Chapter-II

A Raisin In The Sun

– Struggle for a better life

A Raisin in the Sun is the first play written by Lorrain Hansberry. The play projects the struggle faced by a Black family with youngsters living in south side of Chicago. The principle characters Lena the matriarch, her son Walter Lee who works as a Chauffer his wife Ruth and Leena's daughter Beneatha each have a dream of their own.

Hansberry makes a radical effort to represent Black life. In a fiercely unsentimental and unflinching way she reveals her vision of what happens to people whose dreams are constantly deferred. In her portrait of an embattled Chicago family Hansberry projects the issues that range from generational clashes to civil rights and women's movements. She poses the essential question about identity justice and moral responsibility.

Lorraine Hansberry, in an August 1959 Village Voice article, wrote:

> In an almost paradoxical fashion, it disturbs the soul of man to truly understand what he invariably senses: that nobody really finds oppression and/or poverty tolerable. If we ever destroy the image of the Black people who supposedly do find those things tolerable in America, then that much touted "guilt" which allegedly haunts most middle-class White Americans with regard to the Negro question would really become unendurable. (Hansberry, Amen)

Combating the myth of complacency is the central idea that drives Hansberry's play. During a time when African Americans were portrayed in musicals as jovial resilient characters who were content with their status, *A Raisin in the Sun* emerged as the first drama written and produced by an African-American that challenged this myth of contentment. On March 11, 1959, the first play of a young Black playwright Lorraine Hansberry opened at the Barrymore theatre. She had her audience captive. The night was not just another evening at the theatre, but rather marked the beginning of a conversation about several vital issues that concerned not just Blacks, but the American people as a whole. In this play, Hansberry vividly portrays the stress of poverty. On stage, she creates a real world

where five humans are squeezed into a one-bedroom apartment, where a young boy must scramble for a measly fifty cents, and where a man must die for the family to have any hope for the future. Nan Robertson of the *New York Times* voiced some astonishment that the play had even made it to Broadway, considering the number of "firsts" involved. Further, he opines that:

> The producers, Philip Rose and David J. Cagan, are a music publisher and an accountant who have never presented a play before. The director, Lloyd Richards, is a Negro-the first in memory to direct a Broadway play. For Sidney Poitier, who receives top billing, *Raisin* represents his first starring role on Broadway. But the most remarkable coup of all has been pulled off by the author, Lorraine Hansberry. *A Raisin in the Sun*, the story of a Chicago Negro Family's doomed struggle for a better life, is the first drama by a Negro Woman ever to reach the aptly titled great White way. Only three other Negro Writers in the last quarter-century, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright and Louis Peterson-have made Broadway with straight plays. (Robertson, 3)

Nan Robertson could not know when she penned the above article, of course, that another first would be attached to *A Raisin in the Sun*: it won for Lorraine Hansberry the 1959 Drama Critics circle Award, the first ever to be awarded to a Black author.

As Nan Robertson indicated, Broadway had not suffered from an overabundance of Black plays at the time *A Raisin in the Sun* opened at the Barrymore theatre. Langston Hughe's Play *Simply Heavenly* centered and woven around anecdotes and stories by Hughes celebrated character, Jesse B. Simple-had made it; so had Louis Peterson's *Take a Giant Step*, which dealt with the adolescence of a Negro youth growing up in a White neighborhood. Apart from *Raisin*, these were the only two plays by Black authors to be produced on Broadway during the decade of the 1950s.

This is not to say that only three plays by Black playwrights were written in the fifties. Rather it is to suggest the difficulty that such authors had in getting their works accepted or accepted while keeping the original impact and direction. William Branch wrote two plays of note, *A medal for Willie* and *In splendid Error*. In the first, Willie's posthumous medal is presented by the army to his mother, who wonders whether his death really helped his country or his people. The second is a dramatization of the friendship and the disagreement in tactics between Frederick Douglass and John Brown, a dramatization that became "a personal statement in contemporary terms as to the differing roles people could play in a revolutionary movement ..... Society needs both its fiery souls and its more reasoned thinkers, both its identity and its super-ego." (Abramson, 188)

Alice Childress' *Trouble in mind* was produced off-Broadway in 1955, running for ninety-one performances at the Greenwich Mews theatre. The frame work is a play within a play. The play being rehearsed is about Blacks and Whites; what happens to the mixed cast and its White director, stage manager, and doorman as they rehearse the play and react to each other is the substances of the play. *Trouble in mind* was optioned for Broadway, but it was withdrawn by Miss Childress after protracted squabble with the producer, who wanted to change the script into a "heart-warming little story." (190) which it certainly was not she comments on the strained position into which a Black writer who tries to deal with social problems if placed if the producer then wants to change the play in such a way as to distort the original intentions: "It is ironical that those who oppose us are in a position to dictate the quality and quantity of our contributions, to insult a man is one things, but to tell him how to react to the insult adds a great and crippling injury." (Childress, 59)

Loften Mitchell's *A Land Beyond the River* was produced at the Greenwich Mews theatre in 1957, went on tour briefly after the New York run, and has been revived several times since. The story is that of the Reverend Joseph A Delaine, who brought a case to a local court seeking school bus transportation for the Black children in his area. The case in time developed into a suit for separate but equal schools, only to give way to the realization that such schools might be separate, but that they certainly were not equal. The case eventually became part of the larger suit

submitted to The United States Supreme Court that resulted in the 1954 decision to outlaw segregation in the public schools. The way used to this victory was non-violent; there is nothing to suggest, however, that the method for achieving equality will always be non-violent. (Mitchell, 394)

Not all plays about the Black experience are by Blacks, of course, and not all plays with Black faces accurately portray Black life, it was in fact a reaction to seeing a play with a distorted view of Black life that caused Miss Hansberry to begin work on *A Raisin in the Sun*. "I wrote it between my twenty – sixth and twenty – seventh birthdays. One night after seeing a play I won't mention, I suddenly became disgusted with a whole body of material about Negroes. Cardboard characters cute dialect bits or hip-swinging musicals from exotic sources." (*Dramatist Against odds*, 3) she decided "to write a social drama about Negroes that will be good art." (3). asked for an example of the kind of show that triggered her reaction, she cited *Carmen Jones*. "Now there's reality for you, an all – Negro musical written by two White men from a French opera about gypsies in Spain." (4)

The play that developed was one about dreams and what happens when a dream is deferred. The title comes from a poem by Langston Hughes:

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

Like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore –

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over –

Like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

Like a heavy load.

Or does it explode? (*Dream Deferred*, 7)

Each of the four main adults has a dream. For Lena, matriarch of the younger's, it is to have a place for her family to live where they will not have to be continuously batting cockroaches, rats, and other pests. She wants a place with some sunshine, a place where her plants and her children can have some room to grow. For Walter Lee, the dream is of riches, success, status, the American dream, dignity. He is thirty-five years old, and he wants more self – respect than the job of chauffeur which he is. He wants to buy a liquor store and become its owner which he thinks is his vehicle for success. Beneatha's dream is to become a doctor. Her interest in caring for people earns her the nickname of "Alaiyo", which means "one for whom Bread – Food – is not enough". (*A Raisin in the Sun*, 52). Ruth, pregnant with her second child, wants a place to lay the child when it is born and wants its father to be more positive in his attitude towards himself and her, and make life comfortable in general. The catalyst for the action in the play is a check for $.10,000 the payment from the insurance company upon the death of Lena's husband.

The dreams are not all compatible. Walter's desire to own a Liquor store runs counter to Lena's conception of Christian principles. When Ruth Suggests that people are going to drink regardless of who owns the store, so Walter might as well be the owner as someone else, Lena responds emphatically: "well-whether they drinks it or not ain't-none of my business. But whether I go into business selling it to 'em is, and I don't want that on my ledger this late in life" (30)

Beneatha's desire to be a doctor matches better with Mama's protestant Ethic, but the cost involved eats away at Walter. He resents the sacrifices the family has made and will have to make in order to finance Beneatha's dream: "Who the hell told 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 ....."(26)

The action of the play is probably the best known of any by a Black author. As Act I opens, an alarm clock is ringing, signaling the beginning of the day before the check is to arrive. The living room we see would be comfortable except that the furnishings "have clearly had to accommodate the living of too many people for too many years – and they are tired... weariness has, in fact, won in this room. Everything has been polished, washed, sat on, used, scrubbed too often" (11) the play is set on Chicago's Southside, home of an earlier family – Richard Wright's Thomases.

Ruth wakes her son Travis, asleep on the sofa-bed in the living room, and sends him off to school. Walter Lee re-outlines his plans for a liquor store over breakfast, Walter says that:

> WALTER. Yeah. You see, this little liquor store we got in mind cost seventy-five thousand and we figured the initial investment on the place be 'bout thirty thousand, 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. (33)

But Ruth is not impressed with Walter's idea of owning a liquor store so she stares at him vigorously and ask him to complete eating his eggs. Walter is disappointed with the reaction of Ruth he expresses it in this way.

> WALTER. That's it there you are Man say to his woman. I got me a dream. His woman say: Eat your eggs (Sadly, but gaining in power) Man Say: I got to take hold of this here world, baby! And a woman will say: Eat your eggs and go to work. (Passionately now) Man Say: got to change my life, I'm choking to death, baby! And his woman say – (in utter anguish as he brings his fists down on his thighs) – your eggs is getting cold! (21-22)

Beneatha enters in time to get caught in the crossfire, and the attacks shifts to the money being spent on her schooling, as noted above Walter Lee leaves for work. Walter's frustration at being unable to provide his son with a bedroom or anything more than "stories about how rich White people live" seethes within him, and he lays the blame on the "small minds" of Black women (22-23)

The rest of the act I, scene 1 show the interplay among Mama, Ruth, and Beneatha Mama and Ruth display a genuine affection for each other; and after dutifully sounding out Mama about the liquor store, Ruth quietly reinforces her mother-in-law's dream of buying a house.

Beneatha is twenty years old and trying her wings searching for what "expresses" her. She is about to start guitar lessons and has already decided to reject the kind of faith her mother has in god. Beneatha says she gets tired of God's "getting credit for all the things the human race achieves through its own stubborn effort" (39) Now Mama slaps Beneatha on her face for saying something against God and religion.

Scene 2, Saturday morning introduces Joseph Asagai to us and to Mama. Asagai is Nigerian, and it is through him that Beneatha is trying to rediscover her African heritage. The check arrives, but no final decision is made on its disposition. Ruth, ill at the scene 1 Curtain, is confirmed to be pregnant, but she lets it slip that she has made arrangements to have an abortion. Walter has his eyes fixed on a future that is filled with nothing without the insurance money, is unable to make a move either to dissuade Ruth from her plan or to reinforce here. His desire to achieve his dream has paralyzed his ability to recognize or ease the hurt and suffering that his family members experience before his own eyes.

Act II begins with a scene which has a frequently included phrase "Black is beautiful" this is a regular occurrence in sections of play and literature anthologies. It is partly rhetoric and partly a comedy. Too much drink makes Walter Lee to lose his African heritage; he mounts a table, leading his Black brothers into a mighty war. He says, "In my heart of hearts ..... I am much warrior!" To which Ruth dryly replies, "In your heart of hearts you are much drunkard." (65) George Murchison, Beneatha's comparatively wealthy boyfriend enters and brings the African experience to an end. Beneatha defends it:

> GEORGE. Oh, dear, dear, dear! Here we go! A Lecture on the African past! On our Great West African heritage! In one second we will hear all about the great Ashanti empires; the great Songhay civilization and the great sculpture of Benin .... And then some poetry in the Bantu .... And the whole monologue will end with the word heritage! (Nastily) Let's face it, baby, your heritage is nothing but a bunch of raggedy – assed spirituals and some grass huts!

> BENEATHA. Grass huts! ..... See there .... You are standing there in your splendid ignorance talking about people who were the first to smelt iron on the face of the earth! .... The Ashanti were performing surgical operations when the English .... Were still tattooing themselves with blue dragons! ..... (67-68)

While beneath changes for her date with George, Walter Lee unsuccessfully tries to draw George into a discussion about making money. As his attempts are rebuffed, Walter Lee lashes out bitterly against middle – class, college student George.

As soon as George and Beneath Leave, Walter Lee and Ruth fight about the insurance money and their second child to be born as Ruth is now pregnant. Mama's entrance interrupts their reconciliation and she announces her decision as to how the money will be used – she has decided to buy a house. Mama tells Travis: "you glad about the house? It's going to be yours when you get to be a man". (79) But what is a man? Walter still does not feel like a man:

> WALTER. 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 – you – who always talking 'bout your children's dreams .... (80)

The house in which the younger's are living is cramped for room its really not a comfortable place it's a small house leased by a landlord. This house has a kitchen area where the family prepares the meals that has to be eaten in the living room. So it also must serve as a dining room. There is a single window provided for these two rooms which is located in the kitchen area. The sole natural light the family may enjoy in the course of a day is only that which fights it's way through this little window. Towards left is a small room which is shared by Mama and Beneatha as bedroom. To the right is entrance to this house which is used by Walter

and Ruth as a sleeping place. This has been the problems for this family ever since Mama lived along with her husband Walter. Sr. Mama the matriarch of the family wants to fulfill a dream which she shared with her husband when he was alive. Hence she plans to buy a house with the insurance money. She believes that a bigger and brighter dwelling will help them all. But the only problem is that her venture is in clybourne park, an entirely white neighborhood.

But Walter is not interested in purchasing a new house instead he wants to invest the entire insurance money in liquor business. He reveals his discontent to Mama.

A few weeks later scene 2 begins, Beneatha and George have arrived back from an evening out. George wants to kiss; Beneatha wants to talk. At loggerheads, Beneatha tells George to go home. Presently, the telephone rings, the call bringing the information that Walter Lee has not shown up for work for the last three days and that he will be sent out if he does not attend duty tomorrow. Walter Lee is indifferent; his dream is shattered, so he finds nothing worth for him anymore. Mama feels that she is the one partly to blame. She makes Walter Lee the head of the house, by placing in his hands the balance of the insurance money. Of the $.10,000 Mama has already paid $.3,500 to procure a house. She stipulates that $.3,000 is to be put in a savings account for Beneatha's medical school; the rest is his to use. When the others go to bed, Walter Lee pours out his dreams to his son, he says that after tonight's business transaction, things are going to be radically different.

Scene 3 begins a week later. It is a Saturday filled with excitement. Ruth is finishing up the family's packing. Everyone is in a good mood; even Walter is genuinely and deeply exuberant. Their spirits are dampened but not extinguished by the arrival of a quiet, middle – aged White man, Karl Lindner, chairman of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association, who has come to promote brotherhood and buy the younger's out. Believing that Blacks and whites are happier in their own neighborhoods, the committee is willing to buy the house at a financial gain for the younger's but Walter Lee is not interested and orders him out.

When Mama returns home, Ruth, Beneatha, and Walter Lee tease her about the "welcoming" committee that had come. They give her a set of gardening tools, as planned; Travis gives her a huge, elaborate gardening hat. The joy and playfulness are broken by Bobo, who brings a news to Walter that Willy Harris has disappeared with all the money that was to go for the purchase of the liquor store Walter Lee, stunned and distraught, confesses to the family that all of the $. 6,500 entrusted to him is gone, even Beneatha's school money. The scene ends on an echo of Juno's wail from Sean O' Casey's *Juno and the Pay cock*, as Mama pleads for strength.

There is only one scene in Act III, and it takes place an hour after the action at the close of Act II. Gloom and a profound disappointment have settled wordlessly over the group. Asagai arrives to offer a hand with the packing and finds Beneatha in despair. Her future turned around, she has lost the ability to care: "Man is foul! And the human race deserves its misery!" (114) Asagai contradicts her statement, and the two stage their own debate of the validity of an existential viewpoint. As Beneatha softenss, Asagai asks her to return with him to Africa as his wife. She asks time to think about it, and he leaves.

Beneatha loses her ability and interest to care about her family affairs she however viciously mocks on Walter, taunting him with his dreams of success. Walter ignores her, searching for a small piece of paper, and rushes out when he has found it. Mama comes into the living room, "lost, vague, trying to catch hold, to make some sense of her former command of the world, but it still eludes her." (118) her dream battered, she talks of unpacking. Ruth desperately tries to console and comfort her but her attempts are in vain.

Walter Lee returns after he is unable to contact Lindner to tell him to meet his family. He comes over and begins to reveal to his family how low he has sunk into despair. He makes an analysis of the state of the world in his "taker" – "token" speech, and reveals the kind of "show" he is going to put on for Linder when he arrives, complete with Gone – with – the wind dialect: "Yasssssuh! Great White father, just gi' useen de money, fo' God's sake, and we's ain't gwine come out deh ad dirty up yo' White folks neighborhood ....." (124) He breaks down and goes into the bedroom.

Beneatha disowns him, but Mama admonishes: "when you start measuring somebody, measure him right, child, measure him right. Make sure you done taken into account what hills and valleys he come through before he got to where ever he is" (125)

Lindner and the movers arrive simultaneously. Having already gone as low as he could go, however, in his humiliation before his family, Walter Lee begins to pull himself together and to grow. He finds pride in his family and in himself, and he tells Mr. Lindner that they will move into the house. As they begin the move, Walter Lee has become what his mother could not make him by force or order he behaves as – the head of the house and a man.

After the play ended the critics started to give their opinions. The word the next day was good: reviews by all seven New York drama critics were full of praise. (Zolotow, 25) "An impressive first play, beautifully acted," wrote Walter Kerr in *The Herald Tribune*. (Kerr, 23)

From John Chapman of *The Daily News* came the comment, "A lovely play." (23)

Richard Watts, of *The Post* observed, "It is sometimes rather forgotten but there is a great deal to be said for plain, downright integrity in the theatre." (23)

Brooks Atkinson of *The New York Times* lauded. *A Raisin in the Sun* has vigor as well as veracity and is likely to destroy the complacency of anyone who sees it ..... You might, in fact, regard *A Raisin in the Sun* as a Negro *The Cherry Orchard.* (Atkinson, 27)

Critics like them in the various periodicals largely – but not entirely – agreed. Kenneth Tynan went to the Barrymore prepared to like the play and found that "within ten minutes, however, liking had matured into absorption." (100) T.H. Wenning tagged it a contender for best play of the year and wrote, "One of the most stirring and revealing productions of the year is a first play by Lorraine Hansberry, a 28-years-old Negro who combines honesty, humor, and understanding with an instinctive knowledge of how to write the soaring scene." (Wenning, 76) The reviewer for *Time* Spoke of "a work of genuine dramatic merit," a "well – crafted

play" (New plays on Broadway, 58) Harold Clurman Called it "an old – fashioned play – which should not be taken to mean that it is not a good one ..... Miss Hansberry simply wants to say what she has seen and experienced, because to her these things are sufficiently important in themselves. This is what I mean when I call her play 'old – fashioned.' (Clurman, 301) Clurman went on to say that "It is entirely false to assume that we have no further use for the old realism". (301)

There were grumblings, however, and Tom Driver's review in *The New Republic* seemed to include most of them. To begin with, he saw the praise given to *A Raisin in the Sun* as little short of a collective conscience – clearing effort: "If *A Raisin in the Sun* had been written by a White instead of a colored woman and if it had been written about a White family, it would have done well to recover its investment .... Much of its success is due to our sentimentality over the 'Negro Question'. (302) conceding that the younger family had vices as well as virtues, a point in its favor, he nevertheless disliked the "domestic" aspects of the play. He felt the characters were stage stereotypes. He agreed with Clurman that the dramatic writing was old – fashioned, but he did not seem to agree that there still remained a place for it: "The play is moving as a theatrical experience, but the emotions it engenders are not relevant to the social and political realities," (302) He felt that "the effect it produces is comparable to that which would be had in the concert hall if a composer of today were to write a concerto in the manner of Tchaikovsky. In spite of it the actors are capable of performing the score for all its worth." (302)

This is the way the critics' arguments ran. But there were other critics whose voices and opinions mattered to Lorraine Hansberry, as they did indeed to any Black artist. James Baldwin described these critics and the nature of their judgment:

> ...What is relevant here is that I had never in my life seen so many Black people in the theatre as at performances of *A Raisin in the Sun.* And the reason was that never in the history of the American theatre had so much of the truth of Black people's lives been seen on the stage. Black people ignored the theatre because the theatre had always ignored them.

> But, in *Raisin*, Black people recognized that house and all the people in it – the mother, the son, the daughter and the daughter-in-law – and supplied the play with an interpretative element which could not be present in the minds of White people a kind of claustrophobic terror, created not only by their knowledge of the house but by their knowledge of the streets. And when the curtain came down, Lorraine and I found ourselves in the backstage alley, where she was immediately mobbed. I produced a pen and Lorraine handed over her handbag and began signing autographs. "It only happens once," she said I stood there and watched. I watched the people, who loved Lorraine for what she had brought to them; and watched Lorraine, who loved the people for what they brought to her. It was not, far her, a matter of being admired. She was being corroborated and confirmed. (Baldwin, 139)

Even though most of the audience as James Baldwin described would have been unable to point out a teaser or a tormentor on stage, they knew that the play before them was supposed to be in the realistic style and that the subject was their lives; their verdict was that *Raisin* was the truthful portrayal that its author had tried to make it.

The arguments set forth by the critics need examination, however. Tom driver began with the charge of favoritism. Mr. Driver saw the public as "flocking to see it" (Driver, 21) out of guilt feelings, but a different picture was painted in review three days later by another critic. Marya Mannes, writing for the Reporter, compared the potential audience for *Raisin* with that of Tennessee Williams *Sweet Bird of youth*, which had opened a day before *Raisin* and also had unanimously good reviews.

> .... *Sweet Bird of youth* gives every indication of playing to packed houses for a long time to come, and I am sure that audience will include not only theatre lovers and the sneaker set but expense – account customers who want the biggest thing for their money. What western sales managers of die and cast can go back to Tulsa without telling the boys there about the bedroom scene, where they almost do it? "Oh brother," I can hear him telling them, "What a hangover she had!"
>
> He will not, I am equally sure, have gone to *Raisin in the Sun*, although it had the superb notices it deserved as the moving, honest, and compassionate play it is.
>
> Why? Because it is about poor Negroes, and who wants to spend a night on the town seeing poor Negroes, even if the play is consistently absorbing, often funny, and beautifully acted by Sidney Poitier and a cast worthy of him? I have an unhappy feeling that an unadmitted sense of guilty will keep a great many people away from *Raisin in the Sun.* (Mannes, 34)

If statistics may be used to back either position, it would seem that they tend to support that of Miss Mannes on Friday of *the week* both opened, *The New York Times* reported: "Attendance at yesterday's matinees of *Raisin* was below expectations and almost at the sell-out mark for *sweet bird".* (Zolotow, 25)

The cry of favoritism was once again raised when *A Raisin in the Sun* won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award. Asked about it, Miss Hansberry replied, "No, I don't think my being a Negro had anything to do with the award. I certainly hope not". (*Surprise, Newsweek,* 75)

Her statement, of course, did not settle the matter. Nor, for that matter, does the analysis by Gerald Weales of that topic, although his discussion has a logic about it that makes it seem close to the truth:

> Even if the play is a good one, even if it were indisputably the best of the year, the climate of award – giving would make impossible its consideration on merit alone. Whenever an award goes to a playwright who is not a veteran of Broadway or to a play which is in some way unusual, the special case is almost certainly as important a factor in the voting as the play itself. (Weales, 527)

Weales believes that the only play that could have got the prize on its own merits was *Sweet Bird of youth,* as Archibald MacLeish was seen as a poet dominating Broadway and since critics had long waited for a verse on the commercial stage. His play '*J.B*' could also have been considered for the award. Similar opinion could have been aimed at *A Touch of the Poet*: "Had *A Touch of the Poet* got the award, respect for O' Neil as America's greatest playwright and the suspicion that this is very likely the last full-length play to be unearthed from the O' Neil papers and put on stage would have received ballots along with the play itself." (527)

Thus, even though Miss Hansberry's race may have had something to do with the award that was certainly not the whole story.

After the examination of the craftsmanship of the play, majority of critics gave a favorable opinion of the play, calling it "solidly dramatic." *A Raisin in the Sun* is a play with dramatic contagion and a profound emotional statement. Structurally, the play fits within the general boundaries of the well made play, a form that is certainly not revolutionary but which does present the author with an opportunity to speak fairly clearly to the audience. Miss Hansberry has handled the form well, creating in the audience a considerable desire to know what is happening as well as to whom and why.

It is in her characters, however, that the audience is especially interested. They are not kings or men of power but they are normal people with tragedies in different aspects of their lives and they reflect people of everyday life. Jordan Miller describes Miss Hansberry's characters as follows:

> These are very little people, performing in a world of other little people, and their confusion and their anger have solid basis in their irritations at the refusal of the world to behave the way it should. They never become sentimentally maudlin, for they are not by any means the charmingly impossible nice folk of a Saroyan fantasy. Nor are they in the tradition of Grover's corners, and they make no happy journeys to Trenton or Camden on the other hand, inhabiting an essentially sane if not always rational world, they never become the puzzled but game little people of Thurber's wacky universe. They are, in short, attractively and convincingly real people, for whom no excuses are made and none sought. (Bigsby, 162)

They are little people, but they are exceedingly interesting. They are, moreover, the stuff from which twentieth – century heroes are made. They seem small compared to the huge and complex problems that face them in the twentieth-century, but they are heroic nevertheless. Not so very many years ago a "little person" named Mrs. Rosa Parks was riding a bus home in Montgomery, Alabama, after a hard day at work on this otherwise uneventful day she was tired – tired enough to refuse, simply and quietly, to give up her seat just because she was Black and an entering White man had no seat. It would have been easy to give up her seat that day, as she had before, but something inside her refused. In that refusal, in the dissent, she began to achieve that "Pinch of dignity" that Mama talks about. The historic Montgomery bus boycott grew out of support for her stand. In a similar manner, Mama is heroic when she puts her money down on the best house she can

afford for her family, even though the house is in a possibly hostile White neighborhood. Walter Lee is heroic as he refuses Lindner's money "because he has finally reached out in his tiny moment and caught that sweet essence which is human dignity, and it shines like the old star – touched dream that is in his eyes." (Lester, 13)

The characters are heroic, but their author avoids puffing them up in their heroism. They remain people, never becoming a personified "Matriarchal Strength" or "Destroyer of Mr. Whitey's Hopes." The big scene is played down. "At the moment when you'd expect the characters to work themselves up into a fight or a tirade, they melt into touchingly human, though cleanly unsentimental, acts." (Hewes, 28)

Lorraine Hansberry is more concerned with allowing her characters to find themselves as individuals and as a family than with preaching to an audience. She had a message, but she was aware that "whatever is said must be said through the living arguments of human beings in conflicts with other human beings, with themselves, with the abstractions which seem to them to be their society" (Lester, 15)

Lorraine Hansberry, as already discussed before, wanted to write a social drama about Negroes that would be good art. She believed that good art appealed to the universal, but that the universal appeal could only come through when strict attention is made to the particular problems which are common to all human beings. For an example, she turned to Sean O' Casey.

> I love Sean O' Casey. This, to me, is the playwright of the twentieth century accepting and using the most obvious instruments of Shakespeare, which is the human personality in its totality. O' Casey never fools you about the Irish, you see... the Irish drunkard, the Irish braggart, the Irish liar... and the genuine heroism which must naturally emerge when you tell the truth about people. This, to me, is the height of artistic perception and is the most rewarding kind of

> thing that can happen in drama, because when you believe people so completely – because everybody has their drunkards and their braggarts and their cowards, you know – then you also believe them in their moments of heroic assertion you don't doubt them. (*To be Young, Gifted and Black*, 90-91)

O' Casey told the truth about his people, and Lorraine Hansberry sought to do the same for her people.

Not everyone was willing to hear the truth-- or at least the whole truth-- about the young Black family in Chicago. Many critics, together with the more average theatre-goers, seized the universal aspects of the play and closed their eyes to the significance given to the Black in particulars. Thus Henry Hewes wrote: "The fact that they are colored people, with all the special problems of their race, seems less important than that they are people with exactly the same problems everyone else has." (Hewes, 28)

This opinion was echoed by Marya Mannes: "I have an unhappy felling that an unadmitted sense of guilt will keep a great many people away from *Raisin in the Sun*, although its very virtue is in its lack of racial emphasis and playwright Lorraine Hansberry's treatment of her people as whole human beings in wholly human dilemmas." (Mannes, 34)

Nor were those two critics alone in their belief. The statement that follows was made many times: "This is not really a Negro Play; why, this could be about anybody! It's a play about people!" When asked for her reaction, Miss Hansberry replied:

> Well I hadn't noticed the contradiction because I'd always been under the impression that Negroes are people. But actually it's an excellent question, because invariably that has been the point of Reference. And I do know what people are trying to say. People are

> trying – what they are trying to say is that this is not what they consider the traditional treatment of the Negro in the theater. They are trying to say that it isn't a propaganda play, that it isn't something that hints you over the head; they are trying to say that they are trying to say that they believe the characters in our play transcend category. However, it is an unfortunate way to try and say it, because I believe that one of the most sound ideas in dramatic writing is that in order to create the universal, you must pay very great attention to the specific. Universality, I think, emerges from truthful identity of what is.
>
> In other words, I have told people that not only is this a Negro family, specifically definitely and culturally, but it's not even a New York family or a southern Negro family. It is specifically Southside Chicago .... That kind of care, that kind of attention to detail, in other words, I think people, to the extent we accept them and believe them as who they're supposed to be, to that extent they can become everybody. So I would say it is definitely a Negro play before it is anything else. (*To be Young, Gifted and Black*, 128)

A year after Miss Hansberry's death, Alice Childress would echo the first part of the above statement: "Imagine a rose saying I m not a rose, I m a flower. Well I am rose and a flower; I am a Negro writer, and also part of universal man." (Alice Childress, quoted in David Liorens, 65)

Ossie Davis has also commented on the prevalent "they're – Just – like – us" reaction to *Raisin* by the Public:

> One of the biggest selling points about *Raisin* – filling the grapevine, riding the word – of – mouth, laying the foundation for its wide, wide acceptance – was how much the Younger family was just like any other American family. Some people were ecstatic to find that "it didn't really have to be about Negroes at all!" It was, rather, a walking, talking, living demonstration of our mythic conviction that, underneath, all of us Americans, color – ain't – got – nothing – to – do – with – it, are pretty much alike. People are just people, whoever they are; and all they want is a chance to be like other people. This uncritical assumption, sentimentally held by the audience, powerfully fixed in the character of the powerful mother with whom everybody could identify immediately and completely, made any other questions about the Younger's, and what living in the slums of Southside Chicago had done to them, not only irrelevant and impertinent, but also disloyal: *Raisin* was a great American play, and Lorraine was a great American playwright because everybody who walked into the theatre saw in Lena Younger – especially as she was Portrayed by Claudia. MC Neil, his own great American Mama. And that was decisive. (Davis, 399)

He believed that the public, by fixing on Mama's dream of owning a two story house somewhere with a little piece of land around it, ignored Walter's dream and what it meant, and were thus caught unaware during the "Long, Hot summers" that were to follow.

Walter Lee dreams of "being somebody" and of "making it". He dreams of being able to act like the rich White men he sees while he chauffeurs his boss around.

> He wanted a liquor store which would enable him to exploit the misery of his fellow slum dwellers like they were exploited by everybody else. Walter Lee is corrupted by the materialistic aspirations at the heart of western civilization, and his corruption is bodied forth in his pretty, little dream. But it was his dream, and it was all he had! And that made it a matter of life or death to him, revolutionary dangerous in its implications. For it could explode if frustrated! That's what Lorraine was warning us about. But we would only listen to Mama, and Mama did not even fully understand Walter Lee! (400)

Mama did not understand Walter Lee, and America did not understand that there were "millions of young Americans who panic, they are just like him, caught up in the conflict of rising expectations, and in the midst of an affluent society that insists on playing with fire as far as these distorted dreamers are concerned". (400)

They did not understand that by dangling the American Dream in front of those like Walter Lee, while "slapping down their every attempt to reach up and grab, like everybody else". (400) by trapping them in poverty and pinning them in the ghetto, by deferring their dreams, there was little else for the Walter Lee's to do but explode in violence and bloodshed – or shoot dope – or turn their backs on it all and seek their own nation.

A Raisin in the Sun seeks to dramatize Langston Hughes' Poem, not to provide an easy answer to its questions. While it is true that at the end of play Walter Lee and his family are going off to a house of their own, it is likely that this will no more be a complete fulfillment of his dream than was simply coming North completely fulfilling for his father and Mama. He now feels like a man; his mother's "Pinch of dignity" will not be enough – he wants his full share. Moving into a house does not stop his talking about money. As the play concludes, he is still telling Beneatha, "Girl, if you don't get all them silly ideas about going to Africa and being

a doctor, which are out your head! You better marry yourself a man with some loot", (*A Raisin in the Sun*, 129) a man like George Murchison. Moving into the suburbs is not sufficient to cure all that he has become in the ghetto.

Many of the critics saw the move as a "happy ending," but was it? Robert Nemiroff suggests that it "did not have a "happy ending", only the commitment to new levels of struggle." (Nemiroff, 146)

Walter Lee has achieved a pinch of dignity, but the full measure will not be his until he is able to doff his Chauffeur's cap and support his family like those he sees around him. Nevertheless, the alternative to this continuing struggle is abhorrence: to accept the money would be to kill what spirit and self respect he has. To leave the ghetto is not a final solution for Walter Lee, but the alternative is suicide.

> I could no more imagine myself allowing the younger's to accept Lindner's obscene offer of money than I could imagine myself allowing them to accept a cash payment for their own murder.
>
> .... I absolutely plead guilty to the charge of idealism. But simple idealism. You see, our people don't really have a choice. We must come out of the ghettos of America, because the ghettos are killing us; not only our dreams, as Mama says, but our very bodies. It is not an abstraction to us that the average American Negro has a life expectancy of five to ten years less than the average White ..... that is murder, and a Negro writer cannot be expected to share the placid view of the situation that might be the case with a White writer. (*To be Young, Gifted and Black*, 131-32)

Nor will Walter Lee be able to wait until the hearts of those around him change and they grant him his equal measure; he will have to struggle for his dignity and his identity. Walter Lee's author may have been an idealist, but she was not blind:

> I am glad the American nation did not wait for the hearts of individual slave owners to change to abolish the slave system for I suspect that I should still be running around on a plantation as a slave. And that really would not do. (132)

In a letter to the man who translated *A Raisin in the Sun* into Czechoslovakian, Lorraine Hansberry made an observation about *Raisin* which is as characteristic of all her plays. To the translator, she wrote:

> There is, as a certain play suggests, a great deal to be fought in America – but, at the same time, there is so much which begs to be but re-affirmed and cherished with sweet defiance. Vulgarity, Blind conformity and mass lethargy need to triumph in the land of Lincoln and Frederick Douglass and Walt whit man and Mark Twain. There is simply no reason why dreams should dry up like raisins or prunes or anything else in America. If you will permit me to say so, I believe that we can impose beauty on our future. (129)

She says that America is a great nation but the society is complex and difficult to sustain. She says that Negro Americans face appalling conditions and she wished to reveal through her play the conflict faced by her fellow Blacks in America of the oppression involved and the resistance that meets it. In addition, it is this aspect of the play that was generally over looked at the time of its initial production.

There is a certain kinship between *A Raisin in the Sun* and some of Richard Wright's works, most notably *Native Son*. Both works show what it is like to be Black on Chicago's Southside. Although separated by a generation, both works take a look at that life through the eyes of men who are chauffeurs, Black men who regard their uniforms as strait Jackets imposed by the white world. Both Bigger Thomas and Walter Lee Younger "explode" because of a "dream deferred." The nature of the explosions differs, and Bigger's explosion is more fatal, but the same frustration and confusion, the same oppression, is at the root of each, both are native sons of segregated American society.

Images of various boys and men he had known came back to Richard Wright as "Bigger" took shape. One was a boy who took his way through life and was eager to fight anyone who opposed him. Another directed his hardness not towards other Negroes but towards the whites who ruled the south. He would buy food and clothes on credit with no intention of paying believing that any Black who went without the necessities of life or food while there was plenty of both in the white world was a fool. A third carried his life in his hands by crashing movie lines as a youth, by delivering liquor during the days of prohibition, and by generally being what the white population called a "bad nigger". A fourth was eventually driven crazy by the impossibility of his ever being free of taboos and Jim Crow laws. A fifth "Bigger" rode Jim crow street cars without paying and sat wherever he wanted to – including the White section. Told to move, he would take out his knife and nonchalantly reply: "Make me" so people would let him stay there.

Only the Bigger's Consistently Violated, the Jim Crow laws and got away with it, at least for a while "Eventually, the Whites who restricted their lives made them pay a terrible price. They were shot, hanged, maimed, lynched, and generally hounded until they were either dead or their spirits broken". Richard Wright describes the nature of the environment that produced these men in his work *Native Son.* He says that:

> In Dixie there are two worlds, the white world and the Black world, and they are physically separated. There are white schools and Black schools, white churches and black churches, white businesses and Black business, white graveyards and black graveyards, and for all I know, a white god and a Black god ..... (*Native Son,* 11)

This separation was not achieved by an accident, but by a desperate power struggle for a third of the Republic after the civil war. Numerically outnumbered by their former slaves in the most fertile plantations of the south, the whites sought through terror and intimidation to keep the Negroes from the ballot box and, with it, the social, Political and economic destiny of the region.

But keeping the ballot from the Negro was not enough to hold him in check; disfranchisement had to be supplemented by a whole panoply of rules, taboos, and penalties designated not only to insure peace, but to guarantee that no real threat should ever arise had the Negro lived upon a common territory, separate from the bulk of the white population, this program of oppression might not have assumed such a brutal and violent form. But this war took place between people who were neighbors whose homes adjoined, whose farms had common boundaries. Guns and disfranchisement, therefore, were not enough to make the Black neighbor keep his distance. The white neighbor decided to limit the amount of education his Black neighbor could receive; decided to keep him off the police force and out of the local national guards; to segregate him residentially, to Jim crow him in public places; to restrict his participation in the professions and jobs; and to build up a vast, dense ideology of racial superiority that would justify any act of violence taken against him to defend white dominance; and further, to condition him to hope for little and to receive that little without rebelling.

But, because the Blacks were so close to the very civilization which sought to keep them out, because they could not help but react in some way to its incentives and prizes, and because the very tissue of their consciousness received its tone and timber from the strivings of that dominant civilization, oppression spawned among them a myriad variety of reactions, reaching from outright blind rebellion to a sweet, other – worldly submissiveness. (12)

Thus Wright described a system of oppression that was virtually intact while he was a boy in the south, a system that Mama Younger was familiar with. In the face of such oppression, various coping mechanisms developed:

> Some of the Negroes living under these conditions got religion, felt that Jesus would redeem The Void of living, Felt that the more Bitter life was in the Present the happier it would be in the hereafter. Others, clinging still to that brief glimpse of post – civil war freedom, employed a thousand ruses and stratagems of struggle to win their rights. Still others projected their hurts and longings into more native and mundane forms – blues, Jazz, swing –and, without intellectual guidance, tried to build up a compensatory nourishment for themselves. Many labored under hot suns and then killed the restless ache with alcohol. Then there were those who strove for an education, and when they got it, enjoyed the financial fruits of it in the style of their bourgeois oppressors. Usually they went hand in hand with the powerful whites and helped to keep their groaning brothers in line, for that was the safest course of action. Those who did this called themselves "Leaders" to give you an idea of how completely these "leaders" worked with Those who oppressed, I Can tell you that I Lived the first seventeen Years of my life in the South without so much As hearing of or seeing One act of rebellion From any Negro, save the Bigger Thomas's. (12-13)

Some filled the void with sublimation, some with accommodation, some with assimilation, but none revolted except Bigger. Why did Bigger revolt ? Wright suggests that there were two factors psychologically dominant in his personality:

> First, through some quirk of circumstance, he had become estranged from the religion and the folk culture of his race. Second, he was trying to react to and answer the call of the dominant civilization whose glitter came to him through the newspapers, magazines, radios, movies, and the mere imposing sight and sound of daily American life (13)

Bigger Sees himself as alone, and he finds the call of the dominant civilization a siren song.

Not all Biggers were as blatant or as extreme as the original Biggers that wright remembered, "But it was there, never the less, like an undeveloped negative". (13) there might be feelings of anger at his way of life so great that the man would think he would burst. But the anger would go, and the man would continue doing what he had been doing before the anger seized him. An ex-soldier would wonder why he had bought, considering that he had been segregated even when offering his life for his country. For these men and for others, however, the thoughts would pass in the struggle for survival.

Bigger's feelings changed when he went North, there his reactions become even more Violent and Extreme.

> The urban environment of Chicago, affording a more stimulating life, made the Negro Bigger Thomases react more Violently than even in the south. More than ever I began to see and understand the environmental extreme conduct. It was not that Chicago segregated Negroes more than the south, but that Chicago had more to offer, that Chicago's Physical aspect – noisy, crowded, filled with the sense of power and fulfillment – did so much more to dazzle the mind with a taunting sense of possible achievement that the segregation it did impose brought forth from Bigger a reaction more obstreperous than in the south (15)

Both Bigger Thomas and Walter Lee younger live on Chicago's south side. Does the description that Richard Wright gives above of Chicago have anything to do with the real-life Chicago that *A Raisin in the Sun* was to be seen against nearly twenty years later? It would seem from the reaction given film crews for the movie version of *Raisin* that Wright's description was still fairly accurate:

> To add realism to the film.... 15 percent of its scenes were shot on location in and around Chicago. But before filming of the trouble – ridden family could be completed, movie makers ran into unexpected troubles of their own. Houses they intended to use as settings suddenly became unavailable when owners learned of the nature of the film. A national student fraternity blocked the use of its name in connection with one of the film's characters; and the University of Chicago consented to scenes being shot on the Campus only after it had been promised that its name would not be mentioned in the film. More serious trouble developed when a white woman, who had permitted the shooting of a sequence at her home, received threatening Phone calls from neighbors. To avoid an incident, producers called off the shooting and picked a more friendly sight. (*A Raisin in the Sun*, 53)

The call to the good life is strong; so also, the power to block its achievement. If film crews are not welcomed when they are filming the story of a Black family, how much less welcomed must the black family be?

What are the similarities in the responses that Bigger Thomas and Walter Lee Younger make toward the call of Chicago, Separated as they are by a generation? Walter Lee is not Bigger, but he knows Bigger and at times he thinks like Bigger, Both men feel a sense of apartness, of being alone. Bigger seemed to

feel it all the time; Walter lee, most acutely during the period of the play. Bigger briefly reflects on his apartness after he was spoiled in his plans for a robbery by fighting another member of the gang:

> Bigger did not try to justify himself in his own eyes, or in the eyes of the gang. He did not think enough of them to feel that he had to; he did not consider himself as being responsible to them for what he did, even though they had been involved as deeply as he in the planned robbery. He felt that same way toward everyone. As long as he could remember, he had never been responsible to anyone. The moment a situation became so that it exacted something of him, he rebelled. That was the way he lived; he passed his days trying to defeat or gratify powerful impulses in a world he feared. (*Native Son,* 44)

Walter Lee speaks of the same anguish of being alone to his wife and to George Murchison: "Bitter? Man, I'm a volcano. Bitter? Here I am a giant – Surrounded by ants! Ants who can't even understand what it is the giant is talking about" Ruth asks him, "Oh, Walter – ain't you with nobody!" To which Walter "Violently" Replies: "No! 'Cause ain't nobody with me! Not even my own mother!" (*A Raisin in the Sun,* 71)

Both Bigger Thomas and Walter Lee Younger have the desire to be able to do what they see that is being done in the white world. For Bigger, in a passage near the beginning of the Book, the dream is to fly an airplane such as he sees sky – writing overhead. He and his friend knew that their dream will never come true.

> BIGGER. "I could fly one of them things if I had a chance," Bigger mumbled reflectively, as though talking to himself.
>
> GUS. Gus pulled down the corners of his lips, stepped out from the wall, squared his shoulders, doffed his cap, bowed low and spoke with mock deference:
>
> "Yessuh."

BIGGER. "You go to hell, "Bigger said, smiling.

GUS. "Yessuh," Gus said again.

BIGGER. "I could fly a plane if I had a chance," Bigger said.

GUS. "If you wasn't Black and if you had some money and if they'd let you go to that aviation school, you could fly a plane," Gus said (*Native Son*, 20)

In a similar manner, Walter Lee sees the white world as the place where things are done:

WALTER. I'm thirty – five years old ; I been married eleven year and I got a boy who sleeps in the living room (very very quietly) – and all I got to give him is stories about how rich white people live .....

RUTH. Honey, you never say nothing new. I listen to you every day, every night and every morning, and you never say nothing new. So you would rather be Mr. Arnold than be his Chauffeur. So – I would rather be living in Buckingham palace.

WALTER. That is just what is wrong with the colored women in this world .... Don't understand about building their men up and making them feel like they somebody. Like they can do something. (*A Raisin' in the Sun*, 22)

Both see the white world as the world of action.

Seeing the dominant culture as the place where things are done, both Bigger and Walter Lee like to imagine themselves in that world. Having watched the airplane write in the air with some Use speed Gasoline, Bigger and Gus decide to

play the roles of "White men", a game where the ways and manners of white people are imitated. Bigger assumes the role of commander, and calls his general Gus to him.

BIGGER. "Send your men over the river at dawn and attack the enemy's left flank," Bigger ordered.

GUS. "Yessuh".

BIGGER. "Send the fifth, sixth and Seventh Regiments." Bigger Said, frowning." And attack with tanks, gas, planes and infantry."

GUS. "Yessuh"! Gus said again, saluting and clicking his heels.

For a moment they were silent, they were silent, facing each other, their shoulders thrown back, their lips compressed to hold down the mounting impulse to laugh. Then they guffawed, partly at them – selves and partly at the vast white world that sprawled and towered in the sun before them.

GUS. "Say what's a 'left flanks'?" Gus asked.

BIGGER. "I don't know", Bigger said,

"I heard it in the movies" (Native Son, 21)

Turning from the military, they decide to enter another foreign world – high finance Gus is Mr. J.P. Morgan and Bigger is his stock broker. After dumping twenty thousand shares of U.S. steel in the market because they are holding too much, Bigger and Gus turn to the arena of politics. Bigger is the president of the united states calling a cabinet meeting to do something about "the niggers ... raising sand all over the country," (22) and secretary of state Gus drops the Germany problem to rush right over.

Walter Lee imagines himself to be his own version of J.P. Morgan once the $.6,500 is in his hands. At the end of Act II, scene 2, he talks to his son Travis.

WALTER. Son, I feel like talking to you tonight.

TRAVIS. About what?

WALTER. Oh, about a lot of things. About you and what kind of man you going to be when you grow up... Son-son, what do you want to be when you grow up?

TRAVIS. A bus driver.

WALTER. (Laughing a little) A what? Man, that ain't nothing to want to be!

TRAVIS. Why not?

WALTER. Cause, man-it ain't big enough-you know what I mean.

TRAVIS. I don't know then, I can't make up my mind. Sometimes Mama asks me that too. And sometimes when I tell her I just want to be like you – she says she don't want me to be like that and sometimes she says she does...

WALTER. You know what, Travis ? In seven years you going to be seventeen years old. And things is going to be very different with us in seven years, Travis ... one day when you are seventeen I'll come home – home from my office downtown somewhere –

TRAVIS. You don't work in no office, Daddy.

WALTER. No-but after tonight. After what your daddy gonna do tonight, there's going to be offices – a whole lot of offices ....

TRAVIS. What you gonna do tonight, Daddy ?

WALTER. You wouldn't understand yet, son, but your daddy's goona make a transaction ... a business transaction that's going to change our lives... That's have come one day when you 'bout seventeen years old I'll come home and I'll be pretty tired, you know what I mean, after a day of conferences and secretaries getting things wrong the way they do.....' cause an executive's life is hell, man – And I'll pull the car up on the driveway .... just a plain Black, Chrysler, I think, with white walls – no-black tires. More elegant. Rich people don't have to be flashy..... though I'll have to get something a little sportier for Ruth – may be a Cadillac convertible to do her shopping in. .... And I'll come up the steps to the house and the gardener will be clipping away at the hedges and he'll say. "Good evening Mr. Younger." And I'll say, "Hello, Jefferson, how are you this evening?" And I'll go inside and Ruth will come downstairs and meet me at the door and we'll go up to your room to see you sitting on the floor with the catalogues of all the great schools in America around you.... All the great schools in the world! And – and I'll say, all right son – it's your seventeenth birthday, what is it you've decided ? ... Just tell me where you want to go to school and you'll go. Just tell me, what it is you want to be – and you'll be it.... Whatever you want to be – Yes sir! You just name it, son ... and I hand you the world! (*A Raisin in the Sun,* 88-89)

For both Bigger Thomas and Walter Lee Younger, the disparity between what they see that the white men are doing and what they know themselves are able to draws away inside them, eating at them always. Others have resigned themselves to the situation, but bigger cannot:

BIGGER. "Goddammit!"

GUS. "What's the matter?"

BIGGER. "They don't let us do nothing"

GUS. "Who ?"

BIGGER. "The white folks."

GUS. "you talk like you just now finding that out", Gus said.

BIGGER. "Now. But I just can't get used to it," Bigger said. "I swear to God I can't I know I oughtn't think about it, but I can't help it. Every time I think about it I feel like some – body's poking a red – hot iron down my throat. Goodammit, look! We live here, and they live there. We Black and they white. They got things and we ain't. They do things and we can't it's just like living in jail. Half the time I feel I'm on the outside of the world peeping in through a knot – hole in the fence.... (*A Native Son*, 22-23)

Walter Lee uses different imagery, but the meaning is the same and Mama sees in him some things she does not like :

MAMA. Walter, What is the matter with you?

WALTER. Matter with me ? Ain't nothing the matter with me !

MAMA. Yes there is something eating you up like a crazy man. Something more than me not giving you this money. The past few years I been watching it happen to you. You get all nervous acting and kind of wild in the eyes-I said sit there now, I'm talking to you!

WALTER. Mama – I don't need no negging at me today.

MAMA. Seems like you getting to a place where you always tied up in some kind of knot about something. But if anybody ask you 'bout it you just yell at 'em and bust out the house and go out and drink somewheres.

Walter Lee, People can't live with that. Ruth's a good, patient girl in her way – but, you getting to be too much. Boy, don't make the mistake of driving that girl away from you (*A Raisin in the Sun*, 59)

In a moment, Walter reveals why he is restless and without any peace:

WALTER. Do you know what this money means to us?

Do you know what this money can do for us?

....Mama –Mama-I want so many things....

MAMA. Yes, Son –

WALTER. I want so many things that they are driving me kind of crazy ... Mama – look at me.

MAMA. I'm looking at you. You a good – looking boy. You got a job, a nice wife, a fine boy and –

WALTER. A job Mama, a Job ? I open and close car doors all day long. I drive a man around 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. Mama, I don't know if I can make you understand.

MAMA. Understand what, baby ?

WALTER. Sometimes it's like I can see the future stretched out in front of me – just plain as day. The future, Mama. Hanging over there at the edge of my days. Just waiting for me – a big, looming blank space – full of nothing. Just waiting for me. Mama – something 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 –

MAMA. Son – how come you talk so much 'bout money ?

WALTER. Because it is life, Mama !

MAMA. Oh-So now it's life. Money is life. Once upon a time freedom used to be life – now it's money. I guess the world really do changes ....

WALTER. No – it was always money, Mama. We just didn't know about it. (60-61)

Both men find their condition eating away at them from within. Both Bigger Thomas and Walter Lee Younger feel estranged, apart from others. Both feel the Pull of the dominant culture, the lure to do, and both feel the impossibility of ever being allowed to answer the pull. Both feel that the white world doesn't allow them to do anything, and it is nothingness that they see as their future. Both feel eaten up by the disparity between what they dream for and by what in fact seems to be. They cannot escape the dominant white culture, neither are they accepted into it. Without so naming it, they are up against oppression, the "great deal to be fought."

Although the oppression that they experience is essentially the same, they make differing responses to it, differing at least in the manner of their rebellion. Bigger finds violence the freeing instrument from his feelings of oppression:

> Though he had killed by accident, not once did he feel the need to tell himself that it had been an accident. He was Black and he had been alone in a room where a white girl had been killed; therefore he had killed her. That was what everybody would say anyhow, no matter what he said. And in a certain sense he knew that the girl's death had not been accidental. He had killed many times before, only on those

> other times there had been no handy victim or circumstance to make visible or dramatic his will to kill. His crime seemed natural; he felt that all of his life had been leading to something like this. It was no longer a matter of dumb wonder as to what would happen to him – a meaning which others did not see and which he had always tried to hide – had spilled out. No; it was no accident, and he would never say that it was. There was in him a kind of terrified pride in feeling and thinking that some day he would be able to say publicly that he had done it. It was as though he had an obscure but deep debt to fulfill to himself in accepting the dead. (*Native Son*, 101)

In accepting responsibility for the violent act of murder, Bigger Thomas becomes human. In breaking the most sacred taboo of the oppression – the contact between a Black man and a white woman – Bigger Thomas affirms that he is no longer the dehumanized "it" that he was before. An "it" cannot take responsibility for actions committed; only a person, a "thou" in the words of Martin Buber or Paul Tillich, can do that. Only a "thou" can set limits to his actions, choosing that which he will and will not do. Only a "thou" is free to say "no" to the choices presented to him by the forces that oppress him. At one point, Bigger is goaded by white policeman, who want him to confess to raping the white girl he killed;

> POLICE MAN. "Come on, now boy we've treated you pretty nice, but we can get tough if we have to, see ? It's up to you! Get Over there by the bed and show us how you raped and murdered that girl!"
>
> BIGGER. "I didn't rape her," Bigger said through stiff lips.
>
> POLICE MAN. "A, come on. What you got to lose now ? show us what you did."
>
> BIGGER. "I don't want to."

POLICE MAN. "You have to!"

BIGGER. "I don't have to".

POLICE MAN. "well, we'll make you."

BIGGER. "You can't make me do nothing but die!" (311-12).

Bigger Thomas is now a person, albeit a person who has murdered.

Walter Lee also inherits a situation in which he must make a decision either to accommodate to the forces that oppress and dehumanize him or to resist them. He has the choice of spiritual suicide, of remaining in "it" and accepting the money, or the choice of affirming his personhood and setting his own limits for action. Walter Lee wavers between despair and rebellion as he prepares to give Mr. Lindner the final word on acceptance or rejection of the community's offer to buy them out. For a time it seems that he has chosen despair; if it is true, as Camus' The Myth of Sisyphus suggests, that suicide is the ultimate act of despair, then it seems that Mama's remark after Walter Lee has gone through what he intends to tell Linder when he arrives is right on target:

> WALTER. I'm going to feel fine, Mama. I'm going to look that son-of-a-bitch in the eyes and say – (He falters) – and say, "All right, Mr. Lindner – (He falters even more) – that's your neighborhood out there! You got the right to keep it like you want ! you got the right to have it like you want ! Just write the check and – the house is yours". And – I am going to say – (His voice almost breaks) "And you – you people just put the money in my hand and you won't have to live next to this bunch of stinking niggers!..." (He straightens up and moves away from his mother, walking around the room) And may be – maybe I'll just get down on my Black knees ... (He does, so; RUTH and BENNIE and MAMA watch him in frozen horror) "Captain, Mistuh, Bossman – (Groveling and grinning and wringing his hands in profoundly anguished imitation of the slow witted movie

stereotype) A-hee-hee-hee! Oh, yassuh boss! Yassssuh! Great white – (Voice breaking, he forces himself to go on) – Father, just gi' ussen de money, fo' God's sake, and we's – we's ain't gwine come out deh and dirty up yo' white folks neighborhood..." (He breaks down completely) And I'll feel fine! FINE!

BENEATHA. That is not a man. That is nothing but a toothless rat.

MAMA. Yes – Death done come in this here house. Done come walking in my house. On the lips of my Children .... (*A Raisin in the Sun*, 124)

Walter's speech suggests that he has chosen spiritual suicide, that he will remain in "it", that he will allow the oppressor to define the Limits for his life.

Having tasted of despair, however, Walter Lee cannot Carry out the "Suicide"; he rebels against remaining in "It". Walter Lee accepts responsibility for the imminent move, refuses to allow the oppressor to dictate where he may live, and there by affirms his personhood and assumes the stance of a free man.

WALTER. Well, Mr. Lindner. We called you – because, well, me and my family. Well – we are very plain people.

LINDNER. Yes –

WALTER. I mean – I have worked as chauffeur most of my life – and my wife here, she does domestic work in people's kitchens. So does my mother. I mean – we are plain people....

LINDNER. Yes, Mr. Younger –

WALTER. (Really like as a small boy, looking down at his shoes and then up at the man) And – uh – well, my father, well, he was laborer most of his life...

LINDNER. (Absolutely confused) Uh, Yes – Yes, I understand.

WALTER. And my father – My father almost *beat a man to death* once because this man called him the bad name or something, you know what I mean?

LINDNER. No, no I'm afraid I don't

WALTER. Yeah. Well – What I mean is that we come from people who had a lot of pride I mean – we are very proud people. And that's my sister over here and she's going to be a doctor – and we are very proud.

LINDNER. Well – I am sure that is very nice, but –

WALTER. What I am telling you is that we called you over here to tell you that we are very proud and that this – this is my son, who makes the sixth generation of our family in this country, and that we have all thought about your offer –

LINDNER. Well, good .... good –

WALTER. And we have decided to move into our house because my father – my father – he earned it ... we don't want to make no trouble for nobody or fight no causes – - but we will try to be good neighbours. That's all we got to say. We don't want your money. (127-128)

Native Son, by Richard Wright, and *A Raisin in the Sun*, by Lorraine Hansberry, express similar themes through the characters Bigger and Walter. In both the plays the protagonists use different ways to pursue their dreams. They face various problems in the society to improve their living conditions and finally end up in different resolutions. One can observe an improvement in the life of Walter and downfall of Bigger.

Walter and Bigger both have to cope with their poor economic status. They live in Chicago with little money. In each of their houses amenities are very poor they are forced to live in a dark environment without a scope to modify their living conditions. But there is a difference between Walter's situation and Bigger's situation. Besides his mother Bigger is only the person to earn money in his house, this puts a lot of pressure on Bigger to support the household. On the other hand Walter has Mama, Ruth and Beneatha to help him support the family. So he is not alone in his toils.

Walter and Bigger wish to have more money in their hands to lead a better life and cherish their dreams. The difference between the two is that Walter wants to make his money legally, through investments, while Bigger wants to make his money whichever way that is easiest. In order to earn more money Bigger resorts to illegal actions, and ends up facing a severe punishment when he is caught.

Walter and Bigger do not have the opportunity to get a higher level education. The only Blacks that are able to go to college are the Blacks that are born rich. George Murchison from A Raisin in the Son is the only Black person in the two plays who attend college. Though Beneatha wants to go to college, because Walter loses her money so, she will miss her opportunity. Bigger doesn't live at home with his family, after getting a job as a Chauffer. He is also scared of white people because they hold higher social stands than him. This leads him to become irrational and extremely violent. After Gus challenges Bigger, Bigger becomes upset because his cowardice is revealed. He contemplates by stabbing and hurting Gus for making him feel this way because of his anger and frustration he ends up killing Mary in his moment of panic. On contrary, when Walter comes home from work depressed, his family tries to help him out. His mother does things for him, like giving him a part of insurance money, because she knows it will make him happy. Bigger doesn't have this kind of support at home. It can be clearly seen that Bigger and Walter have similar living conditions but Walter deals with it much better than Bigger.

Society creates many problems for Walter and Bigger. White people are the oppressive people in the time period when these works were written. The whites in American society liked to stay at the top of the social ladder. In Raisin in the Sun,

Lindner tries to buy the house that the younger's have bought because he knows that if the younger's move into his neighborhood there will be problems. He says to Walter "What do you think you are going to gain by moving into a neighborhood where you aren't wanted" (119). Lindner also tells about how there have been fights between white and Black people which resulted in Bombings. White people don't want any Black people into their neighborhood because soon many black people will move in. Though Lindner offers to buy the younger's house at a financial gain to the family. If Walter accepts this offer, he would be admitting that he is not good enough to move into that neighborhood because he is Black. He does not sell his house, and by denying Lindner's offer he doesn't allow white society to control him.

Bigger and Walter are both unable to get decent jobs because white people do not hire them. Both of them work as chauffeurs this is the cause of anxiety which creates a drive in both of them to get money at any cost. Bigger is willing to go out and robs stores to get money. Similarly in Raisin in the Sun, Walter gives away all of his money and Beneatha's money as well to Willy Harris in pursuit of liquor store and he is desperate to make money. In this act Walter loses his money but his family forgives him because he only was dealing with Blacks. On the other hand, Bigger is punished because he deals with whites. He is charged with the murder of a white lady, Marry at his trial. But he is not charged with the murder of Bessie because she is Black and therefore insignificant. Bigger and Walter are different, because Bigger assimilates himself into white society, while Walter does not.

To make their dreams come true, Walter and Bigger face many complications. Both Bigger and Walter have dreams that they cannot attain. They both want money and to fly and be free. Both Walter and Bigger are not interested in the Job of a Chauffer because it is like being a slave. Bigger wants to be an airplane pilot instead of a Chauffeur and Walter wants to become rich by doing Business with the insurance money. We find Mama helping Walter to realize his dreams but Bigger get's no such aid from his family or friends.

Both Bigger and Walter have to deal with their own frustrations. They both feel disappoint because they don't have enough power over their own lives. Walter wants money from Mama to get the power he needs. She gives it to him and also

makes him the head of the family. After receiving the money and position of head of the house, he becomes satisfied. On the other hand, Bigger wants power over the white people who oppress him. He decides to gain that power by exploiting Dalton through a ransom note. Bigger looses in his struggle for power, because he is alone. Walter and Bigger both fail to achieve their dreams of wealth, but Walter ends up being well off because his family helps him in achieving his dreams.

In making the choice to say "no" to the outside force and "Yes" to freedom, Walter lee is responding as a person, a "thou", a man.

This is the nature of the confrontation found in *A Raisin in the Sun* through the person of Walter lee Younger. There are other forms of confrontation, though, by other members of the family. Beneatha is confronting the dominant culture by her disdain of "assimilation" and her search for a Black identity. Mama resists the forces that would make her less than a person when she decides to buy the best house that she can afford, even though that house is in a neighborhood where Blacks have never lived. In this confrontation, they are saying "no" to those forces that make them less than human, that make them an "it". In this confrontation, they say "Yes" to human dignity, and affirm that they are persons.

The younger family, one whose line goes back Six generations in this country, knows the meaning of commitment on its most basic level: affirmation of the human spirit, a most resilient thing. Once Lorraine Hansberry attended the united Negro Fund contest and made an address to fellow young Black writers:

> O, the things that we have learned in this unkind house that we have to tell the world about!
>
> Despair ? did Someone say despair was a question in the world ? well then, Listen to the sons of those who have known little else if you wish to know the resiliency of this thing you would so quickly resign to mythhood, this thing called the human spirit .....
>
> Life ? Ask those who have tasted of it in pieces rationed out by enemies. Love ? Ah, ask the troubodors who come from those who

> have loved when all reason pointed to the uselessness and fool hardiness of love. Perhaps we shall be the teachers when it is done. Out of the depths of pain we have thought to be our sole heritage in this world – O_1 we know about love! (*To be Young, gifted and Black*, 263)

The critics praised the extraordinary timelines of the play. Fellow playwright and critic, Amiri Baraka who initially dismissed the play's significance, recanted years later and recognized its importance Baraka said in 1987.

> "The Younger family is part of the Black Majority, and the concerns I once dismissed as "middle class" – buying a house and moving into" white folks neighbourhoods" are actually reflective of the essence of Black people's striving to defeat segregation, discrimination and national oppression" (Baraka, 20)

Ironically, the words of this former critic best captures the younger's contribution to American theatre. The long standing appeal of *A Raisin in the Sun* reflects the following themes are explored.

The American Dream

The play portrays a struggling Black family for a better life. But the fact is the black family's dreams and aspirations for a better life are not confined to their race, but can be identified with people of all backgrounds. Even though what that "Better life" may look like is different for each character, the underlying motive is universal. The main conflict of the play lies in Walter's notion of this American dream. Walter is a victim of the middle class ideology of materialism which is highly seductive. The notion of the self – made man who starts with nothing and achieves great wealth through hard work seems, not intended to offend or upset anyone, but the idea can become harmful if it evolves into an idolization of wealth and power.

In the beginning, Hansberry shows how Walter envies Charlie Atkins dry – cleaning business because it grosses $100,000 a year. He ignores Ruth's objection to his potential business partner's questionable character and dismisses his mother's moral objection to achieving his goals by running a liquor store. Walter doesn't heed to the advice of his family members, he is desperate to make his dreams fruitful. He believes that the liquor store is a means to end his family's misery.

That same Machiavellian ethic is demonstrated when Walter plans to accept Mr. Lindner's offer. Walter is not concerned with the degrading implications of the business deal. It is simply a way to recover some of the lost money.

However, Hansberry challenges Walter's crude interpretation of the American dream by forcing him to actually carry out the transaction in front of his son. Walter's inability to deal with Mr. Lindner marks a significant revision of his interpretation of the American dream, a dream that inherently prioritizes justice and equality over money.

Female Gender Identity

Three generations of women are represented in the play *A Raisin in the Sun*. Lena becomes the default head of the household upon the passing of her husband, Walter Sr. As she loses her husband in her early thirties the entire responsibility of the family falls on the shoulders of this in experienced women. Raised in the south during an era where Black's very lives were in danger because of the Prevalence of lynching, Lena decides to move to the North. She hopes for leading a better life. The decision to move up North becomes Significant in that she had hopes of a better life for herself. Although Lena is a head of her times in some respects, her dreams and aspirations are largely linked to her family's well – being, rather than to her own.

Literary critic and professor of English and African-American studies at princenton university Caludiatate attributes Lena's low expectations for her individual self to gender conditioning – a term used to describe the expectation that a women's goals and dreams be linked to her family alone. Lena tolerates her husband's womanizing and remains loyal to him even though they suffer under the same impoverished conditions throughout their marriage.

Walter's wife, Ruth, is in her early thirties. She is different from Lena in that she vocalizes her frustrations with her spouse, Walter. However, she seeks to please him by talking positively about the business to Lena on his behalf. Ruth encourages Beneatha and asker her not to antagonize her brother so much, she shows her willingness to work several jobs so that the family can afford to Move into the new house.

Other important female character in the play is Beneatha, she is a young feminist college student. She is the least tolerant of society's unequal treatment and expectations of woman. Beneatha constantly challenges Walter's chauvinism, and has no time for shallow men like Georage Murchison, who do not respect her ideas.

Through these three women, Hansberry skillfully illustrates how women's ideas about their identity have changed over time.

Masculinity

"What defines a man?" is a critical question that Hansberry struggles with throughout the entire play. In many ways, the most debilitating situations that Walter faces are those which relate to his identity as a man, whether it be in his role as father, husband or son. Being a father to Travis appears to be the role that Walter values the most. He sincerely wants to be perceived as honorable in his son's eyes. Inspite of knowing that his family has little money to spare, Walter gives Travis a dollar when he asks for fifty cents.

Walter wants to invest in a liquor store not to make money for him but also to provide better facilities for his wife and family. He wants to give his wife Ruth a Pearl's set and a Cadillac convertible car. He wants to gain economic strength so that he can send his son to the college of his choice. As a son he wants to walk in his father's steps and carefully provide everything for his mother in her old age. Walter is framed by the examples of his father and son. At first Walter is ready to degrade himself to obtain these goals. He faces a critical turning point when he reconsiders Mr. Lindner's offer. But in the end he chooses the honorable path so that he can stand with pride before his son Travis.

Afro-centrism

There is a strong motif of afro centrism throughout the play. Unlike many of her Black contemporaries, Lorraine Hansberry grew up in a family that was well aware of its African heritage, and embraced its roots. Lorraine's uncle, Leo Hansberry, was a professor of African history at Howard university a well – known historically Black college in Washington, D.C. Hansberry's uncle actually taught about Kwamenkrumah, a revolutionary and first president of Ghana who fought for the independence of the gold coast from British rule.

Hansberry's afro-centrism is expressed mainly through Beneatha's love for Asagai. Asagai, a Nigerian native, is who Beneatha seeks out during her search for her own identity. She is eager to learn about African culture, language, Music and dress. The playwright is well ahead of her times in her creation of these characters. Hansberry is able to dispel many of the Myths about Africa, and concurrently depict the parallel struggles both Africans and African Americans must face.

Class Tensions within the Black Community

A Raisin in the Sun is not just about race, class tensions are a prominent issue throughout the play. George Murchison is Beneatha's well-to-do boy friend. Although he is educated and wealthy, Beneath is still trying to sort out her feelings about him. Her sister-in-law, Ruth, does not understand Beneatha's attitude of showing both good and bad feelings about him. Murchison is good looking and able to provide well for Beneatha. However, Beneatha is planning to be a doctor, and is not dependent on marrying a man of good fortune for her financial security.

Hansberry also hints that marriage into the Murchison family is not very probable. Beneath says, "Oh, Mama. The Murchisons are honest-to-god-real-live-rich coloured people, and the only people in the world who do not give much importance to high social class which is unlike rich white people and rich coloured people Beneatha says that it seems everybody Knew that she had met Mrs. Murchison. Beneatha is sensitive to the reality that even though the two families are Black, they are deeply divided. She suggests that class distinctions are more

pronounced amongst African Americans than between African Americans and whites. Despite their degree of wealth or education, Blacks in America are discriminated.

Wealthy African Americans also had certain restrictions on schools, housing, and occupations just like their poor counter parts. Even though Mrs. Murchison Makes a desperate attempt to represent themselves as belonging to a family from high class her attempts are futile. She finds the similar treatment that poor Blacks would get from whites. The only solution that seems to help blacks come out of this situation is radical legislative and social change. This might prove helpful and give a substantive solution to America's problem.