Who Aren't)* by Patricia Smith. Although this one is shown in a different way.

In the poem the author describes what a girl has to do to be acceptable in the world as a black girl. " Its dropping food coloring in your eyes to make them blue and Suffering their burn in silence" (Clugston, 2010). Because she is a black girl and in certain periods in time white people seemed to reign supreme she tried to make herself look more socially acceptable, even at the cost of injuring herself. This poem shows the girl desiring to be white and to

fit in to that life, where she can walk around without being judged and looked down upon. It's popping a bleached white mophead over the kinks of your hair and primping in front of mirrors that deny your reflection" (Clugston, 2010). Just another example of putting yourself through pain to feel more accepted and not even wanting to see yourself the way you are because you feel ashamed. At the end of the poem, the young girl seems to feel more accepting of the fact she is black, even though she does not feel it is any easier at that point. " it's flame and fists and life according to Motown" (Clugston, 2010). She has accepted that her life is following the way of her culture.

It is not easy though and she must keep her guard, and her fists up. The poem, to me shows the struggles of a young girl because of society's view of people. It makes her life harder than it should be because of people's ignorance about race and what everyone should be like. Racism is ugly and sometimes makes people feel like they need to change themselves to be accepted. The girl was trying to lead a different life, one in which she was not judged and everyone would accept her. In both of these readings the authors showed the struggles people face because of racism.

There are many different ways racism affects people's lives, in the first story " Country Lovers" it was in a horrible way where an innocent child was murdered so no one would find out the love two people shared because it was socially unacceptable for the time. In The poem by Patricia Smith, the girl also injured herself to make herself acceptable. Both of these stories show the horrible things people do because of racism. It is not fair that an

innocent child, who never knew any better had to die or that a young girl must physically hurt herself to change in order for things to be okay.

There are times where life imitates literature, maybe the author used real experiences of people or situations that have happened or what they believe can happen. I am sure that when racism was extremely prevalent people did try to change themselves, all while hurting themselves or others. Nowadays racism is still around, maybe not to the degree of what the readings spoke about but it is definitely here and horrible things happen because of it. Things such as hate crimes and murder, as well as people having procedures to change their appearance. I am sure we will see these things until the day everyone accepts each other the way they are.