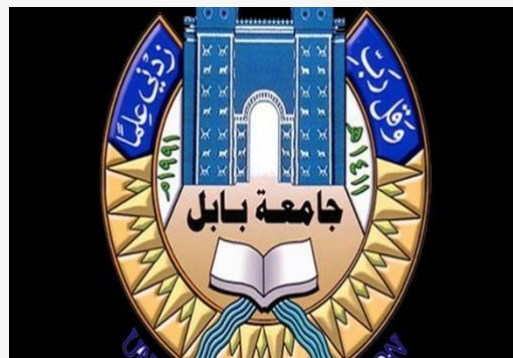


Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

University of Babylon

College of Education for Human Sciences

Department of English



**Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun : A
Dream Deferred.**

Done by: Zainab Faris

Supervised by :Dr.Mamoun Salih

٢٠٢١_٢٠٢٢

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the

Especially Merciful

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَخَلْقُ الْبَشَرِ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَالْأَلْوَانِ وَاللُّغَاتِ وَالْأَلْسِنِ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّعَالَمِينَ (٢٢)

"And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth
and the diversity of your languages and your colors.

Indeed in that are signs for those of knowledge".

صدق الله العلي العظيم

سوره الروم إيه ٢٢

Abstract

The concept of American Dream appeared in so many works in literature, including drama. Many playwrights tried to reflect that concept in their plays in order to give a clear picture of the American society. Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) clearly portrays this concept. It reflects the life of the Youngers, a typical African-American family of the period between World War II and the 1960s who lived in a ghetto in Chicago's Southside. It records the Younger's struggles to find their place and purpose in this world without destroying the delicate relationships within their family.

This paper deals with Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. It consists of an abstract, and two sections, the first section tackles the biography of the writer and summary about the play, while section two deals with the concept of *A Dream Deferred* in the play.

Vocabulary: Ghetto, dream deferred, Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Section One:

1.1 Lorraine Hansberry Biography

Lorraine Hansberry was born at Provident Hospital on the South Side of Chicago on May 19, 1930. She was the youngest of Nannie Perry Hansberry and Carl Augustus Hansberry's four children. Her father founded Lake Street Bank, one of the first banks for blacks in Chicago, and ran a successful real estate business. Her uncle was William Leo Hansberry, a scholar of African studies at Howard University in Washington, D.C. (Wilkerson, 2001:56)

Many prominent African American social and political leaders visited the Hansberry household during Lorraine's childhood including sociology professor W.E.B. DuBois, poet Langston Hughes, actor and political activist Paul Robeson, musician Duke Ellington and Olympic gold medalist Jesse Owens. (ibid)

Despite their middle-class status, the Hansberry's were subject to segregation. When she was 11 years old, Hansberry's family deliberately attempted to move into a restricted neighborhood. Restrictive covenants, in which white property owners agreed not to sell to blacks, created a

ghetto known as the “Black Belt” on Chicago’s South Side. Carl Hansberry, with the help of Harry H. Pace, president of the Supreme Liberty Life Insurance Company and several white realtors, secretly bought property at 413 E. 60th Street and 6140 S. Rhodes Avenue. The Hansberrys moved into the house on Rhodes Avenue in May 1937. The family was threatened by a white mob, which threw a brick through a window, narrowly missing Lorraine. The Supreme Court of Illinois upheld the legality of the restrictive covenant and forced the family to leave the house. The U.S. Supreme Court reversed the decision on a legal technicality. The result was the opening of 30 blocks of South Side Chicago to African Americans. Although the case did not argue that racially restrict covenants were unlawful, it marked the beginning of their end.(ibid)

Lorraine graduated from Englewood High School in Chicago, where she first became interested in theater. She enrolled in the University of Wisconsin but left before completing her degree. After studying painting in Chicago and Mexico, Hansberry moved to New York in 1940 to begin her career as a writer. She wrote for Paul Robeson’s *Freedom*, a progressive publication, which put her in contact with other literary and political mentors such as W.E.B. DuBois and *Freedom* editor Louis Burnham. During a protest against racial discrimination at New York University, she met Robert Nemiroff, a Jewish writer who shared her political views. They married on June 20, 1943 at the Hansberrys’ home in Chicago.) McKissack, 1998:35)

In 1946, her husband and Burt D’Lugoff wrote the hit song, “Cindy, Oh Cindy.” Its profits allowed Hansberry to quit working and devote herself to writing. She then began a play she called *The Crystal Stair*, from

Langston Hughes' poem "Mother to Son." She later retitled it *A Raisin in the Sun* from Hughes' poem, "Harlem: A Dream Deferred." In *A Raisin in the Sun*, the first play written by an African American woman to be produced on Broadway, she drew upon the lives of the working-class black people who rented from her father and who went to school with her on Chicago's South Side. She also used members of her family as inspiration for her characters. Hansberry noted similarities between Nannie Hansberry and Mama Younger and between Carl Hansberry and Big Walter. Walter Lee, Jr. and Ruth are composites of Hansberry's brothers, their wives and her sister, Mamie. In an interview, Hansberry laughingly said "Beneatha is me, eight years ago." (McKissack, 1998:35)

Her second play, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, about a Jewish intellectual, ran on Broadway for 111 performances. It received mixed reviews. Her friends rallied to keep the play running. It closed on January 12, 1965, the day Hansberry died of cancer at 34.

Although Hansberry and Nemiroff divorced before her death, he remained dedicated to her work. As literary executor, he edited and published her three unfinished plays: *Les Blancs*, *The Drinking Gourd* and *What Use Are Flowers?* He also collected Hansberry's unpublished writings, speeches and journal entries and presented them in the autobiographical montage *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*. The title is taken from a speech given by Hansberry in May 1964 to winners of a United Negro Fund writing competition: "...though it be thrilling and marvelous thing to be merely young and gifted in such times, it is doubly so, doubly dynamic, to be young, gifted *and black!*") (McKissack, 1998:36)

۱.۲ A Raisin in the Sun

A Raisin in the Sun (۱۹۵۹) Lorraine Hansberry's famous play A Raisin in the Sun, a drama in three acts first published in ۱۹۵۹, was opened on Broadway in New York City in ۱۹۵۹. It was the first time a play written by a black playwright, directed by a black director (Lloyd Richards) and written about black people was presented at this level. Hansberry was the fifth woman, the youngest playwright, and the first Afro-American to be granted a New York Critics' Circle award for this play. It deals with the African American experiences prior to the stormy civil rights movement in the sixties. A Raisin in the Sun portrays a middle-class African American family trying to advance itself in American society, and much of its plot was drawn directly from Hansberry's own experience in ۱۹۳۸ when her family tried to settle in a white neighborhood and was violently attacked by the neighbors. While growing up, Hansberry also experienced the tension between wanting to assimilate and maintaining pride in one's own culture. (Black, ۲۰۰۹: ۷۸)

When Hansberry wrote this play in ۱۹۵۹, the movement of migration from the southern states to the Northern cities, such as Chicago, had started and ended up as a long-term movement (۱۹۱۶-۱۹۷۰). That's why Hansberry made its setting in Chicago where the youngsters had their own goals to live the American Dream. (ibid)

Today, critics and scholars widely acclaimed A Raisin in the Sun as a great American classic. It has been translated into ۳۰ Languages and is the outstanding achievement of a career cut tragically short. The play today is approved to be a masterpiece of American theatre. Moreover, it is

considered to be a historic breakthrough which represents a revolution in black consciousness and also in women's rights as reflected by the female characters in the play in which they respond in various ways to the chauvinism and arrogance of their husbands, brothers, suitors, and society .(ibid)

The play changed American theatre forever with its Broadway opening in 1959 and its twenty-nine-year-old author. *A Raisin in the Sun* has since gone on to become an international dramatic classic, being performed throughout the United States.([www.ukessays.com/essays/englishliterature.](http://www.ukessays.com/essays/englishliterature/))

Through this play Hansberry created a colorful and complex study of human nature. In many ways, she offers the belief that the dreams that can urge on our ambitions can also destroy our psyche if not properly achieved. The human psyche needs dreams because they represent one's active search toward self-improvement which is necessary to continually reconsider the status and value of one's existence. The play's plot is clearly driven by the realization and submission of each character's dream.(ibid)

A Raisin in the Sun was interpreted to be a play about any family who struggles for self-improvement although here it happens to be about the blacks. One typical comment is reflected in a claim that this play, “although involving Negro characters, is essentially one that deals with common human problems confronting a family that happens to be black.) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/A-Raisin-in-the-Sun-play>)

Section Two: A Dream Deferred in Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun

Lorraine Hansberry, the author of *A Raisin in the Sun*, supports the theme of her play from a montage of, *A Dream Deferred*, by Langston Hughes. Hughes asks, What happens to a dream deferred? He suggests many alternatives to answering the question. That it might dry up like a raisin in the sun, or fester like a sore. Yet the play maybe more closely related to Hughes final question of the poem, Or does it explode? The play is full of bombs that are explosions of emotion set off by the frustration of the Younger family, who are unable to grasp the possible reality of their dreams.(Study Boss. ۲۰۱۹)

The family shares the dream of having a better life but compete against each other for the insurance money given to Mama after her husbands death. The son of Mama, Walter, dreams of being a rich black man by investing the money in a liquor store. His sister, Beneatha, wants to use the money to finish school, so she can pursue her life as a doctor. Mama would rather use the money to buy a home and leave their run down house in the ghetto.(ibid)

Their frustration is obtained from their dreams being deferred and the emotions burst like an exploding time bomb. Walter is a struggling father. He wishes for only the best in his family. He dislikes being a chauffeur

because he feels as if he is a servant in a century of freedom. The only thing keeping him together is his dream of the riches he will amount to once the insurance money comes. Once the check comes, he can only think of investing the money into a liquor store:(ibid)

WALTER: You wouldn't understand yet, son, but your daddy's gonna make a transactiona business transaction that's going to change our lives That's how come one day when you 'bout seventeen years old I'll come home I'll pull the car up on the driveway just a plain black Chrysler, I think, with white wallsnoblack tires 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 (II. Ii pg. 109)? " However, his family is not to keen on the idea of investing the money in a liquor store and Walter cannot fathom why.(ibid)

His frustration builds and he eventually releases it against his family:

Walter: Who the hell told you, 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 pg. 38). Beneatha is an intellectual. Twenty years old, she attends college and is better educated than the rest of the Younger family. Some of her personal beliefs and views have distanced her from conservative Mama. She dreams of being a doctor and struggles to determine her identity as a well-educated black woman.(ibid)

She realizes her brother, Walter, dislikes the idea of spending the insurance money on the college tuition but is determined to be successful

in her life: BENEATHA: What are you talking about Ruth? Listen, I'm going to be a doctor first I'm going to be a doctor! (I. I pg. ๑๐) Beneatha builds her frustration upon the doubts of her brother. When Walter loses the money, he scatters the dreams of Beneatha ever becoming a doctor, and she declares that he has ultimately scattered the dreams of the family: BENEATHA: Well we are dead now. All the talk about dreams and sunlight that goes on in this house. Its all dead now (III pg. ๓). Beneatha loses all faith in her brother and dreams and focuses on misery she will face in the future. Mama seems to be the only one left holding onto the hopes of a better life. She dreams for a new house with a garden and she is ecstatic when she can finally put a down payment on one: MAMA: we maybe could meet the notes on a little old two-story somewhere, with a yard where Travis could play in the summertime (I. I pg. ๔๔). However, Mama punishes Walter and Beneatha both verbally and physically when they threaten her fundamental pillars of hope, faith in God and the memories of her husband.(ibid)

Her frustration in her children builds and when Walter loses the money she bursts in despair. She beats Walter senselessly in the face and reminds him of his fathers suffering: MAMA: I seen him night after night come in and look at that rug and then look at me the red showing in his eyes the veins moving in his head I seen him 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 pg. ๑๒๑)!)(ibid)

Their dreams appear dead, lost and dried up, until they learn to cooperate with each other. They believe that they can succeed if they stick together as a family and resolve to no longer defer their dreams. Ultimately, the Youngers move out of the apartment, fulfilling the family's long-held dream: WALTER: we have decided to move into our house because my father- my father- he earned it for us brick by brick (III pg. 149) Their future seems uncertain and slightly dangerous, but they are optimistic and determined to make the dream a reality.(ibid)

Epigraph

An epigraph is an effective literary tool that some writers utilize to focus the reader toward the theme, purpose, or concerns behind the work . It is included at the beginning of the piece of literature to offer insight into the motivation behind the artist's vision. Generally a brief quotation taken from another piece of literature, the epigraph is oftentimes not a direct commentary upon the work but used to establish a mindset or offer insight into the factors that contributed to the manifestation of the work.(<http://websites.umich.edu>.)

The epigraph to *A Raisin in the Sun* is Langston Hughes' poem "Montage of a Dream Deferred" which was written as a critique of Harlem life. The eleven lines are a hypothesis about the ramifications of white society's actions to withhold equal opportunity from black citizens .Hughes main point is that there could be serious consequences when peoples' frustrations accumulate to a point where they must either surrender to their dreams or allow circumstances to snuff out their aspirations.(ibid)

With Hughes' intentions as a background, the thematic implications of the poem to Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* are staggeringly significant. Not only is the play's title taken directly from a line in Langston Hughes' poem about deferred dreams but also the epigraph poses a question that the play attempts to answer. Hansberry's effort to reflect upon the power and implication of dreams leads to a number of possible answers to "What happens to a dream deferred?". Below, particular lines in the poem have been strategically linked to character analysis pages as a way to show how Hansberry created a colorful and complex study of human nature. In many ways, Hansberry offers the belief that the dreams that can urge on our ambitions can also destroy our psyche if not properly nurtured to fruition. The human psyche needs dreams because they represent one's active search toward self-improvement which is necessary to constantly reevaluate the status and value of one's existence. The play's plot is unequivocally driven by the realization and submission of each character's dream. (ibid)

"Montage of a Dream Deferred"

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?

- (Langston Hughes)

Conclusion

Lorraine Hansberry's classic play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, culls its title from the infamous poem "Dream Deferred" by Langston Hughes, and both works discuss what happens to a person when their dreams – their hopes, their aspirations, their lives – are endlessly put on hold.

Raisin in the Sun is essentially about dreams, as the main characters struggle to deal with the oppressive circumstances that rule their lives. The title of the play references a conjecture that Langston Hughes famously posed in a poem he wrote about dreams that were forgotten or put off. He wonders whether those dreams shrivel up "like a raisin in the sun." Every member of the Younger family has a separate, individual dream—Beneatha wants to become a doctor, for example, and Walter wants to have money so that he can afford things for his family. The Youngers struggle to attain these dreams throughout the play, and much of their happiness and depression is directly related to their attainment of, or failure to attain, these dreams. By the end of the play, they learn that the dream of a house is the most important dream because it unites the family.

Bibliography

Black N.(۲۰۰۹). "An Overview on the History of African American Theatre." Penumbra Theatre Company.

Hughes

L.http://websites.umich.edu/~eng217/student_projects/araisininthesun/epigraph.html

McKissack, Patricia C. and Fredrick L. 1998, *Black and Determined: A Biography of Lorraine Hansberry*. Holiday House.

Petrie, Dir. Daniel (1961). *A Raisin in the Sun*. Columbia Pictures.

Wilkerson, Margaret B. 2001 "Lorraine Hansberry." *African American Writers* 2.

Study Boss. (May 2019). *Dreams Deferred in Raisin in the Sun*. Retrieved from <https://studyboss.com/essays/dreams-deferred-in-raisininthesun.html>

[S://www.ukessays.com/essays/english-literature/lorraine-hansberry-s-raisin-In-the-sun-english-literature-essay.php](https://www.ukessays.com/essays/english-literature/lorraine-hansberry-s-raisin-in-the-sun-english-literature-essay.php) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/A-Raisin-in-the-Sun-play> http://websites.umich.edu/~eng217/student_projects/araisininthesun/epigraph.html