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“That is the dream”<sup>1</sup>  
**American Dream in Lorraine Hansberry’s  
*A Raisin in the Sun***

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**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 radical 60s 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.

The play clearly portrays the dilemma of an African American family accurately and realistically in which each member had a deferred dream, even little Travis although his dream was not directly stated. Their dreams become dried up like a raisin in the sun. Not just dreams are dried up though; Walter Lee and Ruth’s marriage became dried up also. Their marriage was no longer of much importance, like a dream it was postponed and it became dry. Their struggle for happiness dried up because they had to concentrate all of their energies on surviving. The play shows how a family had to overcome and learn life’s lessons the hard way. Through Walter, the play showed that sometimes dreams have to be let go and through Mama it showed that sometimes dreams have to be held on to. Through Beneatha, it was shown that things aren’t always how they seem. The family was able to overcome a major obstacle once they united.

This paper deals with Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*. It consists of an abstract, an introduction, and one section that tackles the concept of American Dream in the play.

**Index Terms:** Ghetto, American Dream, Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, Discrimination, Racism.

## I. Introduction: “I Have a Dream”\*

America is the sum of our dreams. And what binds us together, what makes us one American family, is that we stand up and fight for each other's dreams, that we reaffirm that fundamental belief - I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper - through our politics, our policies, and in our daily. (President Barack Obama) "2

American Dream is a phrase popularized by James Truslow Adams (1878–1949) in his 1931 study *The Epic of America*, which expressed the belief that in America every individual had the opportunity for self-fulfillment regardless of their birth or position. The phrase is used ironically in Edward Albee’s *The American Dream* (1961) and Norman Mailer’s *An American Dream* (1965).<sup>3</sup> Adams defined the American Dream by saying:

that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his[or her] ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.<sup>4</sup>

American Dream as a concept could be traced back since the discovery of America, especially the Northern part, or the Promised Land. According to Ursula Seiler, in *The Promised Land*, the American Dream was associated with the historical discovery of America. She stated that America was desired to be discovered by many discoverers:

“America was long known to the world’s initiates. They determined when it might be ‘discovered’. They chose the discoverer. They knew the plan for the New World and its purpose: to become the leading nation in the promised Golden Age.”<sup>5</sup>

The early principles or concepts of the American Dream were religious and spiritual rather than materialistic. They were associated with the 'heretical' sect of the Albigensians.<sup>6</sup> For them "a pure chaste of life meant to be poor in worldly goods, to shun no work, to kill no creature,

including animals, which is why they were vegetarians, and to use all means to oppose the 'God of darkness', the Tempter."<sup>7</sup>

America was unique in the extent to which religious goals motivated her founding and formed her early spirit. The Albigensians saw the world as a constant battleground between spirit and matter. This Christian community, which was later persecuted in the most brutal way by the Church in the Albigensian wars, where the motto was to simply kill everyone, from infants to old men, in the belief that God would save his own, was supposed to have played a part in the secret preparations for the 'discovery' of America.<sup>8</sup>

The American Dream was associated with the land, in which always there were promises "from the first voyage and the first ship there were promises."<sup>9</sup> This new land was a symbol of man's aspirations. America represented a new life of freedom and a promise of spiritual goodness, material happiness, and the quest of equality. These impulses lead to the foundation of this land, which stood for an image of "the City on the Hill..., [and] the Land of the New Start."<sup>10</sup>

US (America today) has regarded and promoted itself as an "Empire of Liberty" and prosperity, since, the American Dream's origin could be found in the Declaration of Independence, in 1776:

We hold these truths [of the American Dream] to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator With certain unalienable rights, that Among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.<sup>11</sup>

These promises often turned to be not as strong as people originally believed them to be. Only a very small amount of people achieve the famous ideals of the American Dream, whereas many people fail to attain their goal of a better life. For centuries, millions of people from all over the world migrated to United State of America. They escape from war, poverty, ecological destruction, and other dangers. US was the 'New World', constituted a safe harbor where their hopes of a better life come true, the term suggested its literal meaning: "a new continent, a place to create a purer race of men untouched by the decadence of the western civilization", or what was called the 'Old World'. Thus men's eyes were raised to an unattainable peak; whatever bounties the land had to offer, whatever opportunities there were to reform the Old Word, had to fall short of the Utopian ideal.<sup>12</sup>

The meaning of the American Dream has changed over the course of history. The ethos today simply indicates the ability, through participation in

the society and economy, for everyone to achieve prosperity. According to the dream, this includes the opportunity for one's children to grow up and receive a good education and career without artificial barriers. It is the opportunity to make individual choices without the prior restrictions that limit people according to their class, caste, religion, race, or ethnicity.<sup>13</sup> The concept has changed in the modern times, it was not merely the right to get rich, but rather "the promise that all Americans have a reasonable chance to achieve success as they define it—material or otherwise— through their own efforts, and to attain virtue and fulfillment through success".<sup>14</sup>

It was the choice of the African-Americans to bring that dream into reality. One of the aspects of the success of the American Dream was the choice and ability to take the responsibility of that choice. The primary function of the concept was "to demonstrate that man does not have choice in the New World, that man can create himself".<sup>15</sup> This ability to create and recreate was the center of the idea of the American Dream.

The New York Times reported that only 64 % of the public still believe in the American Dream, which they defined as a faith that “hard work could result in riches.” But the reports of the death of the American Dream are premature. The Dream has changed over time just as the nation has changed. At each critical interval as people have evolved from working in the farms to the industry, and then to a knowledge economy.<sup>16</sup>

One of the significant movements that has been playing an important role throughout the history of American literature is the American Dream. It does not merely refer to the identity of an individual; it also refers to American society which was regularly struggling hard to escape from the clutches of the orthodox religious conventions. It has an unlimited horizon, in poetry, novel, drama, and in other forms of literature. One can dive deep and see the various colors of American Dream in American literature. It is a movement that is still influencing and seen and felt in every walk of life, unlike other literary movements that came and disappeared.<sup>17</sup>

## **II. *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959)**

Lorraine Hansberry’s famous play *A Raisin in the Sun*, a drama in three acts first published in 1959, was opened on Broadway in New York City in 1959. 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.<sup>18</sup> 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 1938 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.<sup>19</sup>

When Hansberry wrote this play in 1959, 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 (1916-1970). That's why Hansberry made its setting in Chicago where the Youngers had their own goals to live the American Dream.<sup>20</sup>

Today, critics and scholars widely acclaimed *A Raisin in the Sun* as a great American classic. It has been translated into 30 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.<sup>21</sup>

According to the New York Times, the play changed American theatre forever with its Broadway opening in 1959 and its twenty-nine-year-old author. James Baldwin wrote of the play: "Never before in the history of the American theatre had so much truth of black people's lives been seen on the stage." *A Raisin in the Sun* has since gone on to become an international dramatic classic, being performed throughout the United States.<sup>22</sup>

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.<sup>23</sup>

*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."<sup>24</sup>

#### **"What happens to a dream deferred?"**

The epigraph of the play consists of several lines from one of Langston Hughes's\* most famous poems, "Montage of a Dream Deferred." The play's title is taken from this epigraph. In the first part of the poem, Hughes questions the outcome of deferring one's dreams. He asks whether or not these postponed dreams will "dry up/ Like a raisin in the sun?" Hughes wrote "Harlem" about the African-American dream of justice, economic mobility and access to power. Maybe he also means the American dream, the vision of a country where all have equal rights and opportunities. Either way, "Raisin" reminds us his question hasn't been answered.<sup>25</sup> In this

play each member of the Younger family has a dream that is deferred. Hansberry refers to the fact of the dream deferred through adopting that meaning from Hughes’s poem where he says:

“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?”<sup>26</sup>

*A Raisin in the Sun* is not merely a “Negro play”, but a universal drama. Hansberry assured this fact by saying: “I don’t think there is anything more universal in the world than man’s oppression to man.” She argued that her characters were Negro and specifically from Chicago’s south side in order to use the specific to refer to the universal. She said: “one of the most sound ideas in dramatic writing is that, in order to create the universal, you must pay very great attention to the specific.”<sup>27</sup> *A Raisin in the Sun* is set at in a place where racism was still occurring. Blacks were no longer separated but they were still facing many racial problems. The black Younger family faced these problems throughout the play.<sup>28</sup>

**“You should know all the dreams I had”**

*A Raisin in the Sun* narrates the story of a working-class African-American family with dreams. They are eager to rebel against the position that society has forced on them because of their race and class in order to fulfill their dreams. The Youngers battle in everyday revolutions without armies.

The play is about dreams, the many deeply desired and often conflicting dreams that are flying around in the Younger family, making everybody crazy. It narrates an important period in the lives of the Younger family: Beneatha comes to a better understanding of her origin, Walter learns how to be a man, his wife, Ruth, rediscovers hope, and Mama learns to be less controlling. Mama’s dream has been to move to a better neighborhood, but they face racist opposition from local whites, led by Karl Lindner.

Lorraine Hansberry had created a setting for drama through dreams, deferrals, and conflicts. Family unity touches the human spirit, and conquers all-after dreams have been deferred or destroyed for each character. Typically, responsibilities impact a family's life, leaving Hansberry to warn that destruction, in any era, is a warning for Americans to wake up and listen.<sup>29</sup>

The family of the Youngers lives in a segregated neighborhood in a city that remains one of the most segregated areas in the United States. Almost every act they perform is affected by their race. When the play was performed in 1959, Blacks and Whites were still segregated, and they

usually had no contact with each other apart from work. Mama as well as her daughter –in-law, Ruth, were maids for white women and Ruth's husband, Walter, was the chauffeur of a white man. Walter's description of his job as dull and monotonous and depressing reveals that his "job suppresses any sense of individuality or desire for initiative, that it positions him as utterly powerless."<sup>30</sup> As the play demonstrates, the status of "rich white" people depends in part on their ability to employ men and women like Walter, Ruth, and Mama as their servants.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the Youngers are limited to their poorly maintained apartment because they have low paying jobs and also because absentee landlords often do not maintain their properties,

The Youngers have high pressures in the sense that five people live in a tiny and cramped one-bedroom apartment and two families share a single bathroom. Husband and wife share one room, while mother and daughter share another. The son sleeps in the living room, which also serves as a dining room and is also part of the tiny kitchen. Also the building is rundown and roach-infested. These pressures increase when Ruth, Walter's wife, finds out that she is pregnant for the second time, and begins seriously expecting abortion. Yet even in an environment where a request for fifty cents becomes a family conflict, there is room for ideas and dreams.<sup>32</sup> It is evident that this family is not well off. Many tensions arise throughout the course of the play and it becomes clear that the conflicts in the family relationships are deep-rooted in the economical problems that the Younger family faces.

The Youngers: Mama, Ruth, Travis, Beneatha, and Walter Lee are used in this play as symbols of dreams and conflicts and Hansberry uses the themes of gender, race, and class to create conflict within the characters to help them achieve their dreams and unite as a family. Their dream of owning their own house encountered racism long before the laws of fair-housing and equal-employment. The play shows clearly how racism was deep within the housing industry and how Americans supported the segregated housing environment of Chicago. The Younger family is shocked that Mama purchased a house in a neighborhood full of whites, because living in a white neighborhood could put all of their lives at risk.

In the Youngers' dreams of middle-class life and their love for one another, they are no different from the average white American family. Mama dreams of a yard for her grandson to play in, Walter hopes to put a necklace on his wife's neck; Beneatha wants to be a doctor. Their skin color is the only thing that makes their dreams impossible. This color dooms them to live as second-class citizens.<sup>33</sup>

The Youngers are so centered on their dreams to the extent that their vision is restricted. That is why they fail to identify each other's dreams. But as the play progresses, one can see how the Youngers learn to recognize and

accept each other’s dreams, and thus strengthen the family as a unit.<sup>34</sup>

### “Check Coming Today?”

One way to achieve one of the American Dreams is money. The American Dream is different for everyone and it depends on the way people were raised. Hansberry shows that the American Dream is alive and can be achieved by anyone. She presents a play in which she shows that the “American Dream” is alive and can be an optimistic view of the future and the American Dream.<sup>35</sup>

The life insurance check of ten thousand dollars paid on the death of the father of the household that Mama will soon be receiving is the source of all the dreams in the Younger family. The importance of dreams is a simple argument that Hansberry makes in her play. Dreams are what each member of the Younger family is driven by. Mama wants to have her own home in a nice part of town. She does not want her children growing up in a place with rats. Walter wants to have a successful business so he can suppress the poverty that has overwhelmed his family. Beneatha wants to get a good education, become a doctor, and marry a nice man. Dreams are especially important to the Younger family as they come from a poverty laden family and desire to live the “American Dream”. Every member of the Younger family has a dream. Each one is different with a different view on what the true “American Dream” really is.<sup>36</sup>

Many of the characters have ambitions and hopes. They all strive towards their goals throughout the play. However, many of the characters in the play have different dreams that clash with each other. Problems seem to arise when different people’s dreams conflict with one other, such as Walter’s verses Bennie’s, George’s verses Asagai’s, and the Cleburne Park verses the Younger’s. Walter struggles to achieve his dream to be the “man” of the house.

“A job. (Looks at her) Mama, a job? I open and close car doors all day long. I drive a man around in his limousine and I say, “Yes, sir; no, sir; very good, sir; shall I take the Drive, sir?” Mama, that ain’t no kind of job. That ain’t nothing at all. (Very quietly) Mama, I don’t know if I can make you understand”<sup>37</sup>

Walter belittles the work as a car driver because it belittles his manhood and his sense of individual worth. According to him, his work as a chauffeur puts him in a boring relationship of servitude to white Americans. Walter changes throughout the play from being a boy who is selfish and always complains about the way he is living into a man who realizes the significance of dreams of his family members and dignity of where he comes from.<sup>38</sup>

**Walter Lee Younger: "You butchered up a dream of mine"**

Walter Lee, the protagonist as well as the villain in the play due to the actions he takes to revolve his dreams, is a black chauffeur who dreams of a better life. He says, "I want so many things that they are driving me kind of crazy..." (2, 522) He is waiting for the insurance money as if it was his own and his sister Beneatha, has to remind him that, "that money belongs to Mama, Walter and it is for her to decide how she wants to spend it." (1, 498) Here we see how Walter is brainwashed into America's materialistic and greedy manner. Walter has been corrupted by society and unlike his sister Beneatha, he doesn't even have a desire to find his identity through his African heritage. He is searching for his identity with money because he hasn't any education or skills, and for that reason he is stuck in the same routine. He is trying to break out of this rut by trying to attain the American Dream;<sup>39</sup> He hopes to use his father's life insurance money, \$10,000, to open a liquor store. He is an example of one struggling to achieve his dreams and desires. He wants to own his own business to support a good life for his family and to provide for his son's future. His decision to open a liquor store turns out to be a terrible choice because he is deceived by his friend, Willy, who takes all the money and Walter is looked down upon as a result of the liquor store ambition since this kind of job contrasts his mother's religious values. During the time of the play, the husband of the family is the only provider of the family, but in this play Mama is the sole provider for her family. The liquor store represents an opportunity for Walter to govern his own life, and to be the head of the household, that his Mama now seems to control. That's why Walter struggles to be the man of the family. He talks to his mother, "A job. (Looks at her) Mama, a job? I open and close car doors all day long. I drive a man around in his limousine and I say, "Yes, sir; no, sir; very good, sir; shall I take the Drive, sir..." (1, 522)

Walter seeks a kind of a bourgeoisie lifestyle where he can offer a big house, a nice car, pearls for his wife, and an office job. He believes that money will solve all his problems through his being a business man. Therefore, his mother tells him, "it ain't much, but it's all I got in the world and I'm putting it in your hands. I'm telling you to be the head of this family from now on like you supposed to be" (٥٤٦ و٢) Ironically, Mama makes a wrong decision which eventually lets Walter nearly destroy the family. Unfortunately, Walter allows his obsession with materialism and the realization of his dream distort his judgment. As he saw it "all starting to slip away" (2, ٥٣٢), he got angry at Mama for taking away his chance at a future filled with possibility and money. His words tore deep into Mama's soul as he cried out "you butchered up a dream of mine - you - who always talking 'bout your children's dreams" (2, 537)<sup>40</sup>

He complains to his wife: "I'm thirty-five years old; I've been married eleven years and I got a boy who sleeps in the living room and all I

got to give him is stories about how rich white people live...”(1, 495). It is this knowledge that underlies his bitter disgust and self-contempt. These feelings towards himself affect the relationship that Walter has with each member of his family and the way he interacts with them. "When ten thousand dollars for insurance matures on his father's death he has to watch the money pass into his mother's hands, a final blow to both his dreams and his manhood"<sup>41</sup>

Gerald Weales, a writer, comments on the character of Walter by saying,

“Of the four chief characters in the play, Walter Lee is the most complicated and the most impressive. He is often unlikable, occasionally cruel...The play is concerned primarily with his recognition that, as a man, he must begin from, not discard, himself –that dignity is a quality of men, not bank accounts...Walter Lee’s difficulty...is that he has accepted the American myth of success at its face value, that he is trapped by a false dream.”<sup>42</sup>

Many ideas are included in the American Dream, one of which is the belief that anyone who comes to or is born in America can achieve success through hard work. That is why Walter aspires to achieve part of this American Dream, but he is frustrated at every turn. Despite the fact that he tries to work hard, opportunities for him are few because he is black. His culture has put him in the servant class. When some money does become available to him, his business opportunities are also few, for few businesses historically thrived in minority neighborhoods. Yet by the end of the play, whether or not he achieves the American Dream, he does achieve a sense of himself as an individual with power and the ability to make choices.<sup>43</sup>

Walter goes along with his mother to resist the whites’ threats and moves from their cramped apartment into a white neighborhood. He tells a white man who tries to dissuade the Youngers from being his neighbors, “We come from people who had a lot of pride,” (3, 575) ‘We have decided to move into our house because my father – my father – he earned it.’<sup>44</sup>

At the end of the play, Walter comes into his manhood as Mama proudly observes, “He finally come into his manhood today, didn’t he? ... Kind of like a rainbow after the rain.” (3, 577) Working together, despite their arguments and differences, they end the play preparing for the move that will change their lives, perhaps for the best, perhaps for the worst, probably both. The dream is no longer deferred.<sup>45</sup>

**Lena Younger (Mama): “Is this the harvest of our days?  
Son... Is it gone?”**

Mama is another character who strives to achieve her dreams. Her dream is to own a house with a garden so that her family can live in more space and peace. Despite the dilemma she faces with Mr. Linder, who asks them not to move to his neighborhood where only the white people live, and with the members of her family, but she is able to accomplish her dreams at the end of the play.<sup>46</sup>

The irony for Mama is that the chance for achieving her dream is through the death of her husband. That's why the situation is an unsettling reality to live "in a house - in a world - where all dreams, good or bad, must depend on the death of a man" (3, 565). The money represents a substitution for her husband's life. She realizes the change in the life of the African-American mentality where "freedom used to be life - now it's money. I guess the world really do change." (1, 522) Mama is different from other members of her family in the sense that she is the product of a different generation and therefore she is accustomed to different kinds of injustices and racism. As she has been denied many things in life, she realizes the meaning of many things in life, she says, it "'seem like God didn't see fit to give the black man nothing but dreams - but He did give us children to make them dreams seem worth while.'" (1, 503) She buys the house as a step towards achieving more dreams of her family.<sup>47</sup>

After getting married and moving into the apartment on the Southside of Chicago, Mama and Big Walter expecting to move into another house after a year. She still remembers the furnishing of the apartment being "selected with care and love and even hope." (1, 487) As time passed, her dream of a house went away into an improbable hope. Hansberry used Mama's plant as a symbol of her dream to have a house with a beautiful garden. It represents an impossible dream as a result of the denial of a life outside the apartment. That's why as the Youngers leave for new challenges, specifically neighborhood racism, Mama grabs her plant as a remembrance of the past and a reminder of the care that dreams require.<sup>48</sup> Mama declares that she wants to take that straggly plant to the new house because it "ex-presses ME." (2, 556) It is significant to Mama because it has survived despite the struggle, as her family has survived.<sup>49</sup>

Hansberry also portrays the character of Big Walter Lee through the voice of his wife Mama and how he struggles to achieve the American Dream. She describes him as a brave man who fought all his life to secure a great and happy future to his family. She says, "That man worked himself (himself) to death like he done. Like he was fighting his own war with this here world." (1, 503) He spent his entire life struggling economically and socially against the world that discriminated him. He wanted to make a sense of pride and ambition in their children. They raised their children to value their religious beliefs. That is why Mama is shocked when Beneatha gets slapped for denying the existence of god. Mama lectures about how they (Big Walter and her) raised their children better. Mama forces

Beneatha to say “In my mothers house there is God,” (2, 507) and she tries to change Walter’s way of thinking by having a conversation with him. Furthermore, this is also proven in the play when Mama orders Walter to tell Ruth not to have an abortion. When Walter doesn’t say anything to Ruth Mama lectures about how her and Big Walter raised their children better.

J. Elam and David Krasner commented on the nature of the dreams of Mama and Walter by saying that both characters appear to be chasing the American dream of upward mobility—property and money—when, in fact, Hansberry is using their ambitions as metaphors for the dream of freedom and the right to be respected as not only a citizen but as a human being.<sup>50</sup>

#### **Beneatha Younger: “It’s all dead now”**

The third person who is overwhelming with the idea of American Dream is Beneatha. She is a clever college student who wants to be a doctor, but only if she gets the money for tuition. It is very difficult for her to get her dream due to her being a woman because of the time period she is in. She wants to be different from the woman of her generation. She expects to achieve her dream by Mama’s insurance money. Beneatha’s character explicates a determined woman with ambition on achieving her American dream.<sup>51</sup>

Beneatha is shown in a romantic conflict as dating two men George Murchison and Joseph Asagai. After Beneatha tells George about her dreams of becoming a doctor, George laughs and scorns her since he thinks women are just made to do housework, while Joseph encourages her to get a medical degree and go to Africa with him. In fact these conflicts reflect the young Lorraine Hansberry who was trying to achieve her dreams while circumstances discouraged her. When Hansberry began to write, she was one of the first blacks to go to the University of Wisconsin, bringing stares and nasty comments. However, she kept working hard to be a successful writer. She talked about how she overcame discrimination against females, “A woman who is willing to be herself and pursue her own potential runs not so much the risk of loneliness as the challenge of exposure to more interesting men—and people in general.” Later she proudly said, “I was born black and female.” In this play, Beneatha does not go to a medical school, but at the end of the play there is a strong suggestion that she will become a doctor especially with the new hope for the Youngers after moving to the white neighborhood.<sup>52</sup>

Bennie’s dream to be a doctor has a background story to the reason for this dream to alert the reader that this dream is real and lasting. In a conversation with Asagai, one of her suitors, Bennie reveals the day that she first decided she wanted to be a doctor. She tells about a friend who was in a sledding accident, and how she watched and wondered at the doctor's ability to fix him up. She realized that saving people’s lives is the one concrete thing a person can do in the world. A problem is presented and doctors offer

the solution. , Bennie is unrealistic about the obstacles that threaten her dream; namely, her social status, race, and gender. She refuses to acknowledge the reality that many people share Walter's opinion that she should either get married or be a nurse like other women. Bennie's downfall is her attraction to the unconventional. It causes her frustration and forces her dreams to "fester like a sore" on the shelf of improbability. The major reason her dream can be stopped is the gap between how she sees herself and how the world sees her. She is constantly seeking ways to express herself because she is under the false impression that she can access all the world has to offer. The culture of the time wants to force her into stereotypes that fall short of her visions.<sup>53</sup>

Hansberry proposes, through the character of Beneatha, that marriage is not necessary for women and that women can and should fulfill their ambitions and dreams as men do.

**Ruth Younger: "Well, it's all starting to slip away from us"**

Ruth, Walter's wife, also has her own dream to live a better life as a family. She doesn't just want more money. Because of the bad circumstances the whole family faces, Ruth comes very close to giving up her dreams. Walter hardly acknowledged her. He even says, "Who even cares about you." (2, 532) Her relationship with her husband is falling fast and the only conversation between them is about money. Walter, the new baby, and the lack of money limited her dreams greatly. She was close to leaving him and calling it quits, but held on and kept her dream alive, "Well-well-all I can say is-if this is my time in life-my time to say good bye-to these goddamned cracking walls! and these marching roaches!...and good bye misery... I don't never want to see your ugly face again" (2, 536). Ruth wants to abort the new baby once she discovers that she is pregnant because of their poverty and being second citizens at that time. Through this, Hansberry presents the abortion debate, allowing the topic of abortion to enter the action in an era when abortion was illegal.

The Youngers had a complexity of dreams that came from true living and working hard for a better future of a family. One can understand the lesson out of this play that every person must be optimistic to the outcome of their dreams. The fulfilled dreams were meaningful and the deferred ones were also meaningful, but not as much as the dreams that did not bring unity within a family.<sup>54</sup>

Travis, Ruth's son, is too young to have realistic dreams, but he has a good chance to get his dreams since he lives in a strong family that will encourage him to have a freethinking mind. His grandmother dreams of having a big house with a big yard to see Travis play and enjoy his childhood. His father wants him to be happy through affording him the money he needs.<sup>55</sup> But by living in that cramped house, it seems that their child will not have the opportunity to live like a white American child.

Hansberry commented on this fact in 1955 in Freedom:

“From the time he is born the Negro child is surrounded by a society organized to convince him that he belongs to a people whose past is so worthless and shameful that it amounts to no past at all. . . . Awaiting our youth in every area of American life is a barrage of propaganda which distorts and disparages their identity.”<sup>56</sup>

Hansberry wants the readers to have a close look at the dreamers and the people closest to them when the hope for freedom and justice is repeatedly deprived of. In a world where injustice is deeply rooted, Black dreams are taxed, frayed, and sometimes broken. When these promises are cut, spiritual death follows and the overall health of community declines. Mama refers to this death of spirit in the climax of the play by saying that death “done come walking in my house on the lips of my children.” (3, 572) When dreams are deferred and “fester like a sore and then run,” who sees this the most? When they “dry up,” who grapples with this arid emotional terrain? When they “stink like rotten meat” or sag “like a heavy load,” who cleans things up and tries to lift the heavy load we carry? Our closest friends, loved ones, family members do these things for us; we do it for them. When dreams are deferred, denied, and rejected, the impact is felt most intensely in our most intimate relationships—the places where dreams are made real and are uttered quietly and hopefully. With those closest to us, in interpersonal spaces, our most fragile dreams are given fleeting voice, solidified, challenged, supported, affirmed. It is also where they can be crushed into dust.”<sup>57</sup>

Christopher W. E Bjgsby, a critic, points out that the play clearly reflects the fact of race and the mood and strategy of the Civil Rights Movement for which the main objective was the desegregation of housing, education, transportation, and all public services.<sup>58</sup>

Many white audiences and critics interpreted the play’s ending, i.e., the moving of the Youngers into a hostile all-white community, as a happy one. The ending was seen as the end of their struggle, as a victory and not as the beginning of another struggle. But Hansberry had a different point of view. In an interview with Studs Terkel, she responded to this sentiment as expressed by one critic by saying, “If he thinks that’s a happy ending, I invite him to come live in one of the communities where the Youngers are going!”<sup>59</sup>

To conclude, it can be said that *A Raisin in the Sun* was in fact a revolutionary literary work for its time. Hansberry innovates through the Younger family one of the best depictions of a black family on the American stage in an age where black audience did not exist. Hansberry shows a realistic view of an African-American family whose all members

struggle to achieve their dreams in a society where there is no place for the blacks. They live in poverty and they daily face racial discrimination and social injustice and the play can be considered a very good document for the life of the black people at that time.

Despite their loss of a big amount of the insurance money, at the end of the play they are able to move to a white neighborhood. Hansberry left the play with an open end in the sense that it does not answer the questions it raises; it succeeds in reflecting Hansberry's point of view that the Youngers have dreams and these dreams are crucial since they motivate the characters towards working hard to get them. However, some characters place their emphasis on materialistic matters rather than on the familial happiness and pride. But as long as people do their best for their families, they will lift up each other.

The play says nothing about whether the Youngers will live in peace within a hostile society which is a big challenge to them or they will begin a new life of suffering. Likewise, the play remains silent about Beneatha's education which remains ambiguous especially in the light of Walter's loss of her share of money to Willy Harris. Maybe, she will eventually become disillusioned after she experiences more racism and discrimination in the work market. The play also remains silent about the question of Ruth's abortion. Whether Ruth will abort the child or not is not clear. Walter's future economic status remains ambiguous in the light of his loss of money and his lack of qualifications necessary to compete in the work market.

## الملخص

### الحلم الأمريكي في مسرحية (زببية في الشمس) للوريان هانزبري بسعاد ماهر محيل

ظهر مفهوم الحلم الأمريكي في الكثير من الأعمال الأدبية، بضمنها المسرح. وقد حاول الكثير من الكتاب المسرحيين أن يعكسوا ذلك المفهوم في مسرحياتهم كي يعطوا صورة واضحة عن المجتمع الأمريكي.

ومسرحية لوريان هانزبري "زببية في الشمس" تصور مفهوم الحلم الأمريكي بصورة جدا واضحة. فهي تعكس حياة عائلة اليانكرز، وهم مثال للعائلة الأفريقية الأمريكية في الفترة ما بين الحرب العالمية الثانية والستينات والذين عاشوا في غيتو في جنوب شيكاغو. فالمسرحية تصور صراعات الشباب السود للبحث عن مكانتهم وأهدافهم في هذا العالم دون تدمير العلاقات الحساسة داخل أسرهم.

ومن الواضح أن المسرحية تصور معضلة عائلة أمريكية أفريقية بدقة وواقعية كان فيها لكل عضو حلم مؤجل، وحتى الصغير ترافيس على الرغم من أن حلمه لم يذكر مباشرة. وقد أصبحت أحلامهم مجففة مثل الزبيب في الشمس. ليست فقط الأحلام ما جف؛ إنما زواج والتر لي وروث أيضا أصبح علاقة جافة بحيث لم يعد لزوجهم أي أهمية كبيرة، فقد أصبح مثل الحلم تأجل وأصبح جافا. وقد جف نضالهم من أجل السعادة لأن عليهم أن يركزوا كل طاقاتهم على البقاء على قيد الحياة. فلذلك تظهر المسرحية كيف كان على الأسرة التغلب على الحياة وتعلم دروسها بالطريقة الصعبة. فمن خلال شخصية والتر، أظهرت المسرحية أن الأحلام في بعض الأحيان يجب أن تترك، ومن خلال شخصية ماما أظهرت أنه في بعض الأحيان الأحلام يجب أن تتحقق. ومن خلال شخصية بينيثا، تبين أن الأمور ليست دائما كما تبدو. وقد تمكنت هذه الأسرة من التغلب على عقبة رئيسية حينما توحدوا وتكاتفوا.

يعالج البحث مسرحية لوريان هانزبري "زببية في الشمس"، ويتكون من خلاصة، ومقدمة، وفصل يعالج مفهوم الحلم الأمريكي في المسرحية.

<sup>1</sup> Said by: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "Exploring the American Dream with A Raisin in the Sun" *NC Civic Education Consortium*. (URL:<http://database.civics.unc.edu>), retrieved 3<sup>rd</sup> Aug. 2017.

\* I Have a Dream|| is a seventeen minute public speech by Martin Luther King, Jr., in which he called for racial equality and an end to discrimination. King's delivery of the speech on August 28, 1963, from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, was a defining moment of the American Civil Rights Movement

<sup>2</sup> "Exploring the American Dream with A Raisin in the Sun" *NC Civic Education Consortium*. (URL:<http://database.civics.unc.edu>), retrieved 3<sup>rd</sup> Aug. 2017.

<sup>3</sup> *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature* (4 Ed.). Editors Dinah Birch, Katy Hooper. 2013. (URL:<http://www.oxfordreference.com/search?q=American+DREAM&searchBtn=Search&isQuickSearch=true>), retrieved 1<sup>st</sup> Aug. 2017.

- <sup>4</sup> James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America*, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition 1932,(London: George Routledge and Sons Ltd., 1943), p.415.
- <sup>5</sup> Seiler, *The Promised Land*, p. 15. ([URL:www.facts-are-facts.com/magazin/1-promisedland](http://www.facts-are-facts.com/magazin/1-promisedland).) retrieved 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2017.
- <sup>6</sup> **The Albigensians** were members of a Catharistic sect in the south of France that arose in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and was exterminated in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by a crusade (Albigensian Crusade) and the Inquisition. For further reading consult, Albigensian at ([URL:http://www.dictionary.com/browse/albigensian](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/albigensian) ), retrieved August.3rd, 2017.
- <sup>7</sup> Seiler, *The Promised Land*, p. 18.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Cited in Vernon Louis Parrington, Jr., *American Dreams: A Study of American Utopia* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), p.1.
- <sup>10</sup> Howard Temperley and Malcolm Bradbury," Introduction", *Introduction to American Studies*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury & Howard Temperley (New York: Longman, 1985), p.2.
- <sup>11</sup> *The Declaration of Independence and Constitution of the United States of America* (Washington, D. C.: United States Government Printing, 1979), p. 1.
- <sup>12</sup> Ellman Crasnow & Philip Haffenden , "*New Founde Land*", *Introduction to American Studies*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury & Howard Temperley (New York: Longman, 1985), p. 24.
- <sup>13</sup> Harold Bloom, *The American Dream* (New York: Infobase, 2009), p. xv.
- <sup>14</sup> Jennifer L. Houchschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. xi.
- <sup>15</sup> J.A. Leo Lemay, "Franklin's Autobiography and the American Dream" in, Harold Bloom. Ed. *The American Dream*(New York: Infobase, 2009), p.21.
- <sup>16</sup> "Searching for the American Dream" By Steven M. Gillon . ([URL: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steven-m-gillon/searching-for-the-american-dream\\_b\\_6314708.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steven-m-gillon/searching-for-the-american-dream_b_6314708.html).), retrieved 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2017.
- <sup>17</sup> *Twentieth Century American Literature*. Shivaji University Kolhapur Center for Distance Education. (Elective Group 4: Paper-VII. First Edition, 2011.), p.21.
- <sup>18</sup> *Black Nativity: Now's The Time*, "An Overview on the History of African American Theatre." (Penumbra Theatre Company,2009), p.3.
- <sup>19</sup> "African American Experience: A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry (1959), *Fences* by August Wilson (1985), *Wedding Band* by Alice Childress (1966)." *Thematic Guide to Modern Drama*. Susan C. W. Abbotson,(Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut London, 2003.), p.10
- \* Langston Hughes was a poet, playwright, novelist, short story writer and columnist. Hughes was half African- American and half Native-American. When he was a child, his father left the United States to escape its persistent racism, leaving Hughes to be raised by his grandparents. Langston Hughes went to High School in Cleveland. It was here that he discovered a deep love of literature and made the decision to be a writer.(For more information consult "Exploring A Raisin in the, Study Guide". Written by Andrea Moon, ED. Cathy Hartenstein. Sponsored by University Hospitals)
- <sup>20</sup> "Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin In The Sun English Literature Essay" ([URL: https://www.ukessays.com/essays/english-literature/lorraine-hansberrys-a-raisin-in-the-sun-english-literature-essay.php](https://www.ukessays.com/essays/english-literature/lorraine-hansberrys-a-raisin-in-the-sun-english-literature-essay.php)) Retrieved 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2017.
- <sup>21</sup> Robin Bernstein. "Inventing a Fishbowl: White Supremacy and the Critical Reception of Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun". *Modern Drama*. (Spring 1999), p.20.
- <sup>22</sup> *Play Guide for A Raisin in the Sun*, Editor/ Writer: Peter Altman, Laura Muir Contributing Writer: Elaine Scott Design: Elaine Scott Executive Editor: Peter Altman Published January 2006. p.15.
- <sup>23</sup> L. Domina.. *Understanding A Raisin in the Sun: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents*. (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1998.), p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Tricia Rose. *Hansberry’s A Raisin in the Sun and the “illegible” Politics of (inter)personal Justice*. P.38.

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<sup>25</sup> Lawrence Topman.(URL:

<http://www.charlotteobserver.com/entertainment/ent-columns-blogs/lawrence-topman/article139338263.html> ), retrieved July 17th, 2017.

\* To defer (means to delay or put off to some future time.)

<sup>26</sup>“Harlem (“What happens to a dream deferred?”), Langston Hughes, Album Montage of a Dream Deferred . (URL:[URL:Langston-hughes-harlem-what-happens-to-a-dream-deferred-annotated](http://www.langston-hughes-harlem-what-happens-to-a-dream-deferred-annotated)), retrieved 22<sup>nd</sup>, Sep. 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Studs Terkel “An Interview with Lorraine Hansberry.” *WFMT Chicago Fine Arts Guide*, April 1961.

<sup>28</sup> “Free Essays - A Raisin in the Sun.” (URL:

<http://www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=13750>), retrieved 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2017.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Domina, p.21.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> “A Raisin in the Sun Summary.” (URL: <http://www.gradesaver.com/a-raisin-in-the-sun/study-guide/themes>), retrieved 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Morgan Garci, *A Dream Deferred: Lorraine Hansberry’s A Raisin in the Sun in film* , p.3.

<sup>34</sup> Susan C. W. Abbotson, *Masterpieces of 20th Century American Drama*. Greenwood Press Westport. Connecticut. 2005.

<sup>35</sup> “American Dream.” (<http://www.gradesaver.com/a-raisin-in-the-sun/essays/opposite-takes-on-the-american-dream-in-lorraine-hansberrys-a-raisin-in-the-sun-and-arthur-millers-death-of-a-salesman>), retrieved Aug. 13th, 2017.

<sup>36</sup> “The American Dream in A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry Essay” (URL:<http://www.123helpme.com/preview.asp?id=88493>.), retrieved 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2017.

<sup>37</sup> Lorraine Hansberry . *A Raisin in the sun*. In *Four contemporary American plays*. Selected with Biographical Notes by Bennett Cerf.( New York: Vintage Books, 1960). (All subsequent references to this play are cited parenthetically within the text by Act and page numbers. (2, 522)

<sup>38</sup> Robert Nemiroff, Ed. *A Raisin in the Sun: Unabridged 25th Anniversary Edition and The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window..* New York: Penguin, 1987. 9-20.

<sup>39</sup> “ Dreams in a Raisin in the Sun” (URL: <https://www.papermasters.com/dreams-raisin-in-the-sun.html>), retrieved, 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2017.

<sup>40</sup> *A Raisin in the Sun*. Dir. Daniel Petrie. Perf. Sidney Poitier, Claudia McNeil, Louis Gossett Jr., Ruby Dee, Diana Sands. Columbia Pictures. 1961.

<sup>41</sup> Christopher W. E Bigsby. *Modern American Drama, 1945-2000* ( London: Cambridge UP.2004), p.158.

<sup>42</sup> “Thoughts on A Raisin in the Sun” in *Commentary*, June, 1959. Play Guide for A Raisin in the Sun. Editor/Writer: Peter Altman, Laura Muir Contributing Writer: Elaine Scott Design: Elaine Scott Executive Editor: Peter Altman Published January 2006.

<sup>43</sup> *Drama for Students. Vol.2* . Ed. David Galens, Lynn Spampinato . (Centre Line High School, Michigan, 1998.), p.187.

- <sup>44</sup> Richard Gray, *A History of American literature*. (Blackwell Publishing Ltd. United Kingdom. 2004), .p.687.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid, p.686-687.
- <sup>46</sup> *A Raisin in the Sun: Unabridged 25th Anniversary Edition and The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*. Ed. Robert Nemiroff. ( New York: Penguin, 1987. 9-20.).
- <sup>47</sup> Dir. Daniel. Petrie, Perf. Sidney Poitier, Claudia McNeil, Louis Gossett Jr., Ruby Dee, Diana Sands. *A Raisin in the Sun*. Columbia Pictures. 1961.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>50</sup> H. J. Elam and David K.(Eds.). (2001). *Blacks performance and theater history: A critical reader*. (New York: Oxford UP, 2001), .p.40.
- <sup>51</sup> Nemiroff..
- <sup>52</sup> Maria.Gao, *Lorraine Hansberry: A Writer in the Sun*. (University Laboratory High School, Urbana).
- <sup>53</sup> Petrie.
- <sup>54</sup> Lawrence Toppman,  
(URL:[http://www.charlotteobserver.com/entertainment/ent-columns\\_blogs/lawrence-toppman/article139338263.html](http://www.charlotteobserver.com/entertainment/ent-columns_blogs/lawrence-toppman/article139338263.html)), retrieved July 17th, 2017.
- <sup>55</sup> Robinson, Laymond. "Robert Kennedy Consults Negroes." *New York Times* 25 May 1963: 1, 8, "Meeting with Baldwin, Hansberry, Belafonte, et al."
- <sup>56</sup> Rose, p.42.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid, 31.
- <sup>58</sup> Christopher W. E. Bigsby, *Modern American Drama, 1945-2000*. (London: Cambridge UP, 2004),. pp.278-279
- <sup>59</sup> Rose, p. 38.

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