

A Marxist Reading of Lorraine Hansberry's *a Raisin in the Sun* (1959)

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Abstract

This article investigates the political and social background of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* through the lens of Marxist theory. By asserting the thought that above all her commitments, Hansberry was devoted to the struggle for the progress of the human race. However, she recognized that this struggle had to be made according to the specific terms dictated by the time and country in which one lived. Her actions and writings left little doubt about what kinds of the stand she wanted her fellow humans to take in America in her day. The main question this article investigates is: How does Hansberry who is known to be Marxist in her views on life and art, employ this symbolic play to tackle the social concerns from the standpoint of her ideology? To argue this point from a Marxist point of view, this study pays more attention to Hansberry's battle with the ideology of the dominant class in the United States and provides many quotes by Hansberry that demonstrate this argument. Consequently, the importance of this article is that it theorizes an alternative account of modernity and attempts to mount an operational critique against modernity and modernization.

Keywords: *A Raisin in the Sun*, African American literature, African American women, American Literature, Black feminism, Black power, civil rights, Lorraine Hansberry, Marxism materialism, slavery, Pan-Africanism, oppression, women

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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?

(Harlem: A Dream Deferred, Hughes,
 1994, p. 88).

Introduction

African Americans discovered the importance of literature as a cultural and political tool longer and with more significant hardship than other ethnic minorities in U.S. history. The literature remains the oldest form of self-conscious ethnic minority literature in the United States. It began in 1774 before Phyllis Wheatley's first poetry collection. Slave stories during the pre-Civil War era followed. It produced classic books such as *The Life of Frederick Douglass* of 1845 and Harriet Jacob's novel known as *the Events in a Black Running Life*, 1861. According to literary criticism studies, different literary currents have appeared in African American literature novels, theatre, and poetry. Its appearance has been since the beginning of the Twentieth Century.

Today, a richly complex piece that eloquently depicts the spirit of postwar American life makes *A Raisin in the Sun* still relevant. Theme from *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry (1935-1965) is inspired by these powerful words of the renowned Renaissance man, as the title is taken directly from the poem. Hughes, along with others in his camp, supported the demand for Black writers "to express [their] individual dark-skinned selves who are not afraid or ashamed of whom they are" (Hughes 2010, p190). They pushed the movement toward civil rights in the artistic and political spheres during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and following years (Jeffries, 2013). The main characters in Hansberry's powerful play like, Walter Lee, Beneatha, and their mother Lena Younger are on the edge of a new era of affirmative action and civil rights marches.

Nevertheless, it has been difficult for them to grasp that chasing the American Dream does not replace family honor. As suggested by the figurative title, Hansberry aims to "deconstruct the Black experience around the prospect of factual triumphs depending on a revolutionary action amidst the rigid obstacles African Americans meet in American society" (Wiener, 2011, p.56). Hansberry's play unwraps the numerous issues African- Americans encounter in their quest for the American dream.

Throughout her career as a playwright, Hansberry fell back on her life as a rich source for her literary works; it highly incentives her imagination more than anything else. Critics such as Margaret Wilkerson and Steven R. Carter indicate that events and experiences in her life provided

the raw material for her dramatic work (Goodman, 2003). The work expanded Hansberry's panoramic vision through her life experiences, concerns, and observations. Her views of society originated from lasting impressions made by family experiences, her words of life in Chicago and New York, and her knowledge of and interest in world affairs (Stubbs, 1990).

A Raisin in the Sun will intend for continued evaluation and investigation due to its approach to race, gender, and class issues (Biggsby, 1967). Previous studies like (Carter 1980), discuss this play within Hansberry's canon. Carter's book provides an overview of Hansberry's cultural, social, political, and philosophical views and the relations of these views to her artistic goals. For example, Carter begins his book by presenting the Marxism's esthetics view of Arvon's. He wrote:

Just as true Marxism cannot be reduced to a simple economic and social view of reality but rather is a global vision that seeks to encompass the entire field of human reality, so true Marxist esthetics in no respect resemble a simple sociology of art; it too aims at totality. In its efforts to overlook nothing, to bring together all the elements that comprise the realm of art, it is the exact opposite of a repressive sociologism. The guiding principle of its investigation, namely a living, ongoing, open-ended dialectic, is precisely what makes this esthetic truly Marxist (1980, p.114).

Carter (1980) states that, "this statement about Marxist esthetics could easily stand as Hansberry's artistic credo." (p.41) While Ann (2004) debates that Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* reflects "the desire of Chicago's black women" to move to the suburb and into modern ideal American homes. Hyun portrays these women through "radicalized and gendered" surroundings that expose imbalanced social processes and power relations and communicate resistance to racism and segregation (p.132).

Higashida (2008) observes the American and European existentialisms that molded Hansberry's dramatic vision. The observation developed the idea of a black, anti-imperialist, and anti-colonial. Also, the statement was about their politics of race and sexuality after World War II.

Matthews, (2008) examines the complexities of "home" in *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959). It explores how these literal home mirrors of the mid-century psycho-social struggle helped African Americans achieve, secure, and acquaint a sense of place, or "home", in the face of systemic socio-economic racism.

This study investigates the presence of Marxism in Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* and how do *Particular* aspects of this play will focus on themes and symbolism. The play's title is entirely about the music of the black who struggle for communal civil rights, Black Power, Pan-Africanism, and black feminism. Moreover, it works through multiple means of resistance to the social and economic symbols of racism (Washington, 1983). Finally, the study suggests that the most effective change mode is an alliance of different individuals working together to meet a common aim.

The Historical Contexts of the Play

Lorraine Hansberry's life situation was throughout her career a rich source for her literary works; it appeared to offer stimulus for her imagination. Critics such as Steven R. Carter and Margaret Wilkerson indicate that events and experiences in her life provided the substance of her dramatic work. (Matthews, 2008) Hansberry's dramatic vision was expanded through her own life experiences, concerns, and observations. Her views of society originated in part from lasting impressions made by family experiences, from her observations of life in Chicago and New York, and from her knowledge of and interest in world affairs.

In a speech delivered to a group of Black writers a few days before the opening of her first play, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), Hansberry both described her life experiences and provided some insight into the direction and purpose of her dramatic work:

I was born on the South Side of Chicago. I was born black and a female...I have been personally the victim of physical attack, which was the offspring of racial and political hysteria (Nemiroff,1995, p.44).

In *A Raisin in the Sun* particularly Hansberry analyzes many social issues of the 1950's, including feminism, gender roles, the black family, and the pan-African movement, as well as events within Hansberry's own life, are interweaved in this play. The historical context of Chicago's housing rights struggle plays a significant role in mapping out the primary tensions in the play. It also reveals the Northern prejudice and racism regarding the housing industry, which supported the segregated housing environment of Chicago. George Murray Noted in *The Chicago American* That the Play "Couldn't Be Better Timed for Box Office Success. Its advent coincides with a rising wave of general interest in the Negro. The wave began as a groundswell after World War II. It is visible in the South's integration fight, in high court decisions, The National Association for the advancement of colored people's muscle-flexing" as cited in Bernstein, 1999 P.23).

The ghetto of Chicago, where most blacks lived, is the setting of *A Raisin in the Sun*. These neighborhoods were characterized by costly, overcrowded, and poorly kept flats and houses. The ghettos have high crime rates and insufficient public services. The majority of blacks in the ghetto hoped to move to better suburban neighborhoods, but segregated housing held them there. The play notes that the housing industry has a racist nature because of differences in housing cost within black and white communities and their separate housing locations. Walter and Ruth are astounded that Mama purchases a house in an entirely white neighborhood, because moving to a white neighborhood could put their lives at risk. Mama explains why she was reluctant to stay in the black community when she states, "Them houses they put up for colored in them areas way out all seem to cost twice as much as other houses. I did the best I could"(*A Raisin* 2.1).

Hansberry's father, Carl Hansberry, challenged the restrictive racial covenants legally, and sued to remain in his new neighborhood. The case was won. However, following that "howling mobs" surrounded the Hansberry's house. (Jeffries,2013) At one point a brick hurled through their window barely missed Lorraine's head before embedding itself in their wall (Jeffries,2013). In the

play's first scene, Walter Lee Younger reads from the Chicago Tribune that white folks "set off another bomb yesterday" (*A Raisin* 2.3) a topic of conversation raised four times in the short duration of the play. In post-war Chicago, bombings, demonstrations, and assaults on blacks attempting to move east into predominantly white neighborhoods were on the rise.

Although written prior to the civil rights movement, *Raisin* presents the black struggle for communal civil rights, Black Power, Pan-Africanism, and black feminism. It also works through multiple means of resistance to the social and economic symbols of racism, suggesting that the most effective mode of change is an alliance by different individuals working together to meet a common aim (Matthews, 2008).

A New Era Begins with Civil Rights Marches and Affirmative Action

A Raisin in the Sun is a robust and intelligently written discourse on African American life, and it sets a good example of the Marxist critical theory. The play, also, demonstrates a family's struggle when trying to achieve their ambitions or desires in life. As well as the individuals' concerns over materialism, money, honor, and respect in their society (Brown, 1974).

However, oppression ate the people. The characters have their issues. Due to poverty, the characters made ways to lift their role in society. Travis, his parents (Walter and Ruth Younger), Walter's mother (Mama), and Beneatha, live in a rundown two-bedroom apartment in Chicago, indicating poverty. Walter barely makes a living from his driving job (Szeman, 2009). Though Ruth is pleased with their situation, Walter is not, and he is determined to become wealthy. Walter intends to invest in an alcohol store with Willy, a streetwise acquaintance of Walter's whom we never meet. Mama is waiting for a ten-thousand-dollar insurance cheque at the start of the play. Walter feels entitled to the money, but Mama is religiously opposed to drinking and related business (Schilb & Clifford, 2015). Beneatha has to remind him that spending that money would depend on Mama's decision. Mama eventually puts some of the money down on a new house, opting for an all-white neighborhood over a black one because it is considerably less expensive (Abramson, 1967).

Mama relents and gives the remaining cash to Walter to invest with the intention that he would set aside \$3,000 for Beneatha's education. Willy's foolish sidekick Bobo sends the money to Walter, who gives it to Willy. Unfortunately, Willy took the money and misused it preventing Walter and Beneatha from achieving their ambitions, apart from the Youngers of their new home. Meanwhile, Karl Lindner, a white politician from the neighborhood where they plan to relocate, offers them a substantial payoff. He wants to avoid neighborhood tensions caused by interracial populations. Walter prepared to avoid tension as a solution to their financial setback to the three women's horror (Carlson, 1993).

Lena says that while money is something they try to work for, they should not take it if it is a person's way of telling them they are not fit to walk the same earth. Moreover, two distinct men shape Walter's character and life path.: They include Beneatha's well-educated boyfriend, George Murchison, and Joseph Assegai, a Nigerian medical student visiting America from a Canadian institution. Neither man is involved in the Youngers' financial ups and downs. With a

"smarter than thou" attitude, George epitomizes the "completely integrated black man" who denies his African roots (*A Raisin* 2.1). Beneatha finds it disgusting while dismissively mocking Walter's lack of money and education. Assegai patiently teaches Beneatha about her African heritage. He provides her valuable African presents while pointing out that she is unknowingly adapting herself to white ways. He refers to her straightening hair as "mutilation" (*A Raisin* 2.1).

Assegai chastises Beneatha for her materialism when she is upset about losing money. Beneatha agrees with his opinion that things will improve even in his marriage proposal and invitation to relocate to Nigeria with him, where he was to study medicine. Walter is entirely unaware of the tremendous disparity between George and Assegai: His desire for money is only possible if he can break free from Assegai's culture, which is the cause of his poverty, and rise to George's level, where he sees his salvation. This salvation is Walter's version of the American ideal, chased with the same zeal as Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*, but with the added constraint of being black in a white America. However, When Loman dies at the end of the novel; Walter redeems himself and black pride by refusing the buyout offer and declaring that they are proud and try to be good neighbors. The drama concludes with the family departing for an unknown future.

Since A Raisin in The Sun takes place in the 1950s, the status of race issues stands as an essential factor to consider as the time progresses. There had been more progress in American history, but there was still a long way, as *the play* shows. The 1950s was a turning point in America, the decade that brought the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. During much of the 1950s, racist Jim Crow laws segregated the South, and many African Americans faced unofficial racial barriers in the North (Matthews, 2008). The racial tensions of the period fueled the play's conflicts. Beneatha's behavior, in particular, is historically accurate as she interacts with current sociopolitical challenges. In a way, though, she is ahead of her time. We do not doubt that if Beneatha were still in the U.S. around the 1960s, she'd be marching beside Dr King. Beneatha is also ahead of her time advocating for African Americans to reconnect with their roots in Africa. Later in the 1960s, this act became a significant movement among black Americans. Hansberry foresaw the character of Beneatha. (And possibly helped to spark) some powerful moves in American history (Higashida, 2008, p. 900).

The Youngers' neighborhood is particularly significant because it was primarily a poor neighborhood inhabited mainly by African Americans during the 1950s. After moving from the South searching for a job and a way to escape racial prejudice, many blacks wound up in Chicago's Southside. Things were better in the North on many levels, but blacks still faced many challenges. As *A Raisin in the Sun* depicts, white culture made it difficult for African Americans to escape the vermin-infested apartment buildings of Chicago. Although there was no official segregation law in place, there was unofficial segregation in the city. The White American neighbors were also racist toward the black family because they did not want an interracial community (Stubbs, 1990).

Hansberry not only addresses African Americans' plight but also their interaction with the Black community and society as a whole. He emphasized the lives of Youngers and introduced rich and educated George Murchison and Joseph Assegai. There are also differences in the

characters' ideologies. Another concern is a person's colonial mindset, which focuses on their loss of nationalism. "It is, in reality, the investigation of a civilization's facts which invariably returns to that civilization the rock-like notes of affirmation, significance, and beauty" (as cited in Brown, p.237). Hansberry says of the need to confront societal concerns" (Jeffries, 2013). The main characters triumphed over oppression and made revolutionary decisions for their family's common good. Their viewpoint shifted to one of black pride. So, *A Raisin in the Sun* consummates its relationship to Marxist Criticism. However, she asserts the need to evaluate the country's structure in which she lives and creates her work to reveal its flaws and potential (Kolin, 2007).

The disturbing reality of forced housing integration in Hansberry's own family life demonstrates that she was fully attentive that imposed or legal integration differed from the archetype concept of integration as complete human reconciliation. Segregation's materiality is represented by Hansberry's aesthetic which also depicts various practices of the black people's resistance through space and time. Her art makes the compound systems of black oppression visible in the urban North, which often looks manifestly distinctive from the Jim Crow South. Finally, the Youngers show stubbornness and strength in the face of discrimination (Sutton, 2012). The play effectively illustrates dealing with bigotry by standing up to it and reclaiming one's dignity. Discrimination should be dealt with as soon as possible when it occurs. Once again, Hansberry has humorously juxtaposed the dream's romantic possibilities with the realities of American life (Ann, 2015).

Hansberry is Marxist in her views on life and art dogmatic Marxist argument that art should be used only as an instrument of the class struggle, just as she shunned the position that art existed for its own sake apart from social concerns. As she argues in a letter quoted in *To Be Young Gifted and Black*, "there are no plays which are not social and no plays that do not have a thesis." Based on her perceptions that acclaim art and message, Hansberry is not as far from Marx himself as more doctrinaire Marxists would contend (Carter, 1980, p.90).

According to Marxism, the proletariat is the peasants, the hard-working low class with very little to show for their efforts. According to Marx and Engels, the bourgeois is the upper class who reaps the benefits of the proletariat's labor. Therefore, for the proletariat's insurrection and rebellion to be successful, Marx thought that it has to be immediate and violent. Many members of the current ruling class would perish because the former presiding course would not give up without a fight.

Marxist scholars posit that literature reflects those social institutions from which it emerges. Literature is also a social institution that serves a specific ideological purpose. As a result, Marxists see literature "not as works made according to timeless creative criteria, but as 'products' of the economic and ideological causes unique to that era." Literature reflects an author's class or analysis of class relations, however piercing or shallow that comment may be (Barry 1995, p.219).

Although Hansberry did not make all her heroic protagonists' peasants or men or revolutionary ideologies, she did make them ahead of their time, accelerating the movement of history once they attained a certain level of understating and capacity for action. Her fellow artist,

Lonne Elder, In an insightful article titled "Lorraine Hansberry: Social Consciousness and the Will," argues that "Lorraine has discovered, as we all have at one time or Another, that genuine involvement with the Marxist-Leninist experience is incredible and unforgettable" and that she "remained the inspired socialist outside of the official movements, armed with the knowledge that revolutionary consciousness and precision of revolutionary thought were not the exclusive domain of those who remained within" (Carter1980,p.25).

As evidence, his reading of Walter Lee Younger's "revolutionary" decision house in the hostile white neighborhood represented by Karl Linder of the "welcoming committee" in *A Raisin in the Sun*:

Out of his "small view of human destiny," Walter Lee defends what he deems to be most precious in his life, and that is his pride. A lesser dramatist would have probably chosen a literal revolutionary stance for Walter Lee in his encounter with the racist Linder. It is a tribute, not only to Lorraine's wisdom but to her sense of vision as well, that she refused to provide the expected. Of course, the end result of Walter's actions is revolutionary "in his way" and quite illuminating, considering that he is not fully conscious of the impact of his defiance. So, on this matter of socialist responsibility being in accord with the artistic individuation, one would have to say that *A Raisin in the Sun* is a double triumph (as cited in Carter 1980, 216).

Mama's and Walter's moral victory over white supremacists is genuine, and it is unquestionably significant in confirming Walter's self-esteem. However, as the Hansberry family's humiliations and hardships in a predominantly white Chicago neighborhood proved, the tactical defeat of individual racists does not imply the abolition of racism. At best, it's a self-ennobling start with no guarantee of a satisfactory outcome based on genuine reconciliation.

Also, Beneatha has straightened her hair when the play begins; however, halfway through the play, after Assegai visits her and questions her hairstyle, she cuts her Caucasian-looking hair. Her new, radical afro represents the embracing of her heritage. The cutting of Beneatha's hair is a compelling revolutionary statement, as she symbolically declares her refusal to conform to the style of the oppressor's ideology. Beneatha chooses a class that allows her to better reconcile her identity and culture. Beneatha's new hair represents her anti-assimilation convictions and determination to control her own identity. She remembered her roots in Africa and became free from the criteria of dominant white ideology. The hard truth is that the long-term socioeconomic problems of the Younger family exist. The problem has not been solved by the final placement of the funds for Mama's fight for integration and the recovery of (Walter's) Black masculinity.

Even though the play concludes with the Younger family realizing one of their aspirations — moving out of the slums and into a good home — the drama leaves us wondering about the other dreams. Beneatha is still in need of money for medical school, while Walter is still unemployed. This circumstance reflects the situation of blacks in America at the time. While they had fulfilled some dreams, such as freedom, and integrated education, they did not achieve all their interest. Hansberry uses the epigraph to emphasize the universal essence of her play — everyone has dreams

– and its unique spirit – black Americans have been compelled to postpone their dreams more than others.

The Youngers now live in a better (white) area, but Walter's prospects for even a basic level of socioeconomic self-sufficiency remain grim; and the broader economic difficulties that have left their imprint on both the furnishings and Ruth Younger's features have remained unchanged:

The furnishings of this room were actually selected with care and love and even hope and brought to this apartment and arranged with taste and pride. That was a long time ago. Now the once loved pattern of the couch upholstery has to fight to show itself from under acres of crocheted doilies and couch covers which have themselves finally come to be more important than the upholstery. And here a table or a chair has been moved to disguise the worn places in the carpet; but the carpet has fought back by showing its weariness, with depressing uniformity, elsewhere on its surface. Weariness has, in fact, won this room... All pretenses but living itself have long since vanished from the very atmosphere of this room (*A Raisin* 3.1).

Despite the pride and zeal with which the performance ends, it is difficult to forget the sad memories of these pieces of furniture. Because the same pieces of furniture dominate the final picture as they travel from the old flat to the new house, symbolism in the opening scene is more difficult to decipher. The point is that Hansberry makes no simple promises that they will forget the old grievances and "weariness" or that transformation in terms of socioeconomic achievement and complete human reconciliation will be unavoidable.

She presents the "indestructible contradictions to this state of 'being'" -the rats, roaches, worn furniture, over-crowded conditions, and anti-integration bombs. Therefore, not only sets the stage for the dramatic action in *A Raisin in the Sun* and serves as evidence of Chicago's political and economic infrastructures of deliberate segregation (*A Raisin* 1.1). Early in the play, Hansberry utilizes the gruesome death of a "rat Big as a cat, honest!" to show the widespread reality of ghetto life. Rats and roaches thrive in areas with little or no municipal sanitation service or landlord upkeep. Such conclusions contradict the prevailing assumptions that support segregationist organizations and individuals. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, the rat tackles ghettoized populations' callous neglect and economic exploitation (Potier, 2009, p. 66).

Ruth's agonized response to Travis's contact with the mouse reflects the moral difficulties experienced by parents who rear their children in U.S. ghettos, with Beneatha "on her knees spraying [pesticide] under sofa with behind upraised. Later, Mama announces that she has bought a house in Clybourne Park. The announcement came despite Ruth's dismay at the possibility of living in a hostile white neighborhood in Chicago. She "laughs joyfully" and places her hands on her stomach, "knowing that the life therein pulses with happiness rather than despair, possibly for the first time." Ruth decides to "clean all the floors in America" after weighing the hazards of the ghetto against the threat of anti-black terrorism... if I have to, but we got to MOVE! We got to get OUT OF HERE!" (*A Raisin* 3.1). The imperative to move to both the Younger family's physical

departure from Chicago's ghetto and what Hansberry saw as a necessary mass movement to reconstruct the social order. Beneatha argues that "setting fire to this building" is the "only" method to get rid of the insects and rats in their apartment. ". However, Hansberry rejects simple remedies to inadequate housing conditions and any form of exceptionalism that allows only a tiny percentage of black families to escape American ghettos (Jeffries, 2013, p. 36). The Clybourne Park Improvement Association's economic exploitation, anti-integration bombs, and organizing activities are fundamental to Hansberry's project in *A Raisin in the Sun*. The Youngers show more than "sensitivity" to the "economic stresses" of ghetto living or a lack of awareness "that they are involved in a sociological racial war" throughout the play, according to one critic" (Sutton, 2011, p. 35). Mama expresses her family's right to challenge Chicago segregation's economic exploitation by purchasing the house in Clybourne Park (Tuhkanen, 2010). When the family discovers the location of their new home, no one wants to risk provoking the anger of Chicago's white homeowners.

RUTH: *Where is it?*

MAMA: *Frightened at this telling Well, well it's out there in Clybourne Park.*

RUTH: *Clybourne Park, perhaps? There are no persons of color in Clybourne Park, Mama.*

MAMA *(Almost obliviously) Well, I guess there will be some now (finally raising her eyes to meet [Walter's]) Son- I tried to find the best place for my family for the least amount of money.*

RUTH: *(Trying to recover from the shock) Well- well- 'course I ain't one never been 'fraid of no crackers, mind you- but- well, wasn't there no other houses nowhere?*

MAMA: *The houses they put up for colored areas way out seem to cost twice as much as other houses. I did the best I could" (A Raisin 2.1).*

Despite the pride and enthusiasm, the play concludes that it is difficult to escape the grim reminders of this furniture. Running symbols in the opening scene is more difficult because the same pieces of furniture dominate the concluding scene. They frequently relocate from their previous flat to a new home. The point is that Hansberry makes no simple promises that they will forget the old grievances and "weariness" or that transformation in terms of socioeconomic achievement and complete human reconciliation will be unavoidable. After acknowledging all bourgeois excesses and poverty-inspired expectations, we promote materialistic pictures of the American dream. According to the Younger generation, the American dream ideal still attempts to meet both the material and spiritual needs of the human psyche. And there will be no total fulfillment of the American dream for the Youngers as long as the material and psychological limitations prevail. Mainly, what they achieve at the end of the play lies in an incipient (rather than full-blown) self-esteem.

However, within the Marxist design of Hansberry's themes, this is counterbalanced by the forbidding prospects for material opportunities and social regeneration. Assegai, the African student, can be a romantic embodiment of that rhetoric of optimistic self-esteem that comes easily in a-famous winds of anti-colonial change that affects Africa. However, in an American context, the Youngers' uncertain future and the old furniture's continual 'weariness' contradict or diminish

this optimism. The ultimate *revolutionary consciousness* of the playwright is that moral gloom and spiritual exhaustion have tainted the uniquely American optimism in hopes for change and humanization. Despite all of the sacred myths of change and the treasured hope of ideals of human fulfillment, American society leaves considerably less opportunity for optimism about actual change than the hated organizations of the so-called developing world, which necessitate a "revolutionary" decision (*A Raisin* 2.1).

To conclude, Hansberry addressed a variety of issues and concerns that the United States, particularly African Americans, were dealing with. One of the key themes she explores in her play is the concept of home and what it means and signifies to particularly African Americans, at the time. The drama shows how important the concept of home was to African Americans' desire to define their identities. She also takes up feminism and Marxism, two incredibly important literary criticisms. The search of true identity is a motif that appears throughout the play. especially by Beneatha who, much to her family puzzlement, choose her African suitor over her rich boyfriend, and who insist on taking her college education. Beneatha who refused to be limited to various class, racial, gendered, and sexual orientation, becomes progressive, independent, and a total feminist. Ultimately, from a Marxist perspective it is arguable that Hansberry, in this play is calling for a revolutionary reaction from the African Americans, as social roles are subject to constant reinforcement. In order to fulfill their dreams instead of leaving them captives in the hands of the white oppressor until these dreams dry up like a raisin in the sun.

About the Author

Ohood Al-Aqeel is currently a member of teaching staff at the Department of English, Arts College, Al-Jouf University, Saudi Arabia. She holds a PhD in Drama from the University of Exeter. Most of her academic interests and research activities (MA, PhD, and publications) revolve around American literature and theatre, and the drama of the Saudi female playwrights.

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