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A raisin in the sun critical analysis pdf

Historical Context On the surface, *A Raisin in the Sun* is about an African American family's struggle to get out of the ghetto on Chicago's Southside. However, Hansberry utilizes numerous themes and complex characters that require multiple levels of analysis beyond the primary issues that drive the plot. The beauty of the play is that it explores the African American identity, social status, and racial challenges in conjunction with the intricacies of universal human nature. Throughout Hansberry's brief life, she took every chance to be revolutionary not only in her actions in everyday life but also through her literary works. The fact that she could "tell painful truths to a society unaccustomed to rigorous self-criticism and still receive its praise" is a testimony to her skill both as a writer and a student of life [3]. In many ways, Hansberry's early life contributed to the manifestation of her first work. Although she was born into middle class comfort on the Southside of Chicago, Hansberry witnessed the injustices plaguing American society firsthand. Despite her family's material comfort, they were still restricted to the black ghettos so Lorraine grew up alongside a number of lower class friends and neighbors who taught her about their harsh reality [4]. Surprisingly, her privilege still did not insulate her from the struggles and anger of racial minorities and the lower classes. At one point, her father waged a legal battle that reached the Supreme Court, *Hansberry v. Lee*, that dealt with their right to purchase a home in a previously all-white neighborhood [5]. The battle was won, but the war was far from over as Hansberry's family was subjected to vicious physical attacks once they moved in. Although her work is not autobiographical, it is undeniable that hints of her childhood surface throughout her writing and influence her thoughts and beliefs. Rasin was initially relegated to the outdated category because it emerged prior to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. However, this view neglects to acknowledge the insights and warnings regarding the cataclysmic results of civil unrest and inequality inherent in Rasin. Also, prior to the manuscript's completion in 1957, a number of important events occurred that undoubtedly affected Hansberry's writing. Among others, the Supreme Court ruled against local covenants that perpetuated segregated neighborhoods in 1949 and determined in *1954's Brown v. Board of Education* that "separate but equal" school segregation is unconstitutional [6]. In many ways, Hansberry anticipated the need and called for minority empowerment against inequality and discrimination. One of her major thematic criticisms was the "gap between the American dream and the Black American reality" [7]. The ability to have a dream and the chance to fulfill it was and unfortunately still is different depending upon social status and racial makeup. The Younger family is portrayed in such a proud and honorable light to emphasize the injustice and to call for policy and societal changes. Hansberry is largely responsible for redefining the term universality in art. For a long time, the term was monadic in its conception and application. It had been developed and applied to mean whiteness rather than including the diversity of modern-day society. Another contributing factor to the inaccurate conceptualization of the term was that black art continued to separate itself from the mainstream by isolating discussions of social problems from racial issues. Instead, Hansberry sought to concurrently consider "social significance and racial consciousness" [8]. Her attention to details opened the door for white audiences into an understanding of black experiences that made those experiences understandable and relevant. In the words of James Baldwin, the play received such acclaim from the African American community because "never before in American theater history has so much of the truth of black people's lives been seen on stage" [9]. The inclusion of the black experience within the framework of the human experience forced a redefinition that opened the term universality to include the minority voice [10]. This change may often go unnoted, but is an important illustration of one way Hansberry unintentionally changed the landscape of society through art. In fact, Hansberry herself believes "the question is not whether one will make a social statement in one's work - but only what the statement will say" [11]. All art makes a statement; some are simply more controversial than others. The cruel reality and irony of the play is that despite the realization of the family's dream to move to the new house, the newspaper stories about black homes being bombed, the attacks upon black families mentioned by Mrs. Johnson, and the crudeness of the new neighborhood's welcoming committee promises that their struggles are far from over. Herein lies the mastery of Hansberry's work. She is able to deal with issues of racism and discrimination while maintaining a thoughtful story about a family, race aside, struggling against poverty. Although initially underrecognized as a timeless work, historical context reveals Rasin's significance as a lasting literary social criticism. *A Raisin in the Sun* is a popular play by Lorraine Hansberry. It was performed for the first time in 1959. Hansberry has borrowed the title from a popular poem by Langston Hughes, "Harlem." The play revolves around an African American family living in Chicago who wants to bring improvement in its status through the insurance that their widowed mother, Lena Younger, is going to receive after her husband's death. All the family members are dreaming of having a better lifestyle after having this amount, but their dreams ended in smoke when the money seems to have gone as easily as it has come. Summary of *A Raisin in the Sun* The play presents the story of a few weeks from the life of the Youngers family, an African American family living in the poor neighborhood of Chicago's Southern area during the 50s. The play starts with the Youngers discussing how to spend the money they are going to receive from an insurance company after the death of their patriarch. The total amount of the policy is \$10,000 to be received through a check. As the money is expected to arrive, all the family members are presenting their individual ideas on how to spend the money carefully not to let it go wasted. Each one of them has an idea. Mama, Lena, the mother of the Youngers, knows the importance of a house, the reason that she insists that they must purchase a house in some good neighborhood. However, Walter Lee, the male member of the family has his own plans; he wants to make an investment in the liquor business with the partnership of his friend Bobo and Willy, the street-smarts. His optimism about the success of his investment has made him gleeful so much so that he hoodwinks the family by giving the money to Willy for the liquor store investment in his hope to reveal it later when he succeeds. Despite his optimism, he is unable to convince even his own wife who conjoins his mother in having a house of their own. Also, Mama disagrees with the plan because it is against religion. However, she gives the rest of the money to Walter for the business investment on the condition of reserving three thousand dollars for her daughter's education. During these two supposedly relieving plans, the female member, Beneatha, Walter's sister has her own plan of pulling the family out of this mess through the money she wants to use in her medical education. She is the representation of 'new woman' as against the traditional opinion of a female character. Like her name, everyone is beneath her. She was self-centered at the beginning of the playmaking the family sacrifices their desires to accommodate her expensive hobbies, which keep changing from time to time. Her love interests George Murchison, and Joseph Asagai influences her life choices. George was a wealthy black man who tries to ignore the accomplishments of black people and fit into this white-dominated society and a narcissist who shows off in front of Beneatha by talking about intellectual concepts. Whereas Joseph, a Yoruba student teaches Beneatha the rich culture and heritage of her ancestors in Africa and embraces her identity as a black woman. He later proposes to marry him and go back to Nigeria and her medical practice. Beneatha thinks that as the family does not desire to join the world ruled by the white, she resorts to her identity recognition by recalling African heritage at the end of the play. The competing dreams of the Younger family members make them unable to reconcile with each other. Meanwhile, Ruth, the wife of Walter Lee, comes to know about her pregnancy that she thinks would add to the family's financial woes. When both husband and wife are considering the abortion, Mama, the matriarchal figure of the house, pays down payment for the purchase of the house. Her idea of having their own residence in Clybourne Park may help the family pull out of poverty. On the other hand, the local people send their representation, Mr. Lindner with an offer for them to stay away from the area by giving them money. This house is located in Clybourne Park, an entirely white neighborhood. When the Youngers refuse, Walter faces the stark reality of losing his investment through his friend, Willy Harris, who has run away with his money. Albeit, the family learns that they lost the money to Willy they refuse to take money from Mr. Linder. Beneatha also adds to the family problems by rejecting George Murchison and accepting Joseph Asagai who wants her to complete her medical education first. During the breakup with Beneatha, George says that he didn't show interest in her because they could talk about 'quiet desperation. Although the family moves to the new house, the future is not safe but they are optimistic about staying united to win success and live a better life. Major Themes in *A Raisin in the Sun* The American Dream: The play shows the theme of the American Dream through the Younger family. Each member of the family has a unique dream that they want to materialize with the insurance money of their patriarch. However, the best dream any of them has is of Mama who thinks that having a good house in a decent, white locality would provide a better future to the next generation. Walter's dream of having a good liquor store, too, is an American Dream, though, it is another thing that he trusts his partner who runs away with it. Similarly, Beneatha's dream of having a medical degree could be associated with an individual American Dream. However, it is Mama's American Dream in which lies the dream of everyone; a better house in a better neighborhood, the reason that Walter flatly refuses to budge from his stand later when facing Mr. Lindner. Female Identity: The play presents three towering feminine figures in the play; Mama, who is heading the family after the death of her husband and has a claim over her husband's insurance money, her daughter Beneatha who sees the family future in her own prospect as a medical professional and Ruth, her daughter-in-law who sees the future of her children. All three of them strive against the patriarchal figure of Walter Lee who dreams of becoming a good investor by investing the insurance money in the liquor business with his partner. Although he wastes the money, Mama's idea of having a house of their own rules supreme in the end. Beneatha also takes the lead by turning away Murchison and challenges Walter's narrow-mindedness. Masculinity: The play shows the theme of masculinity in the debilitating role of Walter Lee when he shirks from his responsibility of taking the lead and helping the family stand up to face the prejudice prevalent in Chicago and economic challenges. Instead, he squanders away the money of his father's insurance, he feels that his dream of sending his son to college and purchasing a Cadillac were just wishful thinking of a young man. He comes to the point and ultimately rejects Mr. Lindner's offer of leaving the neighborhood to find some other place for their house for which her mother has already paid. African Identity: The theme of African identity in the play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, is obvious, for it is a play of the Youngers, an African American family, facing prejudice on fulfilling their Mama's desire of having a house in the white neighborhood. Even before they shift, Mr. Lindner comes to warn them to stay away and makes an offer. This prejudice reminds the Youngers of their background. The arrival of Asagai and Beneatha's love for him makes it more prominent when she becomes too eager to learn about African heritage. Class Differences: The theme of class differences is accentuated when Mama advises all her children that getting a house in the white neighborhood in the city of Chicago is their key to the future. However, Mr. Lindner's arrival shows them the reality that they can get more money by not raising their status which, in his words, is not moving to their locality. This class difference, in the words of Mr. Lindner, would cause rift and unease in their neighborhood that they do not want. However, the final refusal of Walter Lee is rather an intransigence to communicate what they want to do. Although Walter Lee takes the lead, he also knows that Mama, Beneatha, and even his wife Ruth have failed to understand his investment. This is a lack of communication that none of them could talk or understand each other's plans or desires. Major Characters of *A Raisin in the Sun* Walter Lee Younger: Walter Lee Younger is the only patriarch in the family and also the only person to have tried to materialize his dream though without any tangible success. Son of Mama and her late husband, Walter is married to Ruth with two children. His driving job is assisting the family to make both ends meet, while Beneatha is only a helping hand. His only aspiration is to start his business as a liquor store that would grow and change the family fortune. However, his unpredictable behavior causes the loss of business in which his friend, Willy, steals the invested money, and the only hope of the family of having a patriarch leading the way ends up in smoke. Lena Younger (Mama): Mama, the dominating matriarchal figure of the family, is Lena Younger, whose husband, Walter senior, has recently died, leaving for his family a good sum of \$10,000 of his insurance policy. Mama's sanguinity lies in thinking about having a proper house in some good locality that could improve the family fortune. The sanguinity of her suggestion and then the payment of the down payment show significance when Walter Lee sees his money gone with his friend who has fled. Her wisdom has saved them from total failure, and they have something to take a stand against Mr. Lindner's unjust offer. Beneatha Younger: Beneatha Younger is the modern face of the Younger family having innovating thinking and a new philosophical approach toward her own race. She thinks that her medical education could pull the family out of this mess. Her rigors on her speech improvement show its results in her talkativeness. She discusses philosophical ideas of religion, class, race, and education with her fiancé as well as family members. Yet, her American Dream of improving her career seems to be selfish and individualistic. Ruth Younger: Ruth is a source of the future generation as Travis's mother and the wife of Walter Lee. Living in a constant tension of improvised living and poverty has taken years from her life, making her old before her time. Working constantly has kept her busy for a decade yet she does not complain and constantly nudges Walter to do more for their son, Joseph Asagai. Asagai is not only the fiancé of Beneatha but he also seems to be her philosophical mentor who fills her mind with new ideas about their rich heritage and racial privilege. His Nigerian roots have made him proud of his race, forcing him to realize Beneatha that she is not from the inferior race. He desires to take her to Nigeria after their marriage. George Murchison: Although not superior to Asagai, Murchison is another suitor of Beneatha who constantly courts her and succeeds, too. However, his willingness to be subservient to the white culture does not impress Beneatha much on account of his competitive rather than collaborative approach to life. Travis Younger: As the only male child in the household, Travis is suffering from the slackness and stupidity of his father, Walter Lee, who does not have good work and a career. He has had to work to earn money besides playing with the neighboring children. His household life is restricted to the sofa in that dingy, little apartment. Mr. Karl Lindner: Mr. Lindner represents not only the white community but also the white thinking about the African American community. His coaxingly threatening warnings fall flat when he confronts Walter and Mama. Although his offer sways his opinion at home, Walter, later, stands up to face him, rejecting his offer. Willy Harris: Although Willy Harris is Walter's friend, he does not appear on the stage and only gets mentioned when he starts a liquor business or runs away with the money. Mrs. Johnson: A neighborhood lady, Mrs. Johnson's significance in the play lies in her persuasion of the family for not leaving the neighborhood. Writing Style of *A Raisin in the Sun* *A Raisin in the Sun* is written by Lorraine Hansberry. She used the dialect of the African American community that is not only distinct but also pure. The characters speak in their domestic setting and individual style as Beneatha and Asagai show their superior and formal education even in everyday conversation, while Mama, Mrs. Johnson, and Ruth demonstrate their crude language. The diction and tone of the play, too, suit the community, neighborhood as well as main audience. Lorraine mostly turns to irony, sarcasm, and other devices of figurative language to make her dialogues effective. Analysis of the Literary Devices in *A Raisin in the Sun* Action: The main action of the play comprises the American Dream of the Youngers that they are going to realize on an individual level from the insurance money they are going to get after the death of the patriarch. The rising action occurs when Ruth Walter comes to know about her pregnancy and the falling action occurs when Walter Lee comes to know that his money is gone. Anaphora: The play shows examples of anaphora such as, i. Anybody who talks to me has got to be a good-for-nothing loudmouth, ain't he? And what you know about who is just a good-for-nothing loudmouth? Charlie Atkins was just a "good-for-nothing loudmouth" too, wasn't he? When he wanted me to go in the dry-cleaning business with him. And now—he's grossing a hundred thousand a year (Act-I) ii. you just sip your coffee, see, and say easy like that you been thinking 'bout that deal Walter Lee is so interested in, 'bout the store and all, and sip some more coffee, like what you saying ain't really that important to you— And the next thing you know, she be listening good and asking you questions and when I come home—I can tell her the details. This ain't no 'y-by-night proposition, baby. I mean we figured it out, me and Willy and Bobo. iii. You ain't looked at it and you don't aim to have to speak on that again? You ain't even looked at it and you have decided— (Act-II) The examples show the repetitious use of "good-for-nothing", "sit your coffee" and "You ain't." Allusion: The play shows good use of different allusions as given in the below examples, i. Asagai—Joseph Asagai. He's an African boy I met on campus. He's been studying in Canada all summer. (Act-I) ii. I am from the Clybourne Park Improvement Association and we have had it brought to our attention at the last meeting that you people—or at least your mother—has bought a piece of residential property at. (Act-II) iii. BENEATHA George Murchison! I wouldn't marry him if he was Adam and I was Eve! (Act-III) The first example shows the reference to a region, the second to a place in Chicago, and the third to Adam and Eve. Antagonist: Walter Lee Younger is the antagonist as well as the protagonist of the play. It is because he not only squanders the money but also becomes a responsible patriarch by the end of the play after he refuses Mr. Lindner's offer. Conflict: The play shows both external and internal conflicts. The external conflict is going on between the Youngers and the economic situation including the white dominance, while the internal conflict is going on in Walter Lee's mind about his responsibility and his attitude. Characters: The play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, shows both static as well as dynamic characters. Lena Younger and Walter Lee both are dynamic characters as they show a considerable transformation in their behavior and conduct by the end of the play. However, all other characters are static as they do not show or witness any transformation such as Mrs. Johnson, Beneatha, Ruth, Lindner, and even Asagai. Climax: The climax in the play occurs when Bobo arrives to inform the Youngers that Willy has run away with their invested money. Epigraph: The play shows the use of the epigraph as given in the example below, i. What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up Like a raisin in the sun? Or fester like a rose - And then run? Does it sink like rotten meat Or crust and sugar over - Like a syrupy sweet? This short extract from the poem of Langston Hughes shows the use of an epigraph. Foreshadowing: The play shows many instances of foreshadows as given below, i. You mean you didn't read 'bout them colored people that was bombed out their place out there. (Act-I) The mention of colored and bombed shows the situation that the Youngers are going to face in the area where they move. Hyperbole: The play shows various examples of hyperboles such as, i. So you would rather be Mr. Arnold than be his chauffeur. So—I would rather be living in Buckingham Palace. (Act-I) ii. I seen one marching out of there like Napoleon yesterday. (Act-I) Both of these examples exaggerate things as Walter cannot be Arnold nor can he live in Buckingham Palace. Also, nobody can be Napoleon. Imagery: Imagery is used to make readers perceive things involving their five senses. For example, i. It is morning dark in the living room, TRAVIS is asleep on the make-down bed at center. An alarm clock sounds from within the bedroom at right, and presently RUTH enters from that room and closes the door behind her. She crosses sleepily toward the window. As she passes her sleeping son she reaches down and shakes him a little. At the window she raises the shade and a dusky Southside morning light comes in feebly. She calls a pot with water and puts it on to boil. She calls to the boy, between yawns, in a slightly muffled voice. (Act-I) ii. She cannot help speaking directly to him. An imploring quality in her voice, her manner, makes her almost like a girl now. (II) These two examples show images of light, color, movement, and sound shown in the instructions of the play. Irony: The play shows the use of irony when Bobo comes to the Youngers to inform them that Willy has run away with the money, a fact that the audiences are already aware of but the Youngers are not. Metaphor: *A Raisin in the Sun* shows good use of various metaphors as given in the examples below, i. So you would rather be Mr. Arnold than be his chauffeur. So—I would rather be living in Buckingham Palace. (Act-I) ii. So you butchered up a dream of mine—you—who always talking 'bout your children's dreams (Act-II) iii. You mean you ain't read 'bout them colored people that was bombed out their place out there?. (Act-II) These examples show that several things have been compared directly in the novel such as the first shows comparing her husband to Mr. Arnold, the second shows comparing Mama to a butcher, and the third shows white people as soldiers throwing bombs at the colored people. Mood: The play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, shows various moods; it starts with quite a realistic and bitter mood but becomes highly sarcastic and critical with the passage of time until it reaches its end which is depressive and serious. Motif: Most important motifs of the play are music, money, Beneatha's hair, and house. Protagonist: Walter Lee is the protagonist of the play, *A Raisin in the Sun*. The reason is that it is he who shows his patriarchal responsibility by the end despite losing money. Setting: The setting of the play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, is the poor neighborhood of the South Side of Chicago. Simile: The play shows good use of various similes as given in the examples below, i. About to march out of here with that head looking just like chickens slept in it. (Act-I) ii. I always thinks like Booker T. Washington said that time— "Education has spoiled many a good plow hand"—. (Act-II) iii. Walter Lee, fix your tie and tuck your shirt in, you look like somebody's hoodlum! (Act-III) These are similes as the use of the word "like" shows the comparison between different things. For example, the first one shows this comparison between the head and the coop, and then between Walter and Washington, and then between Walter's appearance and that of hoodlums.

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