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THE ROLE OF LORRAINE HANSBERRY IN DEALING WITH THE MALADIES OF HER  
SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this paper is analyzing the role of the feminist playwright Lorraine Hansberry dealing with the sufferings of her society through some of her plays. Lorraine Hansberry was fully aware of the maladies of her society, unlike many critics who alleged that because she came from a well-off family, she was utterly ignorant of the sufferings of the common man. Refuting those allegations, Hansberry described the suffering she had been through as she survived the depression of World War I, the devastation of Nagasaki and Hiroshima by atom bombs, as well as the Cold War. Besides, she saw on the streets of New York, beggars, prostitutes and gangs. she also knew people who were drug addicts and others afflicted with mental diseases. She was aware that greed malice, corruption brutality and indifference were the characteristic features of her society.

Lorraine Hansberry realizes the presence of good and evil. There is a preponderancy towards what is good by virtue of man's latent potentialities for goodness and greatness Therefore, Hansberry held various institutions in society responsible for distorting man's basic goodness. She believed that there were no evil people, but only evil systems. Hansberry was unanimously granted a place in the highest ranks of American literature

Hansberry assures the view that the message that should be imparted by the artist is the vision of a better world. Not only did she dreams of that, but also she delineates a world in which man can ameliorate his status and become better – provided that she did not utter clichés of affirmation about a rosy world. She asserted that evil institutions could be reformed with commitment and involvement. Hence, Hansberry is given the credit of a dramatist who has left a profound impact on the American Theater.

Introduction

It is a historical fact that the majority of black women suffer from the bad conditions in America. So, many black women writers reflect such conditions in their writings in the field of drama, poetry, novel and etc. This research attempts to expose the sordid social circumstances in which Lorraine Hansberry and Black Americans in general have lived both during the period of servitude as well as that of racial segregation. The researcher exposes the role of Hansberry as a great black dramatist in exposing the white oppression. As a

matter of fact, this feminist remarkable dramatist tried to bring to light blacks pains and agonies at the hands of the proponents of racism. The researcher focuses on these people's pains and agonies because of the dreadful happenings which befell them since they were taken away from their home land Africa up to the stage when they were sold as cattle in auctions in America through the writing of specific plays written by Lorraine Hansberry such as *A Raisin in the Sun* and *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*. Hansberry believes that there are evil systems-not evil people- and black people should face and get rid of such evil systems.

Black-women have played a heroic role in the struggle for freedom and equality both in the United States and abroad. Hence, Black literature has always been implicated in depicting their oppressed circumstances and the problems of race, sex, and class. We can assume that modern black writers have identified a politics of gender which counters the traditional emphasis on the theme of racial conflict, and which indicates the search for self as the major motif in African-American literature. On the other hand, one tends to say that by joining the politics of race with the politics of gender, and by affirming African-American ancestors, heritage, experience. Lorraine Hansberry has participated in finding an attempt to solve the problems of her community.

Hence, another fact related to Hansberry is that she can be described as a dramatist who believes in Realism. It is a form of realism that moves towards ethics; towards how life should be. Hansberry sees that black people possess the reason and that will enable them to face their suffering and at the same time enable them to better their conditions; a hope of progress towards an existence characterized by more meaningful. This paper assures that Hansberry as a black woman writer – believes in peace not violence as the salvation of the black people. Thus, Hansberry envisages love and peace as the way out of the blacks' dilemmatic situation.

#### **Lorraine Vivian Hansberry as a feminist playwright**

When Lorraine Hansberry was eight years old, a brick broke through a window in her house and almost hit her as she and her family sat in their living room. It was thrown with so much force that it became embedded in the wall on the far side of the room.<sup>1</sup> Incidents similar to this reoccurred for months as her father, Carl Hansberry, fought in the Supreme Court for her family's right to live in their house. The Hansberry, a successful African – American family, had recently purchased a home in a legally all – white neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago. This rebellion against an unjust society inspired her to fight for equal treatment for all repressed people. In each of her works, Hansberry's devotion to social, political, and racial equality prevails.

Lorraine Vivian Hansberry is the first African-American and the youngest woman to win the New York Drama critics Circle Award. She is best known for her play *A Raisin in the Sun*. She was eight years old when her family moved into an exclusively white community, an act that violated the city's "covenant laws" which legally sanctioned housing discrimination. With the help of the Hansberry's family took their case to the Supreme Court, which struck down the restrictive legislation as unconstitutional. During litigation, white neighbors continually harassed the Hansberry family. In 1948, Hansberry enrolled at the University of Wisconsin, where she first became interested in drama after seeing a production of Sean O'Casey's *Junno and the Paycock*. However, she left the university two years later and moved to New York City, where she joined the staff of *Freedom*, a radical publication founded by activist Paul Robeson. As a journalist and aspiring dramatist, Hansberry became increasingly aware of the prevalence of racial stereotypes in the popular theatre. She later revealed in a 1959 interview how she sought to answer the "cute dialect bits [or] hip swinging musicals from exotic scores" with *A Raisin in the Sun*, a realistic drama which, like *Junno and the Paycock*, would universalize the experiences of an ethnic group without compromising its unique character.

In Hansberry's plays, there is a belief in man's possibilities for goodness and greatness. Her view of life which permeated her works of art demonstrated her utter celebration of human nature. Nevertheless, she was not unaware that the world was not man's friend; that tragedy was inevitable in man's life; and that man brought about havoc and self - destruction.

Hansberry held the belief that " man is capable of the most incredible acts of transcendence or abasement , sacrifice or aggrandizement, humanity and inhumanity."2 Yet she believed that man attained his potential by consciously exerting his will on the world around him. She hailed the strength of human spirit which was depicted through her works of art in spite of man's disputing nature for evil is in an incessant quarrel against good. Summing up her hopes for the American art , Hansberry said that the depth of art was depicted through the infinite varieties of the human spirit which invariably fluctuated between joy and despair. According to Hansberry , hope for the human race was inevitable in order to survive. Therefore , Negroes could survive their bitter reality , for if blackness brought about pain and deprivation , yet it was a source of strength ; night followed by day whose light was the latent potentialities of human race. Refuting those who perceived life as absurd , she held the belief : "Man was to do what the apes never will-impose the reason for life on life. "3 Hence , Hansberry's works of art were outlined with such speaks of hope.

### **Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* as a key of hope for her people**

*A Raisin in the Sun* is Hansberry's most consummate work of art which teemed with such sparks of hope for a black family in spite of their deplorable conditions. Hansberry delineated the aspirations and dramas of the Younger Family which turned out to be universal and simple as Anne Cheney voiced out:

Raisin at first seems a plea for racial tolerance or a fable of man's overcoming an insensitive society , but the simple eloquence of the characters elevates the play into a universal representation of all people's hopes , fears , and dreams. <sup>4</sup>

Hansberry pinpointed the search for human dignity , the importance of family unity , the importance of American roots as well as the possibility for change. In spite of the fact that she was aware of the extreme difficulty of change , Hansberry's protagonist , Walter Lee Younger , managed to defeat the obstacles and temptations he encountered which was reckoned as a clear manifestation of the strength of human nature. The play thus ended on an optimistic note.

*A Raisin in the Sun* 5 is about the Younger Family , a microcosm of the African American Nation : black poor and living in the South side of Chicago , an area of slums and ghettos for poor blacks . It open with Ruth Younger , a woman in her thirties , who looks haggard and weary just like the living room she walks into where " weariness , in fact , won in this room" [p.23] . Travis , her son , is seen sleeping on the couch , giving the audience more information about the household. Ruth is cooking breakfast , Walter Lee , her husband , wakes up , and at the breakfast table the mood of impatience and weariness is obvious. Travis needs fifty cents for school which his mother cannot give him . The strained relationship between Walter and his wife is immediately felt. Ruth is too tired to listen to Walter's drams, especially when they involve Willy Harris with whom Walter wants to go into partnership in a liquor store and whom Ruth believes "is a good for nothing loud mouth."

The family, one by one, gather in the kitchen (also the living room, and Travis's room) . There is Beneatha, twenty, and Lena, Walter and Beneatha's mother , in her sixties . the subject of discussion is a ten thousand dollar check from the late Big Walter's life insurance and which is due to arrive any day. Walter Lee needs the money to buy a liquor store , Beneatha wants it for medical school , but Lena is in control of the sum of money and she wants it to buy their way out of their dilapidated house . As the action in Act One progresses , so does the tension among the family members . It becomes obvious that it is not only Walter and Ruth's relationship that is shaky , but also Beneatha's and Mama's . When the former declares there is no God she is rewarded by a slap from her mother . Then Ruth finds out she is pregnant and arranges an appointment with an abortionist as she does not want to add to her husband's financial burden . Then a young Nigerian man visits Beneatha bringing the African flavour into the play . Finally , the check arrives .

Act Two starts off with a bit of tension release when everyone's mood seems to be brighter. The money has arrived and the family share an African realistic dance ignited by Beneatha . In the midst of their " African " dance , George Murchison , Beneatha's other suitor , arrives to dampen the festivities by announcing that there is nothing to be proud of in their so-called African heritage . He voices the black American's ideas of

deviating from the past in order to become part of Capitalist America . He is a bourgeois described by Beneatha as an “ Assimilationist Negro “.

Mama arrives with the news that she spent thirty five hundred dollars as a payment for a house in a white neighborhood . While everyone celebrates the news , Walter sulks when he sees his dream go up in smoke accusing Lena of running their lives , not giving him a chance to be a man , the provider of the family . When Mama sees Walter falling apart , she gives him what is left of the money .

While Lena is out , Karl Lindner , a representative of the Clybourne Park neighborhood , tries to persuade the Youngers not to move into the new house , offering them more money than the sum paid and is consequently thrown out . Soon after , a piece of news arrives that Willy Harris has fled with the money and we learn that Walter has used all the money . Once more the mood of despair settles on the household as everyone sees their dreams shattered . Perhaps Walter suffers most since he feels guilty over the loss . In a desperate act , Walter is resolved to make up for the loss by accepting the debasing offer of Lindner . As the tension builds up and everyone waits to hear the final decision , he regains his manhood and acts with pride and boldly announces that his family are moving into the new house in the white neighborhood .

Act Three is the anticlimax . Ruth will have the child , Beneatha becomes more understanding of her brother’s needs instead of selfishly thinking of herself , Walter and Ruth’s marriage seems to be back on track , and Walter regains his dignity . As Mama reaches for her plant to take with her to the new house , she tries to bring hope of life and survival . Though the ending may seem happy , Yet there is an unknown future awaiting the Youngers as they move into all- white neighborhood where violent actions may be in wait for them as many black families were bombed before .

The plot reveals Hansberry’s intention to portray a black family’s struggle with racism and with themselves in trying to see their dreams of a decent life realized and to learn more about the needs of each other in the meantime , and becoming side-tracked by their selfish needs .

On the surface level , the main issue of *A Raisin* seems to be a call for integration . Thus the simple linear plot and the use of realism are too simple to give Hansberry the wide acclaim and recognition she has received . However , the playwright addresses many issues . Besides , one must never forget that she is a black woman writing in the fifties about sensitive issues for an audience that would still not understand them and many even be shocked or offended by them . A simple technique was required , therefore , to enable her to tackle those delicate issues without stepping on too many toes , providing a wider scope of issues than just integration . She skillfully depicts three generations in one black family with their various , which vary from financial stability to social acceptance and equality, to the equality of women .

The three generations are represented by three female figures and one male . The females are : Mama , Lena Younger , the household head , a woman in her sixties , Ruth , in her thirties , and Beneatha , Walter’s sister , in her twenties . The male is of course Walter , in his thirties. These are strong women , each representing a different generation and a different attitude towards life . Lena Younger is strong , militant and dignified and holding the reins of the family tightly together. It is she who has the say in the house despite the fact that there are other adults. She is described in the play as follows:

... her face is full of strength. She has , we can see, wit and faith of a kind that keep her eyes lit and full of interest and expectancy . Her bearing is perhaps more like the noble bearing of the women of the Heroes of southwest Africa . [P.39]

In a confrontation in Act One between Beneatha and her mother , the former expresses her disbelief in God:

Beneatha , Mama, you don’t understand. It’s all a matter of ideas, and God is just one idea I don’t accept. It is not important ... There is simply no blasted God there is only man , and it is he who makes miracles. [P.51]

for her blasphemous outburst, Beneatha’s mother her:

Now – You say after me , in my mother’s house there is still God

Lorraine Hansberry describes Lena as

The black matriarch incarnate. The bulwark of the Negro family since slavery ; the embodiment of the Negro will to transcendence. It is she who, in the mind of the Black Poet, scrubs the floors of a nation in order to create black diplomats and university professors.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore Lena is the symbol of hope, just like her plant with which she is associated. In Act One she is worried that her plant is not getting enough sun and might not live to see spring. at the end , when she insists on taking the plant with her , she says “It expresses me!”

Lorraine Hansberry could reflect different roles of black women in a family as well as a society. Beneatha is the new woman with new ideas of liberation, not just of her people , but of black women from domineering men and old fashioned thought regarding the status of women. Ruth is in the middle , caught between the old and the new; she understands Beneatha’s outbursts of self-expression and rebellion , but also understand Lena’s view on home , stability , control and strong faith in God. She is neither like Lena nor Bennie; Yet, when it comes to her family’s well being and opportunity for a better life , she fights just as hard and speaks up refusing to lie back and watch her dream shattered . Lena’s world may collide with Beneatha’s several times, but one must not forget that more than forty years separate them. There has been so much political and social change. Mama’s world was one that revolved around her husband and children , while Beneatha’s is full of new thoughts and ideas to discover and tackle. Marriage is no longer the main concern of a black woman. Beneatha tells her mother and sister-in-law :” I am not worried about who I am going to marry Yet-If I ever get married” [P.50] to which Mama and Ruth shockingly reply : “If !” She wants to be a doctor and wants to find her own calling. [P.50].

Even though both Lena and Bennie may agree and differ, they are both very strong women, making the right choices eventually and very proud both of their families and of their race. They each change in character to understand each other’s worlds. In this respect, Anne Cheney notes that:

Lena typifies traditional blacks who found personal fulfillment and courage for political and social actions in God. Beneatha however, does not find, solace in God, believing instead that man deserves credit for his own efforts.<sup>7</sup>

However, she goes on to say that “The old world of Lena and the new world of Beneatha cannot remain static. As both world’s react and collide with the other, they are sure to emerge as slightly different substances.”<sup>8</sup>

It is in her choice of themes and portrayal of character that Lorraine Hansberry’s major contribution to American theatre, in general , and African-American drama, in particular, lies. She managed to reverse the traditional mythical role of the matriarch as conceived by Whites. The black matriarch is no longer the domineering vampire that runs the Negro family and hinders the male’s growth. Lena is the strong matriarch, it is true. But she uses her strength to bring her family back to the right track, to their roots. The matriarch’s concern here, extends to black females and males a like. Both sexes, to Lena , are entrapped in the same historical circumstance .

When Hansberry wrote *A Raisin*, she had more than one theme in mind, which she eloquently represents through her characters and their dreams and their struggle. She is interested in the well-being of black people as a whole , calling for racial tolerance and successfully revealing to both black and white audiences that there is little that separates Blacks from Whites. She also stresses the importance of roots and taking pride in one’s ancestry. It is true that Hansberry calls for black people’s full merger with whites’ but they should never forget the heritage and the suffering of the previous five generations of the black nation, drawing strength from those experiences. She stresses the importance of African roots, points out the weakness of humans when it comes to financial matters , particularly when society remains racist about where black people should live and what jobs to hold.

She gives her audience a family torn by financial strife and protagonists searching for an identity. But , perhaps, the most striking theme of the play is her call for equality of women , particularly African- American women.

Hansberry's feminist views are obvious in this play as her women show far more strength and wisdom than the male protagonist. It cannot be said, however, that she is a man-hater. She sympathizes with men and shows them as characters brainwashed by the mainstream thought of male supremacy. In Steven Carter's words :

She carefully emphasized the ways in which these sympathetic creations were caught in the web of systematic conditioning in male supremacy and the resulting harm that they did to women and themselves.<sup>9</sup>

About the title of the play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, which the dramatist derived from a Langston Hughes poem entitled ;"Harlem" :

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?  
May be it just sags  
Like a heavy load  
Or does it explode.<sup>10</sup>

The Youngers' dream neither dries up , nor festers , nor explodes. Instead, they work hard trying to fulfill their dreams, and they mature in the process instead of letting their dreams just shrivel up in the sun. Hansberry wanted black Americans to examine such dreams, redefining them as the Youngers have done. She also hoped the whites would stop putting hindrances in the way of such dreams .

If Hansberry's play seems to be bursting with ideas and themes , it is because she believed that the dramatic genre is the most suitable medium for the dissemination of her views and was afraid that she may never be heard again or have a similar chance.

In her essay , Barbara explains that very few people hear what black women playwrights have to say. That is why they have been accused of trying to say everything in one play, that and the fact that " They never have the chance to be heard again."<sup>11</sup> She goes on to say that female dramatists are

at the mercy of various media brokers. Most of the brokers are white males. These brokers represent the people with the real power and with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. <sup>12</sup>

Thus, Hansberry had to be caught in weaving her play, using a traditional form to address the volatile issues at the times as calmly as possible, putting in issues of tolerance, rebirth of marriage , the importance of the African heritage, black people's dreams and, most importantly , black women's rights.

Some critics argue that Hansberry could not be a Feminist since she addresses a wide array of issues and not just women's rights, it is safe to reply that Hansberry has been unselfish in realizing the need for more playwrights to address certain themes. She was born *black* and *female* and understands what it is like to be twice oppressed. She needed to transmit the culture of which she is part, was well as tackle the major issues of being a minority within her community as a black female searching for her identity amidst both black and white cultures.

In 1960 Hansberry wrote *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* , after the resounding success of *A Raisin in the Sun* did not open on Broadway until 1964. It rendered the critics baffled for " She had had the audacity to switch subjects , to waste her time bemoaning the plight of white Greenwich Villagers ,"<sup>13</sup> as Anne Cheney pointed out. Being a black artist , Hansberry was expected to write about nothing but the black



experience. Nevertheless, to the critics' amazement, she tackled the problem of a disillusioned white intellectual. About the play, Rex Reed, in the *New York Express*, praised Hansberry:

She knows more about the bloody world we live in than any living playwright working in the theatre today. I shall never, as long as I live, hope to see such perfection in the theatre again. It is a mirror to the life of the human race.<sup>14</sup>

Hansberry's *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* and the plight of the intellectuals

In *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* Hansberry mirrored the plight of the intellectuals who oscillated between commitment and non-commitment, and searched for the meaning of life – a serious issue which was vividly delineated by Hansberry. The message she endeavored to import was that people must commit themselves to a certain objective which was expounded by Anne Cheney:

He who is committed, whether to art, social causes, another person, is truly a valuable member of society, a person whose deeds will help to bring about a more human society in which all may prosper.<sup>15</sup>

Sidney Brustein, Hansberry's mouth piece in the *Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, managed to grasp the meaning of life, and find a haven in Commitment. Sidney was described by Cheney as:

Sidney Brustein is a Broadway version of the modern Everyman, financially comfortable, idle, and intellectual, sometimes quietly hovering in corners, painfully strutting into false security of drinking, glib philosophizing, and ill-advised business deals.<sup>16</sup>

Through *The Sign*, not only does Hansberry convey her personal philosophy, but also her unique conception of the purpose of art. Hansberry calls for commitment to hope rather than despair, to human potential rather than human failure. "For Lorraine, James Baldwin emphasizes, That "..... art has a purpose, and that its purpose was action: that it contained the energy which could change things."<sup>17</sup>

Hence, Hansberry is aware that despair has become the only means of facing such a world that abounds in absurdity. Never the less, her play is a "call to arms to white liberals and intellectuals",<sup>18</sup> Julius Lester remarks. She calls for commitment on different levels. Individuals have to become involved, and take responsible action confirming that withdrawal from the community amounts to disintegration and failure.

Hansberry in spite of her recognition of the actuality of the evil within the world, largely affirms that man must and ultimately can overcome his circumstances. She encapsulates her notion when, in an answer to a letter from a stranger, she writes: "People are generally better than their circumstance. I think that the glorious thing about the human race is that it does change the world constantly," moreover, she contends that no one can gainsay that "the world may seem to more often overwhelm the human being, but it is the human being's capacity for struggling against being overwhelmed which is remarkable and exhilarating."<sup>19</sup> Bigsby finds Hansberry's *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, as well as *A Raisin in the Sun*, protest plays, however different in their perspectives:

It [the play] is a protest not, like *A Raisin in the Sun*, against the suffocating actuality of existence inside a coloured skin but against a defeatism ingrained in post-war man and finding expression in modern literature.<sup>20</sup>

Greenwich Village is the chosen setting for *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*. Greenwich Village is located in New York City. It is famous for its "Bohemian atmosphere, off-Broadway and experimental theatre, art galleries, and open-air art shows and concerts."<sup>21</sup> It has become the residence of many artists and writers. Hence, the place is endowed with a special kind of artistic magic. Hansberry deftly describes the setting: "The Setting is Greenwich Village, New York City- the preferred habitat of many who fancy revolt, or at least, detachment from the social order that surrounds us" [*Sign* p.3].

Hansberry describes the studio apartment of the Brusteins. Not only does she draw an ordinary picture, but also she paints it using the real colors to render her picture authentic. She colors the walls of the apartment in white, expounding the fact that it is a color that relaxes the eye, "for those who live here think

much of such things" [p4]. She means color by "things". In contrast to this color of serenity, or rather in difference, other colors can be seen in the apartment, namely, "Soft Yellows," "warm brown." and "vivid sharp orange" which symbolize a strong inclination to revolt.

*The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* tells the reader the story of Sidney Brustein who is an intellectual who no longer cares. Hence, Wilkerson points out that "the plot is secondary to character and serves only as a vehicle for Sidney Brustein's personal odyssey towards self- discovery."22 Brustein's journey to self-discovery is a conspicuous manifestation of Hansberry's view. In spite of shifting from one failing endeavor to the other, Sidney Brustein-owing to his inherent potentialities tries to make a new life for himself.

The play opens on an inauspicious note. On a late spring evening, Sidney Brustein and Alton Scales, a black friend of Sidney's enter the apartment carrying cases of restaurant glasses which represent the failure of Sidney's venture; nightclub-cum-restaurant business. Nevertheless, this does not deter him from embarking on a new venture, namely, publishing a weekly newspaper. From this, it can be inferred that perseverance is a quality that outlines his character-Save aside the now and then frustrations that he encounters. Hence, Hansberry shows the bad conditions of blacks in general caused by the white demon.

Conscious of the non-existence of a rosy world, Sidney bellows out into the world a lament for the human condition due to his failure: "..... from now on, when we write, let's forget we absolutely love mankind. Don't venerate, don't celebrate, don't hallow what you take to be the human spirit" [p7]. Thus, he decides to become indifferent, "to avoid the impulses to correct" [p7]. Hence, Hansberry renders her audience perplexed for her story fluctuates between optimistic-like and pessimistic- like connotations.

Hansberry, afterwards, introduces Iris, Sidney's wife, and pinpoints the husband-wife relationship. Although they love each other, half the first scene teems with their marital conflict. She pokes fun at his failure by declaring that the glasses are "the residue of all your[Sidney's] failure" [P.10]. She does not approve of his involvement in the nightclub business which he knows nothing about, and so does not back him up. In return, Sidney counterattacks her by declaring that she is incapable of going to the audition-insinuating her lack of talent. Striking on the wrong chord, Sidney is called names by Iris due to his rudeness : "..... their interaction intensifies, becoming scathing before it returns to safer channels," as Sandra y. Govan asserts. 23

The scene then shifts when Alton comes back, accompanying Wally O'Hara, a politician running for office as a reform candidate. They come seeking Sidney's support through his newspaper. He rejects their appeal because he no longer cares ; he is not interested any more in politics... " Politics are for people who have them any more" [P.21]. In consent to Sidney's opinion pertaining Walss, asserts that "Politics are plight on the natural spirit of man. Politics a cancer of the soul. Politics are dirty, fetid, compromise-ridden exercise in futility" [P.21]. Nevertheless, he contends that there is work to be done in order to bring about social reform.

Strikingly enough, scene two opens on a very astounding note. A sign supporting Wally O'Hara hangs from Sidney Brustein's window. This sign is the hinge upon which the action of the play runs. It is a clear manifestation of his intention to change. Bigsby clearly puts it saying : "a sign pledging support for the reform candidate is evidence of his faith in the possibility of change," as well as "... of a self-justifying sense of the righteousness of protest," 24 Hence, the sign stands for Sidney Brustein's endeavor to become committed.

Paradoxically enough, the "sign", at face value, represents commitment which Hansberry calls for- to a political campaign leading to social reform. Nevertheless, Wally O'Hara turns out to be controlled by corrupt political bosses and local drug dealers. Hence, the "sign" represents " the public face of a man whose vision of the world is radically simplified, he fails to understand what Hansberry conceives as the nature of commitment," 25 as Y. S. Sharadha remarks. It become as Iris puts it to Sidney: "It's like a spit in your face" [P.17]. This drives the reader to wonder about the nature of commitment conceived by Hansberry.

Several months later, Sidney Burstein becomes more and more involved in the political campaign. Consequently, he bears the fruits of his effort on the election night for O'Hara has won. Sidney is witnessed jubilantly celebrating success. Unlike Sidney, Alton comes in very frustrated upon knowing that they have concealed that Gloria Parodus, Iris's sister, is not a model as they have claimed, but a prostitute. Hence, unable



to accept her past, Alton leaves her a note informing her that he can not marry her. Shortly after Alton leaves on a very sad note, Mavis Parodus, Iris's conservative, sister, enters and congratulates Sidney on his successful campaign. Thus, the audience are denied the happy ending of the campaign.

More frustratingly though, Sidney has discovered that his efforts have been of no avail; Wally O' Hara turns out not to be the seemingly elected politician who will bring about social reform. However, astoundingly enough, he is a corrupt politician. Not only are the audience disappointed due to the unrevealing of this bitter reality, but also due to Gloria's suicide. Nevertheless, being an anti-racial discrimination playwright, Hansberry does not end her play on this pessimistic note. However, the curtain falls as Sidney vows that "tomorrow we shall make something strong of this sorrow," [P.43] which encapsulates Hansberry's belief in human potential.

Hence, the plot in *The sign in Sidney Brustein's window* has been about the self-recognition of a bohemian idealist; however, it is coupled with sub-plots, namely, the story of Sidney's wife's sisters; the story of the homosexual writer, and that of the Negro idealist. Consequently these digression, though serve to portray Hansberry's ideas render the critics perplexed, and hence, the play is bereft of many critics' acclaim.

Hansberry manages to delineate the social dilemmas of her time through the deft portrayal of her characters as Steven R. Carter remarks:

Keeping faith with her myriad commitments never precluded the portrayal of the full complexity of life as Hansberry saw it. Few writers in any genre have delineated so completely and strikingly the social dilemmas of our time, and none have surpassed-or likely to surpass-her ability to point out the heights toward which we should soar.<sup>26</sup>

In her works of art, Hansberry delineates the social dilemmas of her time yet her characters surpass all difficulty and transcend their bitter reality against the white demon.

Likewise, in *A Raisin*, Hansberry depicts man's inhumanity to his fellow man. Expounding the fact that "if the American State can not protect the lives of black citizens, then presently, the entire State would find itself engulfed."<sup>27</sup> By "protection", Hansberry means that the black citizens should enjoy equal opportunities in all aspects of life. This is manifested through the Younger family who-in spite of all racial obstacles- manage to change their unpleasant reality and leave the roach-infested tenements in the South Side ghetto to a white neighborhood. Hence, they have attained their simplest rights which consequently paves the way to a better future.

Teeming with many ideas *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* is a bit different from Hansberry's other works of art. It is a play that criticizes ideas, rather than issues. Hence, it is more complicated. However, Hansberry delineates the social dilemmas of her time, emphasizing the possibility of a change through her characters who should "soar" above their bitter reality. *Sidney* presents "..... almost too poignantly the whole range of the dilemmas and confusion of contemporary man ... a cry for help as well as hope."<sup>28</sup> A cry for help against the white demon. Hansberry's play pinpoints the dilemmas of the intellectuals of her generation; those who slip into the cant of indifference. Hansberry calls for optimism rather than pessimism in facing the white demon. Hansberry's play is addressed to all American intellectuals pleading them to stop the retreat.

Furthermore, Sidney mentions a very valiant opponent to "the pills" – passivity, namely "the sword" which was used in the past by his ancestors which symbolizes the courage with which they faced the evils of their world, saying: "in the ancient times, the good men among my ancestors, when they heard of evil, strapped a sword... and when they found it, they cut down ... evil is not audaciously confronted: "Wrath has become a poised gastric juice in the intestine. One does not smite evil any more: one holds one's guts, thus- and takes a pill" [P.96]

Sidney draws a very negative picture of modern man who stands hand- cuffed against all evils in life. "Here I'm , Modern Man : flat on my back with oozing intestine, a bit of a tear frozen in the corner of my eye, a glass of booze which will saturate without alleviating..." [P.23]. Sidney can no longer accept corruption or "the

cruelties of man against man, "29 as Y.S. Sharadha puts it. Hansberry emphasizes that if human race is to survive and prevail, hope should be drawn as a shield against all evils of society.

### Conclusion

This research attempted to expose the Black Woman's struggle- in the form of Lorraine Hansberry - for self-definition and personal respect parallels that of Black Women writers to identify their art during the twentieth century. One cannot deny that pre-twentieth-century Black women writers are treated only as contributors to the history of Black literature. Black women writers struggle to identify themselves, and their art against racism and sexism for a long time. But on the other hand , none can deny that suffering which is derived from certain historical as well as contemporary variable circumstances , particularly of poverty , racism, sexism , self-destruction , and oppression , continues to be the Black women writers' motif throughout their works

Throughout this paper, one can assume that the pressures of life are so great against Black women. Hence, the works of Black women writers demonstrate the journey which starts with a complete loss of self till it comes to self-discovery , and acceptance. Because Lorraine Hansberry is one of these women, she left a profound and lasting impression on the American Theatre. Critics were unanimous in acclaiming her distinction and her originality as she was the first African American woman ever to receive the New York Drama Circle Award in 1959. This study tackled Hansberry's realistic way in dealing with the maladies of her people.

The researcher comes to another important fact. That is, Hansberry is a dramatist of love. She sees love- that great sentiment – as the salvation and redemption of her black people in facing the oppression of the whites to the blacks. Hansberry denounces the spread of over materialistic values and the lack of spirituality

Avery important finding still is that once the black American dramatists go beyond the limited scope white black conflict and the angry shouts of the so-called revolutionaries, they surpass regionality and locality by soaring high into acmes of humanity. Hansberry is concerned with the good and prosperity of her fellow black people as human beings who were destined to be blacks; not vice versa.

Having faith in man's ability to overcome despair, and bring about an auspicious change, Hansberry dedicated her plays to the committed everywhere. Hansberry's commitment was an illustration of her view in facing the white oppression . She called for commitment to hope rather than despair; to human potential rather than human failure. She repudiated the attitude adopted by the intellectuals of the ago; those who favored to slip into the cant of despair as a means of facing a world which is bound in absurdity.

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