

Dreams “Deferred” But Identity Affirmed and Manhood Restored: A New Look at *A Raisin in the Sun*

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Abstract

This article explores how Hansberry handles blacks' dreams masterfully and uniquely in her play *A Raisin in the Sun*. Distinctively different from the other black writers who dealt with the issue, she points out that the deferment and collapse of these dreams can be positively exploited to strengthen blacks and help them restore their long absent manhood and dignity in America. She has pigmented her characters with doggedness and insistence. They wholeheartedly do their best to fulfill their dreams and when these dreams are thwarted, a character, either independently or with the help of other characters, gains further strength and is markedly transformed to the better. To bring this view to light, the article concentrates on the long deferred dream of the mother Lena, the thwarted dream of the son Walter, the difference between the two dreams and how the former has been meticulously manipulated by the mother to affirm her identity and help her son restore manhood and dignity in a racist and hostile society.

Key words: Lorraine Hansberry; *A Raisin in the Sun*; Identity affirmation; Deferment of dreams

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The issue of blacks' dreams was recurrent in several black writers' literary productions, most important among which are Lorraine Hansberry's (1930-1965) play *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) and Langston Hughes's (1902-1964) long poem “Montage of a Dream Deferred” (1951)

wherefrom the title of the play was taken. Hughes's poem played a significant role in triggering off the writing of our under-analysis play. Both Langston Hughes's poem and Hansberry's play have a lot in common as they both concentrate on the continual deferment of achieving blacks' dreams in America and the different possibilities awaiting these dreams. However, Hansberry has uniquely managed to deal with this issue from a broader perspective. Never, either before or after Hansberry, did a black writer manage to deal with blacks' dreams in the way she did.

This paper tries to illustrate how Hansberry successfully, masterfully and differently manages to go further and explore how the deferment of these dreams can be positively exploited to build up black characters and help them affirm their identity and restore their long absent manhood and dignity in the USA. The doggedness with which Hansberry pigments her characters is what gives her under-discussion play universality, distinction and wide recognition. The characters wholeheartedly do their best to fulfill their dreams and when these dreams are thwarted, a character, either independently or with the help of other characters, gains further strength and is markedly transformed to the better.

To bring this view to light, the article concentrates on the long deferred dream of the mother Lena and how she patiently manages to affirm her identity, the thwarted dream of the son Walter, the difference between the two dreams and how the former has been meticulously manipulated by the mother to help her son restore manhood and dignity in a racist and hostile society. The different forces that have played a role in the deferment or the total collapse of these dreams are shed light on. The great effort exerted by the mother to stand against them all is also illustrated. In so doing, we could also falsify what has been claimed by Harris (1995) that Lena's strength has crippled her son Walter and her immense physical and moral presence continues to loom large (p. 116). The

mother does have an immense impact on her son but this impact is, as proved in our discussion hereafter, completely positive, and not negative as claimed by Harris.

A Raisin in the Sun “was a landmark success and was subsequently translated into over thirty languages on all continents” (Wilkerson, 1983, p. 8). It is the play wherewithal Hansberry “had stunned the Broadway stage” and “had surpassed two of America’s most renowned playwrights, Tennessee Williams and Eugene O’Neill, for the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play of the 1958-59 season” (Wilkerson, 1987, p. 642). Hansberry “was the youngest American, first woman, first black to win this award” (Carter, 1980, p. 42).

Hansberry’s play “tells the story of a mid-twentieth century black American family” (Lund, 1989, p. 83). The incidents circle around the members of this family: the mother (Lena), her daughter (Beneatha), Lena’s son (Walter), his wife (Ruth) and their son (Travis). They have been living in a “cramped, roach-infested apartment” (Hughes, 2011, p. D1). Each of the Youngers dreams though in a way different from those of others. The mother has long been dreaming of having a comfortable house in an all-white neighborhood, a dream that her daughter-in-law earnestly shares. Walter dreams of accumulating money and getting rich as soon as possible. The youngest daughter Beneatha dreams of completing her education and having a degree in medicine “despite the era’s dictates against her gender and race” (Foley, 2011, p. D20). What all the members share in common is that they are expecting a ten-thousand American dollars check which is the life-insurance of Old Younger. This check represents “the engine of the plot” (Kingston, 2010, p. 28), and “the catalyst for change ... [for the] family members who have different and conflicting designs for the money” (Palm, 2012, p. M30). Each of the characters wants to use the money to fulfill his dream.

When the money comes, the mother, as a compromise, uses one third to buy a house in a white neighborhood, and gives the two thirds for Walter to save one for his sister’s education and to exploit the other in the business he wants to start with his white friend. Not attending to his mother’s instructions, Walter gives all the money to his friend who suddenly disappears. The white character, Mr. Linder, comes to the family to negotiate buying back the house as it is against the racial laws. Swindled of the money, Walter was about to sell the house at a considerable profit. Shocked by what the son wants to do, the mother tries her best to dissuade the son, she succeeds and Mr. Linder is ordered out.

To fully understand Lena’s dream and its motivations, we need to throw some light on the dream of the blacks who were relegated and treated like animals in the Southern plantations. Their biggest dream was to migrate to Northern states to find better job opportunities and to escape the inhuman treatment they long endured and suffered from in the South. They thought that in the North

they would be free and manage to achieve progress in their life. However, their dream of becoming part and parcel of the American mainstream was shamefully hindered as they were dehumanized and cornered in ghettos that were inappropriate for human life. These areas were over-populated by black residents and utterly neglected by the white government. Such sordid social conditions caused some blacks to dream of moving to all-white neighborhoods. Such a tendency is represented in the analyzed play by Lena whose dream starts even before the start of the play.

Lena migrated to the North with her husband hoping to achieve certain progress and have a house of their own. At the very start, they were satisfied with a rented apartment in a black ghetto thinking that within a year they can save some money and buy a house in a good neighborhood. Unfortunately, none of this has happened. Her long deferred dream and suffering are explicitly stated in her conversation with her daughter-in-law Ruth:

RUTH... Well, Lord knows, we have put enough rent into this here rat trap to pay for four houses by now...

MAMA (*looking at the words “rat trap” and then looking around and leaning back and sighing – in a suddenly reflective mood –*). “rat trap” – yes, that’s all it is. (*Smiling*) I remember just as well the day me and big Walter moved in here. Hadn’t been married but two weeks and wasn’t planning on living here no more than a year. (*she shakes her head at the dissolved dream.*) We was going to set away, little by little, don’t you know, and buy a little place out in Morgan Park. (Hansberry, 1959, p. 421)

Lena’s and Ruth’s words are highly indicative. Both of them have become dissatisfied with the life they have been leading and the apartment wherein they “are packed like sardines” (Siegel, 2012, p. G12). The quoted lines indicate also that whites have been exploiting blacks renting them bad apartments and forbidding them from moving to other good neighborhoods. The house is described as a “rat trap” which means that it is not at all appropriate for human living. We are told in other parts of the play that Travis was happy because he killed a rat, and that every now and then the Youngers find no way but to spray the apartment throughout with insecticides to kill cockroaches, acts which are symbolically rich in two ways. First, they illustrate how these ghettos were utterly neglected and, thus, have become a fertile soil where insects such as rats and cockroaches would vigorously grow. Second, the repeated acts of killing rats and cockroaches might be taken to represent Lena’s dream and those of all other blacks to put an end to their suffering; a dream that whites would never allow them to fulfill. Once the apartment is sprayed, rats and cockroaches and other insects disappear for some time, and when the impact of spray diminishes, they begin to appear once more. Similarly, Lena has been repeatedly so burdened by expensive rents and other obligations that she has not been able to fulfill her dream until eventually she finds no way but to wait for her deceased husband’s insurance

money. Even after having the money she is hindered by other race-related acts and the play comes to an end without having her dream achieved. Important to add here is that though the dream has been repeatedly hindered, she has never given it up. For her, it is a way of achieving her identity.

The two lexical items "rat trap" are very telling in that they indicate whites' superiority over blacks on the one hand, and how painful and thorny the way to success in front of blacks is on the other. Whites think that blacks, like rats, should be kept in troubles, or rather in traps, from which they cannot set themselves free. This is very clear as the mother, her children and grandson have long been crammed in this small and inappropriate apartment, a fact that indicates mama's long suffering and endurance that have continued for three generations. No sooner did she manage to terminate her subjugation and slavery in the South and migrate to the North than she has been thrown into an ocean of discriminatory acts in the North. The stage directions vividly illustrate Lena's psychological state as she "leans back", "sighs" and "shakes her head" regretfully as she has seen her long deferred dream thrown into the world of oblivion.

Hansberry, being "one of the most gifted playwrights of the twentieth century" (Guillory, 1992, p. 558), was meticulous enough to affirm her view that the life Lena, like other blacks, has long been leading in ghettos is inhuman. The writer exposes right from the very start of the play how Lena and her family sleep, sit and dine. All the members of an extended family are crammed in their two-room-apartment to the extent that they do not have a space where the grandson Travis can comfortably sleep. To clarify the psychological torment that Lena and her family endure, Hansberry focuses, at the very start of the play, on one of the basic necessities that all human beings repeatedly need, i.e. the bathroom. The play opens with Ruth trying to wake up her son Travis and husband Walter to catch their turns in the bathroom before other people wake up and amass in front of it each waiting their turns. In so doing, Hansberry justifies and stresses Lena's need and right to dream of getting out of the ghettos and moving to a sanitarian house, a dream that Hansberry herself and all other blacks share. This was explicitly stated in Hansberry's *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*:

We must come out of the ghettos of America, because the ghettos are killing us, not only our dreams, but our very bodies. It is not an abstraction that the average American negro has a life expectancy of five to ten years less than the average white... that is murder (1995, p. 117).

Above, Hansberry justifies blacks' urgent need to get out of the ghettos as they are hindering the fulfillment of their dreams and shortening their life span. It is important to note here that these ghettos, though neglected and not even given a small portion of the care given to white neighborhoods, were intentionally rented by white landlords to blacks at higher prices as explicitly made

clear in the words of Ruth. Lena and her daughter-in-law have to keep toiling or serving inside white people's houses to be able to afford the rent and the physical food wherewithal to survive, and are prevented from achieving a noticeable progress in their life. That is why Lena's and her husband's dream of having a house of their own have long been deferred and could not have been fulfilled during Mr. Younger's life. The man, owing to being cornered in these ghettos, has been sent to his grave earlier leaving his dream unfulfilled, and his wife has to wait for his life-insurance money to fulfill the dream.

Mistakenly, Lena thinks that having the money will help her solve her problems and get her dream achieved. However, what happens in actuality is totally different as the affordance of the money represents the real momentum towards further troubles in the play. Having the money, she begins to act practically towards the achievement of her dream. She, "seeking more physical space for the family and the psychological freedom it would bring" (Wilkerson, 1986, p. 443), "makes a down-payment on a house" (Anderson, 1976, p. 93) in an all-white neighborhood and this has caused her to run into troubles that have not been ended even with the play's end. First, she has to face Whites' violent and non-violent reactions towards her intention to move into the all-white neighborhood. Second, she has to confront the discouragement and the conflicts that result from other black characters in the play owing to her intention to move, most important of which is the conflict that begins to arise between her and her son because the fulfillment of their dreams relies basically on this money. Noteworthy of mentioning here is that Lena gets stronger and stronger and never gives her dream up or admits defeat. She has become like the iron which has been purified and turned into steel in a high-temperature oven. The more troubles she runs into, the more moral strength she gets and the stronger her personality becomes. She firmly clings to the achievement of her dream thinking that it is the sole way whereby she can affirm her identity.

Concerning whites' violent reactions towards Lena's decision to move, Hansberry was intelligent enough to raise several questions in the on-looker's or the reader's mind. Though the posed questions are left unanswered, it can be argued that the play, to use Wilkerson's (2005) view when directing the play in 1965, offers people in general and blacks in particular "many ways to reflect on their lives and futures" as the play comes to a close while the Youngers are moving to their newly-bought house in the all-white neighborhood (p. 785). We cannot tell for sure what will happen. However, depending upon what happens in reality, we can safely say that the Youngers are going to be repeatedly attacked by whites to be forced to move out. The most important point that Hansberry wants to raise and concentrate on is Lena's reaction towards these threats and hostilities. She would like to say if Lena is to get terrified and admit defeat,

her dream will be terminated for good and, she has to accept inferiority and conduct her life that way, and this is the tendency that Hansberry detests most. Contrarily, if Lena is to resist oppression and continue the fight she has already begun when she has decided to buy the house, she will, one day, affirm her identity, fulfill her dream and attain her full citizenship which is closely associated, as Matthews (2008) contended, “with property ownership” (p. 556). And this is the tendency that Lena advocates in the play, and Hansberry vehemently supports. In Lena’s case, Hansberry, would like to warn all blacks against the dangers of submission. She wants them to have the stamina to decide and to go ahead and never retreat even if this would take them to a bloody confrontation, and this is what really happens sometime after Hansberry wrote her play. Commenting on Hansberry’s foresightedness, Whiton (1964) stated: “Indeed, she is ahead of the rest of the people who have written of Negro and white relations in our time” (p. 12). Hansberry would like to say if blacks do not admit defeat, their dreams will sooner or later come true.

As for whites’ non-violent reactions towards Lena’s attempts to achieve her dream and buy a house in an all-white-neighborhood, this attitude is represented in the character of Mr. Linder. This man seems keen on the benefit of the Youngers. However, when we delve into what lies deep inside him, it becomes obvious that he is heart and soul a racist. In actuality, he believes in blacks’ inferiority and whites’ superiority. He thinks that blacks do not fit for living among whites as they are going to contaminate the place and carry their bad habits and social diseases and spread them wide among whites. This man adopts the policy initiated a long time before him by Abraham Lincoln who freed blacks and abolished slavery but never believed in their equality to whites. Lincoln himself admits: “I am not, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races” (Hine, W. C. Hine, & Harrold, 2000, p. 219). The goal of such tendencies, as indicated by Hoy (1995), was “racial tolerance, not equality” (p. 118). So does Mr. Linder believe. To him, blacks are human beings but they are far more inferior to whites. Consequently, they are not by any means to be admitted into white neighborhoods.

In Hansberry’s play, Mr. Linder has been sent by the Clybourne Park Improvement Association to convince Lena not to move to the white neighborhood. He tells the Youngers that they are human beings and have the right to choose where to live. Nevertheless, for the benefit of both blacks and whites, they both should be separated and live apart to avoid any clashes that might ensue from the daily contacts among them both. He would like to say that they are segregating both blacks and whites and that is why the Youngers will not be welcomed, if admitted at all, into the white neighborhood. His view is vividly crystallized in his words:

... you have got to admit that a man, right or wrong, has the right to wants to have the neighborhood he lives in a certain kind of way. And at the moment the overwhelming majority of our people out there feel that people get a long better, take more of a common interest in the life of the community, they share a common background. I want you to believe me when I tell you that race prejudice simply doesn’t enter into it. It is a matter of the people in Clybourne Park believing, rightly or wrongly, as I say, that for the happiness of all concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their own communities (p. 466).

Linder’s words are thematically rich and when looked at superficially indicate one extreme, and when analyzed in depth indicate another. On the surface, they seem to be imbued with kindness, compassion, mercy and humaneness. The view that he explicitly states is that both blacks and whites should avoid any clashes; each should mind their own business. It is better for whites to live in an all-white neighborhood, and for blacks to live in an all-black-one. In so doing, the whole nation is going to live in peace and the bloody confrontation between whites and blacks can be avoided.

However, when his words are deeply ruminated, it can be easily discerned that this man represents the non-violent attitude manipulated by whites’ to resist blacks’ integration into their neighborhoods (Matthews, 2008, p. 556). This man is a racist in disguise. He knows well that the place wherein a human being lives denotes his social status and whereby his superiority, or inferiority, is decided. He knows well that all-white neighborhoods stand for superiority and all-black ones stand for inferiority. By achieving her dream and moving to an all-white area, Lena is going to gain some strength that can help her and other blacks protest against whites and accept degradation no more. In addition, he, like Lincoln, believes that if the Youngers are admitted, they are going to bring deterioration to the whole area. That is why he twists facts and states that blacks are happier when they live and are let alone and so are whites. It is whites who are happier when blacks are discriminated against and cornered in ghettos that do not fit human life.

Although he seems keen on blacks’ interest, Mr. Linder is an advocate of racism and plays a vital role in the long deferment, if not the utter hindrance, of Lena’s dream. He works hand in hand with those who advocate violence against blacks as their efforts necessarily lead to one and the same conclusion which is letting blacks crushed by abject poverty and cornering them in inhuman apartments. He fears that if blacks are to be admitted, intermarriages are inevitably to take place and the whole white race will be contaminated in the long run. This idea is explicitly stated in the words of Lena’s daughter-in-law, Ruth:

MAMA (sadly). Lord protect us.

RUTH. you should hear the money those folks raised to buy the house from us. All we paid and some more.

BENEATHA. What they think we going to do-eat’em?

RUTH. No, honey, marry’em

MAMA (shaking her head). Lord, Lord, Lord... (p. 468)

Beneatha, being young and not having seen the oppression and servitude that Mama and Ruth have been exposed to, cannot understand why Mr. Linder does not want them to move. Ruth, depending on her past experience tells her why. She implicitly points out that whites’ fear results from their firm belief that they are both mentally and physically superior to blacks. For whites, the Youngers represent dirtiness, commotion and other bad things that should not be conveyed to their community. That is why “the Clybourne Park Improvement Association offers to buy the house back at a significant profit for the Youngers” (Lund, 1989, p. 84). As for the mother, she is overwhelmingly sad to see her long-awaited for dream thwarted and fought by racism. However, what is noticeable is that she has become more and more determined and has decided to move despite whites’ threats, and that is why she asks God’s protection and support.

Hansberry was intelligent enough to illustrate in her play how Lena’s dream is sometimes hindered by other blacks, relatives and non-relatives alike, who are either too submissive and naïve or too dreamy and ambitious to the extent that their dreams conflict with those of other blacks. Both attitudes tease Hansberry most as she wants all blacks to get united to be able to defeat racism and get their dreams achieved. She thinks that submissiveness, passiveness and having conflicting dreams are the major forces that weaken blacks and thwart their dreams.

In *A Raisin in the Sun*, the first attitude is vividly incarnated in the character of Mrs. Johnson. This woman stands for those blacks who have accepted inferiority and started conducting their life that way. She is an “Uncle Tom”, the recurrent submissive and naïve black character in African American literature; an attitude that Hansberry explicitly denounces and firmly stood against as noted by Higashida (2008, p. 898). Mrs. Johnson is satisfied with her life and thinks that those blacks who dream and try to achieve their dreams are faulty and should stop acting as such. Thinking it is her moral obligation to advise Lena, she comes to dissuade her from pursuing her dream to avoid being killed:

JOHNSON. ... Lord – I bet this time next month y’all’s names will have been in the paper plenty – (*holding up her hands to mark off each word of the headline she can see in front of her*)
“NEGROES INVADE CLYBOURNE PARK – BOMBED!”

MAMA (She and Ruth look at the woman in amazement). We ain’t exactly moving out there to get bombed.

JOHNSON. Oh, honey – you know I’m praying to God every day that don’t nothing like that happen! But you have to think of life like it is – and these here Chicago peckerwoods is some baaaad peckerwoods. (p. 456)

Very apparent in the above lines is the effort Mrs. Johnson exerts to attract Lena’s attention to the catastrophe she will certainly cause to her family if she insists on moving. She holds up her hands to let them clearly see

the headline. Her profound terror can be clearly seen in the way she speaks and the lexical items she selects. The word “peckerwoods” is doubly meaningful as it is used to terrify the Youngers and, at the same time, to refer to whites’ dominant aggressiveness and mercilessness at that time. Stressing the dominance of whites’ violence against blacks trying to improve their living conditions and move to better places, Matthews (2008) stated: “In post-war Chicago, bombings, demonstrations, and assaults on blacks attempting to move east into predominantly white neighborhoods were on the rise (p. 556).” Important to note here is Lena’s reaction to this discouraging woman. She has given her a deaf ear and has decided to affirm her identity and move even if all the members of the family will be in jeopardy.

In this dialogue, Hansberry wants also to uncover and cynically criticize those blacks who are unconsciously united with whites to discourage and defeat other blacks. This woman is scared not because she herself is asking for utter freedom and equality but to see other blacks doing so as this, so she thinks, is going to stir whites’ indignation and resentment against all blacks. She thinks that Mrs. Younger, by deciding to move, harms and imperils not only her family but also the whole black community. Hansberry condemns such a type of people and considers them agents serving whites and doing blacks more harm than good. Hansberry’s view is that these people, instead of scaring and frustrating other blacks and deferring their dreams, should have encouraged and supported them. Had they done so, Hansberry thinks, blacks might have succeeded easier and earlier in the USA and their dreams might have been achieved.

Last but not least is that the deferment of blacks’ dreams sometimes comes from within the family members themselves. Sometimes the hindrance results from the members’ fears to support one another and some other times from having conflicting dreams. The shock and the move from one psychological state to another that Ruth and her husband Walter show when hearing the news that the mother has bought them a good house in Clybourne Park indicate this view:

RUTH. Where is it?

MAMA (*frightened at the telling*). Well – well it’s out there in Clybourne Park – (*Ruth’s radiance fades away abruptly, and Walter finally turns slowly to face his mother with incredulity and hostility*)

RUTH. Where?

MAMA (*matter-of-factly*). Four o six Clybourne Street, Clybourne Park.

RUTH. Clybourne Park? Mama, there ain’t no colored people living in Clybourne Park.

MAMA (almost idiotically). Well, I guess there’s going to be some now.

WALTER (bitterly). So that’s the peace and comfort you went out and bought for us today! (p. 451)

Most telling in the above extract are the stage directions.

When the mother is asked where the house she bought is located, she becomes “frightened”. This elucidates the fact that Lena, strong and determined as she is, cannot resist being overwhelmed by terror. However, she soon curbs such a feeling once she remembers the sublimity of her mission and the importance of having her identity affirmed and her dream achieved. The word “frightened” is also significant in that it refers to whites’ continuous racism. Hansberry wants to say that racism still widely exists and forbids blacks from fulfilling their dreams. She also wants to say that if blacks are to achieve these dreams, they have to confront whites even if they are going to get terrified at the beginning. This terror, Hansberry thinks, will vanish in time and blacks will manage to get their dreams achieved. If they are to let themselves be controlled by terror, they will continue to suffer and will not be able to achieve any of their dreams. That is why Lena never surrenders to terror and threats.

As for Ruth, she is taken by happiness and her cheek turns red when she knows that they are going to have a house of their own but soon this happiness and “radiance” fade away when she knows that the house is located in a white neighborhood. Her sudden change from one extreme to the other – ecstasy to terror and sadness – indicates nothing but the vast impact that racism have upon blacks and the role it plays in the long deferment of their dreams. Notwithstanding, Ruth has quickly attended to Hansberry’s instructions as she soon has control over her feelings and starts to support Lena heart and soul.

Regarding Walter’s reaction to the news, it deserves more consideration to bring to light how the total collapse of his dream has led him, with the help of his mother, to get utterly and positively transformed and, as a result restore his manhood and dignity. At first, he, as can be discerned from the above lines, is overcome by two mixed feelings: terror and bitterness. He thinks that his mother has bought them intense fear and ceaseless unrest instead of “peace and comfort”. He thinks also that he has the right to use the money to start a business instead of throwing themselves in the midst of a sea of troubles in an all-white neighborhood. In Walter’s case, Hansberry wants to advise blacks to have the physical and moral strength wherewithal to resist oppression and avoid having conflicting dreams among themselves as this impacts them negatively.

However, Walter represents the biggest obstacle in front of Lena as “the conflict is sharpest” (Wilkerson, 1986, p. 443), because his dream is totally different from hers. While his mother wants psychological peace and stability inside a house of their own, he wants richness and fame. Walter is totally dissatisfied with his life and thinks that money is the sole means by which he can change his life. The difference between Mama’s and Walter’s dreams is vividly concretized in this rather lengthy dialogue:

WALTER. ... I don’t know if I can make you understand.
MAMA. Understand what, baby?

WALTER (quietly). Sometimes it’s like I can see the future stretched out in front of me – just plain as day... Just waiting for me... (Pause. Kneeling beside her chair.) Mama – sometimes when I’m downtown and I pass them cool quiet-looking restaurants where them white boys are sitting back and talking about things ... sitting there turning deals worth millions of dollars ...

sometimes I see guys don’t look much older than me –
MAMA. Son, how come you talk so much about money?

WALTER (with immense passion). Because it is life, Mama?

MAMA (quietly). Oh – (Very quietly)... Once upon a time freedom used to be Life – now it’s money...

WALTER. No – it was always money, Mama. We just didn’t know about it.

MAMA. No... something has changed... In my time we was worried about not being lynched and getting to the North if we could and how to still alive and have a pinch of dignity too... now here come you and Beneatha – talking about things we ain’t never even thought about hardly, me and your daddy.

WALTER (a long beat. He pats her hand and gets up.). You just don’t understand Mama, you just don’t understand. (p. 439)

This long dialogue between Walter and his mother is very significant as it tells us about the nature of Walter’s dream on the one hand and the difference between this dream and that of his mother on the other. Walter thinks that affording the money to start a business represents the sole escape from the hellish life he has been leading as a chauffeur working for a very rich white man. Above, he is pondering the future and tells his mother that a prosperous one is waiting for him to grasp. It is the money whereby he can own the liquor store and in no time, and without tedious effort as he thinks, he is going to be as rich as, and perhaps richer than, the white guys of his age. Commenting on the difference between the young man and his mother, Matthews (2008) observed:

Unlike Mama, for whom life is “freedom”, Walter Lee Younger equates self-expression with material gain and wealth, and his aspirations mirror the segment of the post war black population who believe acquiring capital would ensure entrance into “good” society. (p. 559)

It is noticeable that Walter Lee, like other black young men, is influenced by the American Dream of accumulating prodigious amounts of money very quickly.

Hansberry’s voice is very loud as it severely criticizes black young men and the white community at large. As for black young men, they should not be too dreamy. To achieve their dreams, they should work hard and exploit each single minute in their lives. Hansberry, purposefully, intends that Walter fail in his business enterprise. He is cheated, swindled of his money and his “dreams, or hopes, have dried up” (Brown, 1974, p. 240). In so doing, the writer wants to tell black young people that money should not be looked at as an end in itself. It is good once it is going to be properly channeled and exploited to help other people and the community at large. However, if it is to be regarded as an end in itself, it will inevitably create struggles and troubles among blacks themselves and this is what happens in the under-analysis play. Money is

nothing when compared to dignity and integrity, things that Walter has not taken into consideration. The fact that Walter is cheated by a white young man is telling in that whites will not easily allow blacks succeed and live in the same way as whites do. It can be safely said that if Walter had not been swindled of his money, he would not have been able to succeed because he is living in a racist “capitalist economic system that necessarily excludes him from ascendancy” (Matthews, 2008, p. 559). In terminating Walter’s dream that way, whites are not also spared the blame. Looking at blacks as both mentally and physically inferior, they have deprived them of things that whites have access to.

If we would like to clarify in what aspects Walter’s dream is different from that of his mother, two important things should be seriously considered: the nature of their present jobs and their past experience. His mother has long been working as a domestic serving inside white people’s houses. This means that she regards herself inferior to whites and, consequently, conducts her life that way, and, simultaneously, does her best to affirm her identity, improve her life and that of her family. That is way buying the house, as it denotes the family’s stability, is a priority for her. She has never lost confidence because she has been dreaming reasonably. Regarding Walter, he works as a driver for a very rich white businessman, and this has given him the chance to move from one place to another and see things, people and places that his mother has never seen in her life. This has made him too much of a dreamer.

As clarified in Mama’s words, “freedom” not “money” used to mean life for this woman and her husband. In the past, they both used to toil on plantations from sunrise to sunset. Their biggest dream was to run away from the South to the North to avoid being lynched or killed at the hands of white racists. When they arrived in the North, they were discriminated against but this discrimination is bearable and far better than jeopardizing their life in the South. In short, living in a crowded apartment is luxurious when compared to toiling on plantations. That is why she is a little bit satisfied with her situation, dreams reasonably and exploits whatever affordable to her to affirm her identity and achieve her dream. She sees that even Walter should be satisfied with his life because he has “got a job, a nice wife, a fine boy” (p. 438), and other things from which blacks were deprived in the past.

However, Walter’s case is totally different. He was born in the North, and has never seen what his mother and father saw in the South. Since he was born, he has been living in the same small apartment and nothing has changed in his life. His wife works as a servant and his son does not find even a bed to sleep on and sleeps on the sofa instead. Being a chauffeur, Walter travels with his boss and sees how luxurious the life of whites is. That is why when he dreams he dreams much. Had he not been working as a driver for the white man, and had

he not been given the chance to compare, he might have been dreaming less imaginatively. In other words, if he had been working among blacks, his indignation and resentment might have been less and his dream might have been totally different. This does not by any means spare him the blame because he should have taken his potentialities into consideration. If we are to say that he is, in one way or another, justified because he has been taken by the American dream, he, still, should have rationalized his situation fully. He is a driver and has no experience in the world of business. He should have started a project that he knows about and can manage. To this we can add his disregard of his mother’s dream and giving a deaf ear to her advice not to buy a liquor store. That is why his dream totally collapses and his business venture is doomed to failure.

We have seen how generational differences between the mother and her son have dominated the scene and have created an atmosphere of misunderstanding. The mother has patience and stamina, and, as a result, does not easily fall victim to frustration. On the other hand, Walter, acting against his mother’s advice and lacking the experience in the world of business, is deceived and the money is taken from him, an act that leaves him an easy victim to frustration, indignation and resentment. It is at this moment that he decides to accept Mr. Linder’s offer to sell him back the house his mother has already bought to afford the money to save his dream from being thrown into the world of oblivion. Money for him is second to none. It is more important than identity, manhood, integrity and dignity.

Having seen that her son is not on the right track, the mother has devised a three-step strategy by which she can help Walter restore his manhood so as to be able to weigh and consider things properly. The first step is to blame him cruelly and remind him of his father and how he worn himself out to leave that money for them. She does so in an attempt to revitalize his dead conscience and to convince him that he has committed a fatal mistake when he acted against his mother’s advice. She, very expressively, states:

I seen... him...night after night...come in...and look at that rug...and look at me...the red showing in his eyes...the veins moving in his head...I seen him grow thin and old before he was forty...working and working and working like somebody’s old horse...killing himself...and you – you give it all in a day – (she raises her arms and strike him again.) (p. 474)

In the mother’s words, Hansberry manages to create a very gloomy atmosphere that fits what is going on. Both the mother and the son are frustrated. The mother cannot believe that what the father did in many years has been thrown away by the son in a single day. Life had been putting years on the father because of the agony and suffering he went through. This goes in accordance with Hansberry’s view that racism and life in ghettos have managed to reduce the age of African Americans as has

been previously stated. The mother thinks that all these things should have been considered by the son. However, the mother quickly recollects herself and ends her first step successfully and Walter gets painfully impacted.

Lena's second step in the strategy is to defend Walter against the attacks of the other members of the family. In so doing, she thinks that Walter is going to come to his senses and regain his lost manhood. This is clear in her response to her daughter when the latter attacks Walter for wasting her schooling money:

BENEATHA: He's no brother of mine.

MAMA: What you say?

BENEATHA: I said that the individual in the room is no brother of mine.

MAMA: ... You feeling like you better than he is today?...

BENEATHA: ... Wasn't it you who taught me to despise any man who would do that?...

MAMA: ... But I thought I taught you something else too... I thought I taught you to love him

BENEATHA: Love him? There is nothing left to love.

MAMA: There is always something left to love...when do you think is the time to love somebody the most? When the done good and made things easy for everybody? Well, then you ain't through learning – because that ain't the time at all. (p. 483)

The dialogue between the mother and the daughter is very telling in that it uncovers the real nature of the mother. Though Walter has been swindled of the money, she is taking his side at what she thinks is the most critical moment. Commenting on Lena's attitude in this part of the play, Lieberman (2011) stated: "... Lena Younger tells her daughter Beneatha that even though her brother has squandered the money that would have put her through medical school, she should still love him" (p. 207). Money for the mother is not the end of the world as it comes and goes. She thinks that there are other things that are more important than money is such as one's dignity and manhood. When these things are lost, a human being is of no worth even if he has money.

The mother tries, though implicitly, to attract her daughter's attention to the fact that "[T]he Younger family is weakest when it is a house divided against itself" and thus "the family loses its potency and its life" (Matthews, 2008, p. 567). Lena tries to teach her daughter, and the audience as well, a lesson as regards when to love people. The best thing to do is to support people when they are in trouble not when they are prosperous. When they are in crisis, you are to be beside them, try to find excuses for their wrong doings, and take into consideration the different hardships they have gone through. She sees that Walter has been victimized by the white community which has left him to be crushed either by the American dream which defines manhood in terms of money, or racism which has deprived blacks of their citizenship rights. Though she regrets the loss of their money, she is trying to find away out from the very psychological state Walter finds himself in. Having seen his mother taking his side after blaming him, the son has gained some confidence in

himself and the second step in her three-step strategy ends successfully.

The third step in her strategy is to help Walter come to his senses and weigh things properly. She is now sure that Walter will not change unless he is given the floor to have the hot confrontation with Mr. Linder who has come to negotiate buying back the house from Lena.

LINDER: ... Well, with whom do I negotiate? You Mrs Younger, or your son here....

RUTH: Travis, you go downstairs – MAMA (opening her eyes and looking into Walter's): No, Travis, you stay right here. And make him understand what you doing. You teach him good like Willy Harris taught you.... (Walter looks from her to the boy...) Go ahead son – (she folds her hands and closes her eyes.) Go ahead son. (p. 484)

Here, it is clear that Lena is intelligent enough to test Walter's manhood in front of his son Travis and is sure that Walter will excellently pass the test. She intentionally allows Travis attend the hot confrontation between his father and Mr. Linder as she is sure that a father does not like seeing himself defeated in front of his son. She orders Walter to teach his son a lesson and reminds him of big Walter to give him extra courage and stamina. She wants him also to teach Mr. Linder that blacks are not to accept degradation and humiliation no more, and that they have the right to decide where to live.

Lena has exerted her utmost effort to make Walter feel that manhood, dignity and pride in one's origins are much more important than money is. Her-three-step strategy has come to fruition as we see a completely changed character conversing with Mr. Linder with confidence, pride and even scornful looks at the man. Even Mr. Linder is quite sure that Walter has changed and begins to address him use the lexical item "Mr. Younger" instead of "your [Lena's] son" at the start of the meeting. Lena's success in helping her son gain integrity and restore manhood is very obvious as we see Walter weigh things correctly. For the new and improved Walter, being proud of his father, who represents his origin and black identity, is better than accumulating prodigious amounts of money: "My father almost *beat a man to death* once because this man called him a bad name or something, you know what I mean?" (p. 485). Mr. Linder, stunned and terrified, cannot get Walter's message: "(looking up, frozen): No, no, I'm afraid I don't" (p. 485). Walter tells him exactly what he means: "... what I mean is that we come from people who had a lot of *pride* – we are very proud people." (p. 485). Commenting on Walter's words, Lund (1989) has emphasized that "Walter's pride will not allow him to capitulate to whites who want to dictate where he and his family should live" (p. 84). The change in Walter's character can be easily seen.

Being an expert dramatist, Hansberry is keen on crystallizing that Lena's efforts have been crowned with fruition. Walter has learned that a man without a past cannot prosper at the present or even in the future. That

is why he begins to see that the past, the present and the future as indivisible. As a result, he focuses on his son Travis and “draws” him closer as he represents the continuity of their lineage. Though he badly needs the money to start a business to make his son Travis lead a happy and comfortable life, he does not want the money once it will be at the expense of his manhood and dignity. The utter transformation that has happened to Walter is very clear in the way he has concluded his speech with Mr. Linder:

WALTER: (Signaling to Travis) Travis, come here. (Travis crosses and Walter draws him before him facing the man.) This is my son and he makes the sixth generation our family in this country. And we have all thought about your offer –

LINDER: Well, good...good –

WALTER: And we have decided to move into our house because my father – My father – he earned it for us brick by brick.... We don’t want your money. (p. 485)

It is clear in this extract that the collapse of Walter’s venture, or rather his dream, has caused him, with the help of his mother, to become a totally different man. Previously, he was totally self-centered ignoring the dreams and needs of the other members of the family and thinking exclusively about his materialistic personal gains. Now, he forgets all about such selfish things and takes into account all the members of the family. That is why he uses the lexical items “we”, “all” and “our” that indicate collectivity, intimacy, altruism and love and denigrate self-centeredness. Here, Hansberry wants to say, as argued by Parks (1995) that “group identity with the culture and the family are historically significant tools of survival for black people (Matthews, 2008, p. 575). That is why Walter has changed and is firmly attached to his origin and to the other members of the family. He tells the man that they have decided to move to the house they have bought in the all-white neighborhood despite being aware that this will cause them a lot of troubles. He is not ready to jeopardize, in return for money, what his father had tirelessly worked for. Defeated and frustrated, Mr. Linder appeals to the mother to interfere and her reply is even more frustrating: “My son said we were going to move and there ain’t nothing left for me to say” (p. 485). She has told Mr. Linder that Walter is the man and he has taken the decision to move to their new house. Lena is happy to see that she has succeeded in changing the character of her son Walter.

As has been pointed out, we have seen how the issue of blacks’ dreams has been uniquely and differently dealt with. The concentration has been placed on Lena’s dream, that of her son Walter and the difference between the two dreams. While the mother has long been dreaming of having a house in a good neighborhood, her son has been dreaming of being a businessman. It has been elucidated how the dream of the mother has been deferred because of financial and racial causes, and the dream of the son has completely collapsed as he has been

swindled of his money by his white friend. Moreover, it has been clarified how the mother has never admitted defeat and has firmly been clinging, both emotionally and physically, to the achievement of her dream. In so doing, she has managed to affirm her identity. On the contrary, the son was destabilized by the collapse of his dream. However, his mother has gradually managed to help him get re-stabilized. The young man has become aware that manhood, dignity and pride in one’s ancestors are highly more important than financial gains are. Thus, dreams have been deferred and sometimes collapsed altogether, but identity has been affirmed and manhood and dignity have been restored.

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