The Agony of Female Characters in Hansberry 's A Raisin in the Sun

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Abstract:

A Raisin in the Sun (1959) by Lorraine Hansberry, delves into the profound struggles and agonies faced by women, capturing the essence of their dreams deferred and aspirations suppressed. The characters, particularly Ruth and Mama, navigate societal expectations and systemic barriers, grappling with the weight of discrimination and limited opportunities. As the play unfolds, it explores the multifaceted dimensions of the female experience, portraying the resilience and determination of these women amid the oppressive circumstances, ultimately shedding light on the enduring spirit in the face of adversity. 'I was born black and female,' Lorraine Hansberry once said. These two identities dominated her life and writings. Rejecting the limits placed on her race and gender, Hansberry employed her writings to investigate what it meant to be a black woman in post-war America. Throughout history, black women suffer various forms of marginalization, discrimination, and oppression. The same is true of their position in literature. Because of the white monopoly of literary writing and production, black women were underrepresented in the dominant white literary canon. Hence the need to have a distinctive voice of their own. The play deals with a number of womanist issues like black man-black woman relationship, gender roles, images of black woman in the 1950s American society, black matriarchy and abortion. It centers around three black women as they grapple with the difficult circumstances they are facing in a largely white racist society.

Key Words: black woman, agony, Lorraine Hansberry**,** womanist issues

Introduction:

Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun bravely challenges the generalization about women of 1950's America as a nation who believes that women are only for breeding and being good housewives. The women in this play, Mama, Ruth and Beneatha, speak to three ages of black women who, regardless of their twofold fronted subjection, keep on longing for a superior tomorrow. Despite the fact that the desires of these women contrast in personality, they all represent their jobs as ladies, regardless of whether it be owning a house, paying for their child's education or going to Medical School. Hansberry is relatively revolutionary; she showed herself and stood against the American society who believed that women's place in the kitchen. All the characters in the play have unfulfilled dreams. These dreams mostly involve money. Noteworthy is the fact that although the Younger family seems alienated from and oppressed by white middle-class society, they harbor the same materialistic dreams as the rest of the American

society. In the 1950s, the stereotypical American dream was to have a house with a yard, a car and a big family

In fact, the play offers a rich field of exploration for American society's perception of black woman in the 1950s. Recent interpretations of female characterizations in the play reevaluate the moral strength of the three black women in many crucial ways. Instead of following the lead of traditional analyses of female characters whose reductive generalizations limit black women to passive secondary roles, current studies recognize the importance of black females as active agents in their societies. This play masterfully captures the agony of female characters, notably Ruth and Mama, as they confront societal barriers, racial discrimination, and the unescapable challenges of their time. Through storytelling, Hansberry weaves a narrative that not only reflects the specific struggles faced by women but also transcends temporal boundaries, resonating with audiences across generations. This introduction sets the stage for a profound exploration of the agonizing journey undertaken by the women in A Raisin in the Sun.

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The Younger Family: The Agony of Female Characters:

Generally speaking, agony is extreme physical or mental pain or suffering or a period of such suffering. There are three female characters in Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun*. Each woman encounters different issues as she struggles for freedom. This African American family lives in a cramped two-bedroom household in a depilated apartment building located in Chicago's south side. As they struggle against various obstacles, all they want is harmonyand unity for their family. Much of the material and historical information in this play came from Hansberry's own life experiences, especially her childhood. She grew up on the Southside of Chicago. Her family moved into a white neighborhood. They were daily threatened and harassed by hostile white neighbors who tried to evict them. She narrowly escaped a serious injury when a brick was thrown through their window.[1] Hansberry expressed her sympathy for those characters that shared the same experience with her own family. She dedicated *A Raisin in the Sun* to her own mama:

> Mama, it is a play that tells the truth about people, Negroes and life……That we have among our miserable and downtrodden ranks-people who are the very essence of human dignity. That is what after all the laughter and tears, the play is supposed to say. I hope mama it will make you proud of me.[2]

Hansberry's first full length play, *A Raisin in the Sun* opened at the Ethel Barrymore Theater on March 11, 1959. The play ran for 530 performances. It was directed by Lioyed Richards who was the first black man to direct a play for the Broadway stage.[3] It won the 1958- 1959 New York Drama Critics Circle Award. The play was translated into over thirty languages and it was produced in the former Soviet Union, Mongolia, England, France, and Japan. The play became a popular film in 1961. It won A Tony Award in 1973. It was a highly successful television drama produced on American Playhouse in 1989.[4] Margaret B. Wilkerson argues that through this play, "Hansberry enhances the public understanding toward blacks' progressive ideas in life."[5] Steven R. Cater also contends that, "realism would not be a limit for writers' imagination but truthfully presents black people's life to the audience."[6] Frank Aston describes *A Raisin in the Sun* to be, "An honest drama, catching up real people. It may rip you to shreds. It will make you proud of human beings."[7] Amiri Baraka explained in 1987 that, "Hansberry's play has done more than a document and can be regarded as political agitation to deal with issues of democratic rights and equality."[8] He also said that:

> The Younger family is part of the black majority, and the concerns once dismissed as middle class. Buying a house and moving into white folks' neighborhoods are actually reflective of the essence of black people's striving to defeat segregation, discrimination, and national oppression.[9]

A Raisin in the Sun is based on firsthand knowledge of the working-class black residents who rented from her father a small apartment with their own kitchenette. Those events and her concerns with the struggle of her people served in part as motive for the play. It takes place in the Chicago slums. It dramatizes "the seductiveness of American materialistic values."[10] Hansberry tells the story of the suffering of an African-American working-class family struggling to survive with dignity. The play stresses the misery of the family members who hope to witness a bright future. The Youngers move to live in comfortable home. George R. Adams points out that the Youngers in *A Raisin in the Sun* come to recognize that:

> Black Americans have a social right to move out of the ghetto into a white suburb. A psychological necessity to direct frustration outward into healthy aggression, manifested as self-assertion and hand work. A social duty to reinforce the value of a mature citizen responsibility and the American democratic ethic. An economic responsibility to invest money wisely, and personal and familial obligation.[11]

The play revolves around what is to be done with ten-thousand dollars life insurance check belonging to the Younger family. Lena Younger (Mama) wants to move her family out of the ghetto, "a section of a town, lived in by underprivileged class. The ghetto is the product of rigid housing segregation that kept all Blacks regardless of income, confined to the same neighborhood."[12]

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Hansberry describes Mama, the head of the Younger: **"**She is a woman in her early sixties…. Her face is full of strength. She has wit and faith. Her eyes full of interest and expectancy She is, in a word, a beautiful woman (I, I, p.39).

Mama is portrayed as "strong, unabashed, compassionate, reflective, and supportive."[13] She is the strong, dominating mother who has over the years worked hard, attended church and made sacrifices for her family. Her children are her prime concerns. Her strength and integrity are the family backbone. From Mama's first entrance on stage, one can see the potential for tyranny in her strong character. She wants her children to respect themselves and others. Wilkerson states that:

> Lena Younger is not the accommodating Mammy who chooses the passive, safe path, but rather the folk figure, the courageous spirit that lends credence and power to the militant struggle. In her own determined way, she gives birth to revolutionaries and is herself a progressive force.[14]

Mama exemplifies Hansberry's belief that the ghetto leaves marks and scars. Mama wants to buy a big house for her family to improve their condition:

MAMA: It's just a plain little old house---but it's made good and solid----- solid and it will be ours. Walter Lee—it makes a difference in a man when he can walk on floors that belong…
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. (II, I, p.92)

Mama is a fighter who wants to make a meaningful change in her family's life. She says: "when the world gets ugly enough--a woman will do anything for her family" (I, ii, p.75). All the characters of the play struggle to remain alive by making something new in their lives. All of them dream and suffer. The play has a universal theme. It is about the failure of the American Dream. Walter Lee, Lena's son, is a thirty-five-year-old frustrated chauffeur. Harold Clurman believes that: "*A Raisin in the Sun* is authentic, it is a portrait of the aspiration, anxieties, ambitions, and contradictory pressures affecting humble Negro fold in an American big city."[15] It is obviously hard for these African-Americans to maintain a stable home in America and to dispose of the sense of homelessness.

A Raisin in the Sun opens with an important description of the furniture on stage, suggesting the shabbiness, and desperation of the ghetto. The pieces of furniture are described as, "tired' from having had to sustain "the living of too many people for too many years" (I, i, p.23). This suggests the weariness of the inhabitants of this Southside of Chicago apartment, to refer to two things, struggle and deferred dreams. Mama's feeble plant which is growing in a pot on the window sill represents suffering and disillusionment of African-American experience. Throughout most of the play, Mama tends to this withering plant that suffers because the apartment has only one "Little window" (I, I, p.24). In this small apartment, the sunlight, "fights its way" (I, I, p.24) through the tiny window to get to the plant. The little plant is a symbol of hope for a family determined to escape the violence of the ghetto. The plant symbolizes the hope that it will flourish in the new soil along with the Younger family. Mama is the most outstanding character in the play. She is at the center of the household. Like the plant which needs sunlight and space to grow, she wants happiness and love for her family. As Helen Keyser comments:

> Her first line movement set up much of our response to her. The voice of authority and decorum sounds in her, "who that round here slamming doors at this our"? We know this is a person who commands respect. But her immediate attention to a scraggly little plant trying to survive on the one window sill in the apartment. It is a symbolic gesture that reveals the softness in Mama and leads us to expect that her decisions will reflect concern for the vulnerable and the brave….[16]

Linked to the plant is the garden that Mama envisions whenever she thinks of the new house. Mary Louise Anderson suggests that the garden is:

A symbol communication that the house will be the place where the family can grow and flourish

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in better condition. It is fitting that her family would give her gardening tools and a gardening hat symbolizing the tools she needs to nurture them and help their dreams grow.[17]

The women in the play form the conventional circle of support for the male protagonists. The pressures of everyday life in the ghetto could be detected in the character of Ruth, Mama's daughter-in- law. she can feel the misery and suffering of the Younger family, who toil to improve their living conditions, still, they do not see the fruit of their labor. Her "disappointment has already begun to hang in her face" (I, I, p.24). In fact, Ruth is not only responding to the disappointment of her lifetime, but to the disappointments experienced by previous generations, as well. Big Walter, for example, moved into the same apartment with the hope of owning a house within a year. New Big Walter has passed away, and three generations live in the same tiny apartment. Ruth, who is overcome by this stagnation, loses hope. She demonstrates strength and individualism. She works as a domestic servant. She is not well educated. She shares two rooms with her husband, son, mother-in-law, and sister-in-law. She realizes that her job as a servant will not be enough when she discovers that she is pregnant again. Due to her religious convictions, Mama is against Ruth's idea of abortion. Mama's faith is the source of her strength. Mary L. Anderson summarizes Mama's character in the play as:

> Religion is an integral part of her life. She wants her children to incorporate her religious ideals into their lives. This wish is most evident when she slaps Beneatha for saying there is no God…. when Mama is furious at Walter for losing the insurance money and a moment of great need, she asks God for strength. Her religion sustains her and gives her strength to be a matriarch.[18]

Ruth does not have time for husband, Walter's fancy dreams. When Walter begins to talk about his liquor store investment, she responds, "Eat your eggs" (I, I, p.34). When she listens to Walter's soaring dreams, she responds with skepticism. As he gets angry, Ruth explains: **"**Honey, you never say nothing new. I listen 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 (I, I, p.34).

As Julius Lester observes, "The black male -- black female conflict is presented in all its painful rawness in Walter and Ruth."[19] She suffers when Walter says: "she has to go out of here to look after somebody else's kids" (1, II, p.59). Frances Beal describes this as, "the worst kind of economic exploitation, where black women serve as white woman's maid…… while her own children were starving and neglected."[20] Ruth is suppressed by the fruitless dullness of her life. Her husband wants her to enjoy the same pleasures as the rich enjoy in society. She is disappointed. When Mama informs her about the down payment of her new house the first question Ruth asks is about sunlight. It is a symbolic expression of her longing for happiness, "Is there--Is there a whole lot of sunlight? (II, I, p.94).

Walter and his sister, Beneatha, are consistent by their dreams. Walter dreams of being a businessman. Beneatha currently is a college student who wants to become a doctor. Both of these dreams rely upon their father's life insurance check for its realization. The tension between Walter and Beneatha surfaces the morning before the insurance check arrives:

WALTER (*looking at his sister intently*): You know the check is coming tomorrow. BENEATHA (*Turning on him with a sharpness all her own*): That money belongs to Mama, Walter, and it's for her to decide how she wants to use it. I don't care if she wants to buy a house hhhh house or a rocket ship or just nail it up somewhere and look at it. It's hers. Not ours---hers. (I, I, p.36).

Walter complains that Beneatha's medical schooling will cost more than the family can afford. Since Beneatha is a woman, she should not become a doctor, "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….(I, I, p.38). Beneatha stands for women's need for professional education. Her name suggests that she may be beneath other classes yet; she wants to become a doctor

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and travel to Africa. She challenges the idea of women being dependent on men. Hansberry believes that women are capable of taking care of themselves. Beneatha is portrayed as a young African-American striving for success. She is struggling to go beyond what society permits woman to do. She represents the voice of hope and future. She believes in her own identity and individuality and freedom. She is in search of her identity, "I experiment with different forms of expression—(I, I, p.48). Hansberry analyzes African- American women's suffering and provides a new understanding of the relationship between men and women.

Walter accuses Beneatha of being ungrateful to the sacrifices the family has made for her go to college. Walter and Beneatha seem only to know how to insult each other. Their inability to be civil to each other is a reaction against their bad conditions. Beneatha sees Walter to be weak and worthless, "I look at you and I see the final triumph of stupidity in the world!" (III, p.138). Then they both admit that the insurance money belongs to Mama. The latter will decide to spend it. Unfulfilled dreams are due to psychological and economic impoverishment. Walter and Beneatha represent revolt. Walter is an African-American who works hard to have a better life. He is helpless. He wants to be independent by revolting against the white society: "This morning, I was lookin' in the mirror and thinking about it…… I'm thirty-five years old; I been married eleven years and I got a boy who sleeps in the living room---(*Very, very quickly*) ---and all I got to give him is stories about how rich white people live…". (1, I, p.34)

Mama represents the black matriarch of the family. She warns Walter that if he continues to spend so much time away home, he will lose his wife. As Tom Scanlan quoted:

> For Mama, the four generations of Youngers and the example of her dead husband, Big Walter have made her own struggles worthwhile……. Her family heritage has made survival possible by giving her an example of dignity and integrity.[21]

She cultivates the Christian virtue of honesty and kindness. Arguing with her daughter about the future, Beneatha says: "I'm going to be a doctor" (1, i, p.50). Mama hopes that Beneatha will be a doctor. Mama says: "'Course you going to be a doctor, honey, God willing" (1, I, p.50). Beneatha says:

> I'm just tired hearing about God all the time. What has He got to do with anything? Does he pay tuition...God is just one idea I don't accept. It's not important. I am not going out and be immoral or commit crimes because I don't believe in God……. I get tired of Him getting credit for all the things the human race achieves through its own stubborn effort. There simply is no blasted God-- there is only man and it is he who makes miracles! (1, I, pp.50-51).

Mama gets angry. She slaps her daughter. She makes her say: "In my mother's house there is still God" (I, I, p.51). God is Mama's source of strength, "Oh, God…. show me the strength." (II, iii, p.130). Religion is her fortress. Although, Beneatha is supported by her mother in her dream to be a doctor, she tries to assert herself. Beneatha's dream, however, differs from both her mother's and brother's dreams. When her mother and Ruth talk to her about marrying George Murchison, the rich Black young man, she says: "Listen, I'm going to be a doctor. I'm not worried about who I'm going to marry yet---if I ever get married" (1, I, p.50). She believes in education as a means for understanding and self-fulfillment. George sees education as a means to get a job:

BENEATHA: Then why read books? Why go to school?

GEORGE (*With artificial patience, counting on his fingers*): It's simple. You read books--- to learn facts---to get grades---to pass- the course---to get a degree. That's all---it has nothing to do with thoughts. (II, II, p.97)

Beneatha accuses George of being ashamed of his heritage and that she hates "assimilationist Negroes!" (II, I, p.81). When she is asked to explain she says:

BENEATHA: It means someone who is willing to give up his own culture and submerge himself completely in the dominant, and in this case *oppressive* culture!

GEORGE (*Nastily*): Let's face it baby, your heritage is nothing but a bunch of ragged- assed spirituals and some grass huts! (II, I, p.81).

Beneatha believes that society must be changed through self- knowledge and celebration of one's

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heritage. George and his family, however, believe that they should become wealthy to achieve respect through economic status, which demands obedience and subjugation the white dominant authority and culture. Asagai, Beneatha's other suitor, is an African student. He attends college in the United States but he plans to return to make important social and political changes in Nigeria. Commenting on Asagai's character, Steven R. Carter in *"Images of Men in Lorraine Hansberry's Writing"* wrote:

> His beguiling mixture of idealism and sophistication, his seeming role as spokesman for many of Hansberry's political philosophical views, and his willingness to die either to free his country from colonialism or simply to aid its progress- all lend him the aura of a romantic hero.[22]

When Beneatha mentions him to Mama, the latter questions: "why should I know anything about Africa?" (I, ii, p.57). Beneatha tells Asagai: "Mr. Asagai---I want very much to talk with you. About Africa. You see, Mr. Asagai, I am looking for my identity!"(I, II, p.62). Asagai teaches Beneatha about her heritage. He teaches her about "Africa's struggle for freedom in the battle with the French and British colonizers."[23] He tells her about African dress, customs, songs, dance, and spirit of survival. He believes that Beneatha must work towards making blacks free to choose their destiny. He teaches her about striving for her own identity and independence as a woman and as a black: "I will show you our mountains and our stars; and give you cool drinks from gourds and teach you the old songs and the ways of our people---and, in time, we will pretend that you have only been away for a day." (III, p.137)

Isaacs suggests that Asagai is, "the most literate, the most self-possessed, the most sophisticated, most purposive. He offers Beneatha a life of dedication, work, and self-realization in emergent Africa."[24] When Beneatha straightened her hair, Asagai accuses her of being an assimilationist:

BENEATHA: My hair—what's wrong with my hair? ASAGAI: Were you born with it like that?

BENEATH (*Reaching up to touch* it): No ----------of course not.

ASAGAI: How then? And it is ugly to you that way? You mutilate it every week?

BENEATHA: You know perfectly well how- - -as crinkly as yours-----that'that's how….no—not ugly--- But it's hard to manage when it's, when it's, well---raw….I am not an assimilationist!

ASAGAI: But what does it matter? Assimilationism is so popular in your country. (I, ii, pp.62-63)

Asagai gives Beneatha African robe to symbolize the connection between her African descent and her American citizenship. Beneatha considers that robe to be elegant and dignified, "Oh, Asagai! - - - You got them for me! - - - How beautiful! (I, ii, p.61). And then, he gives her a "Yoruba", nickname:

ASAGAI: Oh---"Alaiyo." I hope you don't mind. It is what you would call nickname, I think. It is a Yoruba word. I am a Yoruba. is my tribal origin---

BENEATHA: You didn't tell us what Alaiyo means……You might be calling me Little Idiot or something- - -

ASAGAI: Well--- let me see……It means One for Whom Bread---Food- ------ - -Is Not Enough. (I, ii, p.65)

Beneatha wears the African robe, plays African tribal music on the phonograph, and tries to imitate an African folk dance. She tells Ruth that that the dance is "from Nigeria", and that it is, "a dance of welcome"(II, I, p.77). Even Walter imagines himself an African warrior with a spear fighting enemies, "I am much warrior!" (II, I, p.78). In this play, Beneatha expresses Hansberry's knowledge of pride in her African heritage. Mama's ethical principles are asserted when she disapproves Walter's liquor business plan, "Well---whether they drinks it or not ain't none of my business…..Selling it to 'em is, and I don't want that on my ledger this late in life." (I, i, p.42). Mama and Walter have different ways of thinking. Mama is hurt to hear Walter talk so much about money:

MAMA: Son--how come you talk so much 'bout money? WALTER *(with immense passion)* : Because it is life, Mama!
MAMA *(Quietly)* Oh---*(Very quietly)* : 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 change….
WALTER: No---it was always money, Mama. We just didn't know about it abo it. (I,ii,p.74)

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Walter's dream of success is nurtured by a young white man whom he saw in town. The latter personifies for him the true American Dream. Walter wants to become a prosperous businessman, like Willie Loman, the tragic protagonist who believes in the American Dream. Both men believe that wealth will solve their problems and bring them happiness. When they realize too late that these values are false ones, Willie Loman commits suicide. Walter retrieves his dignity and becomes the man he always wanted to be. His reliance on White models does not mean that he hates himself or his Blackness. He believes he can do what they do and that he deserves to have what they have. He says to George Murchison, Beneatha's suitor, whose father is a rich Black businessman:

> Your old man is all right, man….I mean he knows how to operate. I mean he thinks big….But I think he's kind of running out of ideas now. I'd like to talk to him. Listen, man, I got some plans that could turn this city upside down. I mean think like he does. Big. Invest big……..…It's hard to find a man on this whole Southside who understands my kind of thinking_ you dig? (II, I, p.84)

Gerald Wales points out that: **"**Walter Lee's difficulty is that he has accepted the American myth of success at its face value, that he is trapped, as Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's *Death of Salesman*, was trapped by a false dream."[25] Walter tells his mother: **"**Mama_ sometimes when I'm downtown and I pass them cool, quiet-looking restaurants where them white boys are sitting back and talking 'bout things…sitting here turning deals worth millions of dollars...sometimes I see guys don't look much older than me__" (I, II, p.74)

No real enmity exists between Walter and his mother. They are united by love for each other and for their family. Walter wants to enjoy luxuries like any American citizen. He believes that he is capable of doing better things. He describes himself as, "I am a giant surrounded by ants! Ants who can't even understand what it is the giant talking about" (II, I, p.85). This strong faith in himself is the basis of his self-sufficiency. His parents' struggle shaped his strong sense of self-respect and aspirations. Walter's father also played a meaningful role in his life. Mama says: **"**Crazy 'bout his children! God knows there was plenty wrong with Walter Younger—hard- headed, mean, kind of wild with women…..But he sure loved his children. Always wanted them to have something---be something. " (I, I, p.45)

Walter believes that money is the source of social and political freedom. Mama is generous. When Walter tells his dream, she understands his plight. She gives him the remaining money after down payment. She gives him the opportunity to fulfill his dreams. Mama desperately wants Walter to succeed, and regain his manhood. She tells him that she loves and trusts him:

Listen to me, now, now I say I been wrong, son. That I been doing to you what the rest of the world been doing to you .....There ain't nothing worth holding on to, money, dreams, dreams, nothing else---if it means it's going to destroy my boy……I'm telling you to be the head of this family from now on like you supposed to be. (II, II, pp.106-107)

Walter takes all the money to Willy Harris, the con man who proposes the liquor business deal and who skips with the money. Walter says: "We have decided to move into our house because my father earned it for us brick by brick……. We don't want to make no trouble for nobody or fight no causes, and we will try to be good neighbors." (III, p.148)**.**

Bobo, the third partner in the liquor store, confesses to Walter that Willy "is gone" (II, iii, p.128) with the money. In addition to his lack of knowledge and experience of how to run a business, his lack of judgment makes Walter lose the long-waited money. With the loss of the money, the entire family must face dreams that are deferred once against. Mama abandons hope, telling her children to unpack and cancel the moving, "I guess we all better stop moping around. All this unpacking and everything we got to do…. One of you call the moving people and tell 'me not to come" (III, p.139).

Mama's disappointment in her son is evident because with the loss of money, the family has lost the means of escaping the ghetto. She tells Walter that his father: **"**Grow thin and old before he was forty---working and working and working like somebody's old horse---killing himself … and you---you give it all away in a day." (II, III, P.129)

Beneatha's idealism breaks down as she tries to deal with her brother's failure and its effect on her future. Asagai appears at Beneatha's most desperate moment. He encourages her to

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stop dwelling on the past and to think about her future. He asks her to go to Nigeria with him and practice medicine there:

ASAGAI: Then stop moaning and groaning. I have a bit of a suggestion. That when it is all over---that you come home with me with me to Africa. BENEATHA: To Africa?

ASAGAI: Yes!---Three hundred years later the African Prince rose up out up o of the seas and swept the maiden back across the middle passage over which her ancestors had come--- BENEATHA: To ---------- to Nigeria?

ASAGAI: Nigeria. Home. Say that you'll come. (III, pp.136-137)

Ruth is the one person who is unwilling to let her dream go so easily. When Mama gives up and starts making preparations to stay, Ruth pleads: "I'll work twenty hours a day in all the kitchens in Chicago….I'll strap my baby on my back if I have to and scrub all the floors in America and wash all the sheets in America if I have to---- but we got to MOVE! We got to get OUT OF HERE!! (III, p. 140)

When Mama discovers that Walter plans to allow the White Neighborhood Association to buy the house, she regains her courage to teach Walter a lesson:

Son---I come from five generations of people who was slaves and share coppers--

-but ain't nobody in my family never let nobody pay 'em no money that was a way of telling us wasn't fit to walk the earth. We ain't never been that poor. We ain't never been that dead inside. (III, p.143)

Her message to Walter is that the Youngers are hard-working people who have dignity and cannot be bought at any price. Karl Linder, the chairman of the New Neighbors Orientation Committee, attempts to bribe the Youngers to stay out of the White neighborhood. He informs them that the association is ready to buy the house. Walter orders Linder out of the apartment. Mama asks: "Did he threaten us?" (II, III, p.120). She was not at home during the negotiation with Linder. Beneatha answers her mother's question: "Oh_Mama_they don't do it like that anymore" (II, III, p.121). Mama tells Walter:

Something has changed……. You something new, boy. In my time we was worried about not being lynched and getting to the North if we could and how to stay alive and still have a pinch of dignity too- - - Now here come you and Beneatha---talking 'bout things we ain't never thought about hardly, me and your daddy. You ain't satisfied or proud of nothing we done. I mean that you had a home; that we kept you out of trouble till you were grown; that you don't have to ride to work on the back of no boy's streetcar---you my children---but how different we done become. (I, II, p.74)

Mama also teaches Beneatha a lesson when the young girl says that her brother is "not a man. That is nothing but a toothless rat." (III, p.144). She tells Beneatha that the true test of love is the ability to love a person when he is at his lowest. She says: "There is always something left to love…. It's when he's at his lowest and can't believe in himself 'cause the world done whipped him so! " (III, p.145). Mama's advice to Beneatha is: **"**When you start measuring somebody, measure him right, child… Make sure you done taken into account what hills and valleys he come through before he got to wherever he is." (III, p.145). Walter refuses Linder's deal:

Well, Mr. Linder. We called you---because, me and my family---we are very plain people….I have worked as a chauffeur most of my life---and my wife does domestic work in people's kitchens. So does my mother. And---uh----well, my father, well, he was a laborer most of his life---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 there and she's going to be a doctor---and we are very proud……..This is my son, and he makes the sixth generation our family in this country……We have decided to move into our house……..We don't want your money. (III, p.148)

Walter refuses to take bribes from the Whites who do not want the Blacks to move into their neighborhood. Steven A. Carter contends:

He learns that his pride in himself and his pride in his family are inseparable that anything harming

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one also harms the other, and further sees that, the three women in his life always helped him to bear the burdens of living in a racist system and are now prepared to be powerful allies in the struggle against this new insult.[26]

He proves that he is responsible for restoring Mama's faith in her dreams of leaving the ghetto. Mama tells Mr. Linder not to appeal to her because her son, the head of the house, has firmly decided:

LINDER *(To MAMA):* Then I would like to appeal to you, Mrs. Younger. Young You are older and wiser and understand things better. I am better sure_ _

MAMA: I am afraid you don't understand. My son said we was going to move and there ain't nothing left for me to say. You know who these young folks are nowadays, mister. Can't do a thing with 'em! Good-bye. (III, pp.148-149)

Douglas Turner Ward observes that, "Mama Younger is a pillar of strength, ethical wisdom and moral rectitude."[27] Mama is a strong woman whose old virtues, love and suffering hold the family together. Her children are independent. Jeane Marrie A. Miller says:

The promising talent of the late Lorraine Hansberry was perhaps displayed in the well-known *A Raisin in the Sun* which portrays an interesting variety of female characters, none more so than Lena Younger (Mama), who has grandeur, strength, patience, courage and heroic faith. She is strong in the belief of her mighty. Love for family to whom she teaches self-respect, pride, and human dignity, protects them.[28]

Mama is committed to her Christian belief and puritan notions of work and success. She is obedient to law. She is hard working woman. Mama is portrayed as: "complex individual who is responsive to the new and changing demands of the modern world."[29] Walter has modified his dream as he has matured. His dignity becomes more important to him than his dream of material success. Mama says that Walter has come into his manhood, "He finally come into his manhood today…. Kind of like a rainbow after the rain…. (III, p.151).

The Youngers celebrate their nobility. They represent the triumph of the Black working- class family. Despite their differences, they get together against white racism. Their struggle gives them strength to survive. Mama carries her withering plant with her to the new house. This symbolizes the idea that they will face future challenges. The family members need and support each other. *A Raisin in the Sun* is a realistic play. Jordan Y. Miller declares that:

Lorraine remains essentially within the bounds of the conventional realistic well- made play. The development of plot and a neatly planned series of scenes, and climaxes can greatly assist in thematic and character development of a superior nature. Plot of Miss Hansberry is not her main dramatic purpose.[30]

Conclusion

A Raisin in the Sun stands as a timeless exploration of the human condition, with a particular focus on the agonies faced by its female characters. Lorraine Hansberry's narrative prowess exposes the multifaceted struggles of women in 1950s America, showcasing their resilience amid societal constraints. Through the lens of characters like Ruth and Mama, the play transcends its historical setting, offering poignant reflections on dreams, discrimination, and the indomitable human spirit. As the curtain falls, the enduring impact of these women's journeys resonates, inviting contemplation on the complexities of identity, societal expectations, and the pursuit of a better life. The play remains a powerful testament to the strength and fortitude of women grappling with adversity, leaving an indelible mark on the literary landscape.

The women in Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* exemplify how traditional, presence absence constructs reduce the dynamic and shifting nature of power relations to simple monolithic hierarchies that cannot fully explain the intricacies of power in society. Similarly, this suggests the necessity of redefining power in a more open manner. The idea of power as an inner ability for transformation becomes a step in this direction

The questions of the position of woman and the nature of the roles she should play have taken the entire attention of human societies since their infancy. Since its emergence as a distinctive literary

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type in the 5th century B.C. drama shows an interest in woman-related issues. However, these issues were not the main focus of the dramatic works. In fact, they were dealt

with within the larger framework of the dominant patriarchal system in which women have no voice and are often relegated to secondary positions. Due to the dramatic changes and the introduction of new ideas that took place in the twentieth century, drama witnessed a surge of interest in these issues. Of special importance to Hansberry ‘s play, is the emergence of Womanism since it deals with the lives of three black women who endure a double blow not only because they are black, but also because they are women as well. When Hansberry wrote *A Raisin in the Sun*, Womanism had not fully surfaced on the American literary scene. Here lies the importance of this powerful drama which deals with and foreshadows a number of the womanist issues that are crucialto black women ‘s existence.

Some of the issues that Hansberry as a womanist cared about are racism, sexism, class and gender oppression, female representation in public and private life, and sterilization. Her portrayal of the three black women in the play challenged prevalent stage stereotypes of black women and introduced womanist issues to the American stage in a compelling way. Her portrayal of Beneatha as a young black woman with aspirations to be a doctor and independent in a society that highly discriminated against the black race, and her introduction of the abortion as a solution for the problem of an untimely pregnancy in an era when abortion was illegal signaled early on Hansberry ‘s womanist stances and ideas. Indeed, in addressing these womanist issues, Hansberry proves herself a head of her time.

Hansberry was able to illustrate a typical journey of an African– American in search for the American dream in segregated America. Indeed, the play reflected the dreams and frustrations of an entire generation. It showed Hansberry's ability to speak for those who sought a better life in America. Anne Cheney described *A Raisin in the Sun* as: “A moving testament to the strength and endurance of the human spirit, it is a quiet celebration of the black family, the importance of African roots, the equality of women, the survival of the individual, the true value of money, and the nature of man's dreams.”[31] Martin Luther King Jr. said that, "her commitment of spirit, her creative literary ability and the profound grasps of the deep social issue confronting the world today will remain an inspiration to generation, yet unborn."[32]

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