Chapter Five

Adventure and Choice

The struggle for identity is a major issue in the modern century. Identity of a person is never stable. It always undergoes changes. Lack of self knowledge and a sense of non identity fill a person with self hate. A person with a satisfactory self will not try to escape from the real life experience.

Both Baldwin and Lorraine Hansberry were actually aware of the conditions of the blackman in America. When a Negro begins to believe in the white myth of the black man, self hatred, hostility, and alienation result and these drive him to take revenge on himself and the world at large Baldwin and Hansberry tried to break the racial barriers between blacks and whites and tried to create self awareness among blacks by presenting their experiences and observations through their books. Lorraine Hansberry and James Baldwin belong to two different periods. There are a number of similarities and glaring differences between Baldwin and Hansberry. Their backgrounds, the influences on them, the type of social life they embraced, their political ideologies and their approach to writing are highly dissimilar. At the same time through their plays they also reveal a shared vision. Blacks must struggle together to secure political, social and economic gains. There is a conscious effort on the part of these dramatists to improve the conditions of blacks in America. They have very definite and similar views about racism, poverty, education, politics and sexism.
The worlds that James Baldwin and Lorraine Hansberry have created in their plays are very much a product of the worlds out of which they themselves have come. What they have presented in their plays is an extension of the view points or perspectives which are distinctively and inextricably black. Their own personal struggles are mirrored in their plays. Their plays are concerned with the aspirations and frustrations of blacks and the characters in their dramas play some what parallel roles within the family and the larger society. Both these authors raise questions about African heritage, education, housing and marital relationships. These similarities suggest some congruence in atleast the dramatic image of the black family in America. Their plays reveal the potency of American dream for black families while simultaneously showing that the dream evokes frustration and confusion for many black people. In their plays there are black characters who demand chances for comfort and prosperity as anyone else in the United States. Their characters hope that good, honest labour will bear security as its fruit. Another similar aspect in the plays of these dramatists is that the values and life styles their characters embrace or aspire are distinctly middle class and racial barriers put them in financial and occupational limits. This situation prevents upward mobility and tend to push them increasingly into the lower class.

Both James Baldwin’s and Lorraine Hansberry’s attitudes towards American race problem can be analysed in relation to their childhood, early education, religion and bitter personal experiences during their life time. No incident, no passion in Baldwin’s life is wasted. Everything is salvaged into
the fabric of a novel, a play, a short story or an essay. He translated the mass
agony of the black Americans into an individual experience, his experience.
Baldwin is a self made man in the most comprehensive sense of the phrase. He
was the grandson of a slave and the stepson of a Southern Harlem Preacher. He
was deeply affected by his father’s bitterness. When James Baldwin was a
High school student in Harlem he had a brief conversation with his father that
he later recalled as “the one time in all our life together we had really spoken to
each other” [Standley, Critical Essays 241]. He was utterly contemptuous of his
father’s world view. His relationship to his father had turned out to be a love –
hate relationship. He lacked a right father figure. The rebellious adolescent,
troubled son in Baldwin was due to the ugliness, poverty and miserable
material surroundings of his father’s house. Baldwin loved his mother. But he
was sad when his mother who loved him deeply had to share her time, for him
with other children. It is the lack of love and communication with his parents
that drove Baldwin to search it in others in order to prove to himself that he
was wanted by somebody. His homosexual relations shows a negative identity.
To this phenomenon Erikson gives the following explanation, “…before genital
maturity is reached, much of sexual life is of the self seeking, identity – hungry
kind, each partner is really trying only to reach himself” [Erikson, Identity
137]. So Baldwin’s experience is of course specific, but it is hardly unique.

Lorraine Hansberry was different. She was an outsider. She was a
member of the upper middle class family. Her parents gave her a white fur coat
even in the middle of the Depression. Except for a period in New York she
lived in privileged. Circumstances all her life. She was a member of a proud, ancient race. The Hansberry’s were wealthy, benevolent and kind. She had inherited the natural drive and talent of her remarkable family. She gained confidence and renewed zest for life from her father Carl Hansberry. He was rightfully a proud man with an educated soul. He was a gifted personality. Her mother was a former teacher. Influenced by her mother Lorraine took special interest in her community. Her sister Mamie Hansberry was an ideal sister to her. She sought to collect one among the serious problems of her generation, the lack of commitment because of the committed life led by her sister. Lorraine Hansberry remained an outsider in the white upper middle class because of her blackness, she was an outsider in the black community because of her affluence and education.

The sense of insecurity and the lack of love from family were the reason for Baldwin’s ambivalence that filled his life by his double role as a black man. The two selves operating within Baldwin generated in him, in early life, self hatred, an admiration for whiteness and severe hatred for the white people. But on the other hand Hansberry had the good fortune to enjoy an unusually privileged childhood. She was not the product of a broken family as is usual with Negro families and it had strong financial background. She speaks of her childhood days with great concern and love. A person’s identity formation and development begins with his relation with family. Hansberry’s family helped in the development of positive identity elements in her. Usually Negro mothers not fathers took greater care of their children. It was from her mother
Hansberry learnt to look beyond class distinctions. Hansberry defines the influence of her parents and race in the following way,

My parents taught me among other “Vague absolutes” that they were the products of the proudest and mistreated of the races of men. Above all there were two things which were never to be betrayed …. the family and the race.…. [Hansberry, To Be Young 48]

Lorraine Hansberry grew with a strong sense of self and African-American identity because of her blessed childhood days and support from the family. Baldwin’s was a life of non-identity in childhood because of the miserable family background usually seen in a Negro family.

Both Baldwin and Hansberry had an encouraging school atmosphere. Baldwin’s teachers inspired him to achieve perfection. He was encouraged and appreciated by his teachers for his intelligence. His school Principal and his white teacher Orrin Miller who displayed no trace of racial prejudice became his role models. From a very young age itself Hansberry displayed her talents for writing. Both Baldwin and Hansberry were willing to be instructed, guided and to be corrected. They were good observers, listeners and learners. Their talents were appreciated and valued by their teachers and classmates. But it was with great difficulty that Baldwin completed his school, but Hansberry was blessed with facilities for higher education. She gained confidence through her studies. She had a very good library at home and her parents provided her with all facilities. In Baldwin’s case, he had to devote the very little time he got free
from household duties, for his reading and writing, unnoticed by his stepfather. Negro society around him could not approve such intellectual pursuits on the part of a Negro boy, because they believed that such things were harmful for their community.

Baldwin and Hansberry were influenced by many other writers. Both of them were influenced by Richard Wright, Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, Frederick Douglass and Langston Hughes. They were indebted to many other American and European writers. Henry James had a powerful influence upon James Baldwin not only on his personal life, but also in his literary career. In his art and in his life he followed Henry Jame’s theories and his specific themes. After an interview with James Baldwin, David Adams Leeming has stated how deeply Baldwin valued his connection with Henry James.

In everything that he said in those conversations and those lectures between, it was clear that his relationship with James was of a very special sort, perhaps of the sort that existed between James and Balzac. James was his standard – the writer he thought of when he thought of the heights to which the novelist’s art might aspire. [The Black Scholar Interview 40]

Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, Paul Robeson, William Leo Hansberry, Frederick Douglass were some of the eminent personalities who influenced Hansberry. It was from W.E.B. Du Bois she gained an admiration for the black intellectual, Socialism and black leadership. It was from Frederick Douglass Hansberry
learned about slavery and its psychology. Probably the single most important artistic influence on Hansberry was Langston Hughes.

Religion played a dominant role in the lives of James Baldwin and Hansberry. For Baldwin religion was basic to his writing. The bitter experience of fear and anguish he experienced during his early life, especially from his stepfather who frightened him so much that no man had ever frightened him since, made him move to the church as a refuge and escape. Baldwin says:

The summer, in any case, all the fears with which I had grown up, and which were now a part of me and controlled my vision of the world, rose up like a wall between the world and me, and drove me into the church. [The Fire 38]

Baldwin’s escape into church was because of socio-historical reasons and he left the church at the age of nineteen. So his search for identity through religion was only tentative. But in the case of Hansberry religion constituted the historical, social, emotional and spiritual centre of black life. She found meaning and commitment within the organized religion.

Baldwin’s attitude towards his African ancestry is ambiguous and is directly connected with his views on sin. Africa embodies for him the “dark” mysterious, and the “sinful” past of the blacks. His early position is characterized by self-hate. He despised blacks and believed that the blacks were a race without culture, a conviction he abandoned only in later years. Baldwin’s weakness is primarily due to his incapacity to be single minded. He wavers, hesitates, and is a “bundle of contradictions”. As a Black writer
Baldwin “has always been drawn in two apparently mutually incompatible directions” (Bigsby’ “The Divided Mind” 95). Baldwin’s works contain the most grueling agonizing, total hatred of the blacks, particularly of himself, the most shameful, fanatical, fawning, sycophantic love of the whites that one can find in the writings of any black American writer. Baldwin ‘the man’ is not fully released from his ‘self destroying limbo’ of experiences which paves the way for the emergence of Baldwin the artist. He is completely lost when asked to look backward to his origins in Africa. Here is a conversation he had with a black Jamaican.

“He asked me where I was from and I said I was born in Newyork. He said, “yes”, but where are you from? I did not know what he meant, “where did you come from before that”? he explained. I said “my mother was born in Maryland… [and] may father was born in New Orleans”. He said “yes, but where are you from? Then I began to get it, very dimly because now I was lost. And he of the American Negro comes out of these extreme situation…” [qtd. Standley, Critical Essays 58].

Baldwin’s realization of these self destructive hatred, in later life, encouraged him to convert that rage into art, though he miserably failed to achieve it on many occasions.

Hansberry had a strong sense of African American identity. When her parents sent her to school in a white ermine coat her white classmates welcomed her with fists, curses and inkwells. Hansberry understood their
hostility towards her, but she respected their courage and their fight, and soon made close friendship with the very children who had destroyed her coat. She appreciated the many links between Africans and African Americans. Hansberry was fascinated by and delighted in and could indeed be said to have glorified black culture and the black experience. She refused to make distinctions between people on the basis of colour, but did make distinctions on the basis of attitudes about colour. The influence of DuBios is most evident in her in the concepts of double and merged consciousness. DuBois wrote that consciousness of imprisoned people might take three forms, a state rebellion and revenge, a state of double consciousness, in which one tries to adopt the consciousness of ruling people and merged consciousness, in which one successfully mixes one’s cultural history and one’s present situation to achieve self realization. [Du Bois, Souls 1-2]. Double consciousness is a result of trying to recontextualize oneself, to lose one’s own history which is impossible, and to adopt, some one else’s history and culture without any opportunity for complete entry and privilege in that culture; Merged consciousness allows the person to reach a new equilibrium, bringing the past into one’s journey through the present. It is described by DuBios as a tool for an imprisoned people.

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, thing longing…. To merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America …. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism…. He simply
wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an
American. [Souls, DuBois 2]

So Hansberry had a firm belief in the power of her racial past. She tried to create her personal identity and discover her true self by respecting her culture and her people’s past.

Baldwin’s power as a writer lies in his ability to weave the deeply autobiographical with political and social. For him the personal is never just personal, and political never just political. When Baldwin speaks of beauty, a particular undertone of yearning reminds us of the ugly child in Harlem ghetto. His encounters with Negro churches or Black Muslims are the aspects of his lost self, the child who wandered in Harlem, whose little boy he was. His weakness centers around his difficulty in seeing his characters plainly but through the distorted lenses of his self pity and self love. Hansberry is totally different from Baldwin in this aspect. No direct autobiographical similarity can be found in Hansberry’s works.

As a writer Baldwin often assumes the role of a prophet, priest and a revelator. He often uses terms like redemption, damnation, sinner, soul, redeemed etc. His experience as a Baptist minister in a storefront church is often reflected in his works. Assumption of the priestly role is always preceded by an extraordinary experience of suffering, often symbolized in Baldwin’s work by the death of a child. Thus in The Amen Corner Sister Margaret becomes a storefront church evangelist after giving birth to a dead child. In Baldwin’s moving story, Sonny’s Blues the Jazzman is portrayed as a priest. In
Baldwin's novel *Giovanni’s Room* the hero is a true priest. For a priest is nothing but a journeyman in suffering. This is a crucial distinction for all of Baldwin’s work, i.e., the clergy who are intimate with pain. But Hansberry never attempts to preach or teach through her writings.

Baldwin and Hansberry admired Martin Luther King. Baldwin loved him deeply and respected his non-violent resistance. But Hansberry sometimes advocated revolutionary tactics. “Negroes must concern themselves with every single means of struggle; legal, illegal, passive, active, violent and non-violent… They must… sit in, lie down, strike, boycott, sing hymns, pray on steps and shoot from their windows when racists come through their communities” [Hansberry, To Be Young 22]. Basically, however, she remained an “intellectual revolutionary” as in *Les Blancs*.

In Baldwin’s and Lorraine Hansberry’s works the white liberals are the special targets for criticism. In *Blue for Mister Charlie* Baldwin was dealing with the raw, brute, objective facts of the white man’s barbarity towards black people in America. Parnell James in *Blues* is the editor of a liberal local paper. He is portrayed as a barbarious, unmitigated bigot. At one time in the play, Parnell James confesses his deep sexual involvement with a Negro woman. To talk about the white man’s sexual fears and guilt is to strike him in the most vulnerable corner’s of his ego. And he loses all rationality, all objectivity. Baldwin hits white America between the eyes and doesn’t apologize for doing so Baldwin presents white man’s fears, anxieties, but along with that he stresses white man’s guilt feelings. By doing so Baldwin, as a Negro writer,
expresses the anger of American Negroes against the whites. In scene iii of Act II of the play *A Raisin in the Sun* Hansberry introduces the play’s only white character Karl Linder. It is set up with humour and deliberately ironic juxtapositions. Only a moment before the door bell rings, Walter is imitating Beneatha, suggesting that at some future time she will be learning over a patient on the operating table, asking, “By the way, what are your views on Civil Rights down there”? [Raisin 93]. They laugh and we laugh as Beneatha goes to the door to allow the surprising entrance of a middle-aged white man in business attire. The white man introduces himself as Karl Linder, chairman of a “sort of welcoming committee” from the neighbourhood into which the youngsters are about to move. Linder’s verbal and physical awkwardness and the deliberate vagueness of his language warn the audience from the start that this man’s intentions are suspect. Linder has come to the youngsters to buy their new house from them at a profit for the family inorder to keep black people out of the neighbourhood. Hansberry makes Linder’s presentation of his mission dramatically ironic because the younger family defeats the “rational” core of Linder’s argument. His central point is that people are happier when they live in community in which the residents share a “common background” and from his viewpoint, “Negroes” and whites obviously do not have that common background. But just before he articulates this conclusion, Hansberry has Linder describe his community in a way for the audience should clearly appear as a striking parallel to what it knows of the behaviour and desires of the Youngers. “They’re not rich and fancy people, just hardworking, honest people
who don’t really have much but those little homes and a dream of the kind of community they want to raise their children in”. [Raisin 97]. One might laugh at how well Linder disapproved his own point about “difference in background” were it not for the fact his bigoty will harm others, will create pain and difficulty for people like Youngers. Youngers firmly evict the man from the house. Even if the White spectator had privately shared Linder’s rationalized prejudices, Linder’s dishonesty should provoke disgust at his behaviour and applause for Walter Lee’s unhesitant refusal. Here black spectator might feel fear for the Youngers, since black spectators know what whites have done to the homes of blacks who moved into white neighbourhoods. Hansberry’s purpose, however, seems less to arouse fear in black spectators than to provoke a recognition in white spectators. The white audience needs to see Linder to know he is despicable, the black audience may have assumed that possibility.

Stereotypes of blacks abound in American literature. Even Faulkner’s magnificent Dilsey in The Sound and the Fury is too selfless, too controlled to be fully believable. Americans have fantasized about black people “this image of the unharrassed, unconcerned, glandulatory, simple, rhythmical, amoral, dark creature who was, above all, a miracle of sexuality” [To Be Young Gifted and Black 209] White readers find stereotyped blacks a “pressure valve for fanciful longings” [To Be Young, Gifted 209] and a repository for their repressions and suppressions. Moreover black women have usually been considered either strong, heroic, hardworking or sensual, lazy and promiscuous. Never are they
merely human. Black men are “shiftless”, “prize bucks” or “upstarts”. Baldwin and Hansberry succeeded in erasing these pale imitations from the stage and replace them with living human beings.

Another significant factor in Baldwin and Hansberry is the universality of the black experience and universality of art. Their universalism grow out of a deep, complex encounter with the specific terms of human experience as it occurs for blacks, whites and many other groups of people. They believed that a look into oneself would reveal his relationship to other human beings of the world. Thus Baldwin uses the black man to show the white man what he himself is and there by “his artistic achievement mesh with his historical circumstances” in genuinely visible revolution [Standley 9]. It was as a result of the discovery of his blackness, that Baldwin could get over from the state of a fear ridden, hungry black boy full of hatred to the world, to the level of a great writer and a spiritual reformer for the people of his country. In moulding believable characters Hansberry believed that the writer should begin with precise details. In an interview she said “In order to create the universal, you must pay great attention to the specific. Universality, I think emerges from truthful identity of what is” (128). In a Raisin in the Sun, she told people “that not only is this a Negro family… but it’s not even a New York or a Southern Negro family. It is specially South side Chicago” [To Be Young, Gifted 128]. Hansberry and Baldwin emphasized the significance of a person’s past and culture in the development of his self and identity. They asserted that the search for creating a free self in the case of a blackman should begin with the assertion
of his black identity. So they recommend to their country men a turn to their own selves which would gradually drive home to them the universality of human experience.

Baldwin dismissed capitalism and Communism as a means of saving the country. He did not appreciate Black Nationalism as they demanded a complete separation from the main current of American life. But Hansberry was generally Marxist in her view on life and art. Hansberry’s view of the nature of the hero Sidney Brustein is a prime example. She did not make all her heroic protagonist peasants or revolutionary ideologues, she did make them ahead of their time accelerating the movement of history once they attain a certain level of understanding and capacity for action. Her fellow artist, Lonne Elder, commented “Lorraine has discovered, as we all have at one time or another, that honest involvement with the Marxist-Leninist experience is awesome and unforgettable”. [Elder Lonnie, Freedom Ways, 213-18]. Her world view combined a commitment to black liberation with an equally fierce commitment to demise of capitalism. It is better to say she was a black nationalist with a socialist perspective. She believed that the road to socialism is through national liberation, just as the literary road to universality is through local identity. Baldwin in later life displayed a tendency to advocate the policies adopted by Black Nationalists especially Black Muslims.

Baldwin believed that a black man’s identity can be shaped only in America. He disowned his relationship to Africa. He traced his roots to the American South where his parents were born. But Hansberry respected her
African past. She glorified African culture, life style and black experience. But she never hesitated to oppose anyone of any colour who supported racism or to join forces with anyone who actively opposed it. She also regarded herself unequivocally and inextricably as a black, an American and a world playwright. The awareness of self made her realize the limitations of blacks. She believed in the power of Negro people. Black man can gain a better self by respecting his African culture, colour and values. Instead of surrendering and suffering they should develop confidence, they should understand their potentials.

Both Baldwin and Hansberry recommended love as the cure for the moral blindness and lack of identity of his country men. Baldwin believed in ‘love’ and equated it with “grace” as both means and ends of greater human understanding- Baldwin reveals the elevating power of love. The object of his quest, the love in which he continues to believe, is an active, positive force with the potential to effect a transformation in the lives of man. It is “something more like fire, like the wind, something which can change you. I mean energy. I mean a passionate belief, a passionate knowledge of what a human being can do, and become, what a human being can do to change the world in which he finds himself” [qtd in Louis Pratt, James Baldwin 21]. The implications of love are vast. Loving means removing the mask, exposing one’s psyche to the stark, cold reality which has long been buried in the vault of one’s subconscious. One can never attain selfhood in isolation from humanity, one must be willing to pay the price, unmask one’s illusions and
inhibitions, and face the terrors of these revelations. Baldwin’s characters find their real self by mingling with others and by giving due recognition to the individuality of others. For Hansberry men and women attain their potential by consciously asserting their will in the world around them. When the Younger’s family in the play *A Raisin* began to make allowances to each other, understand each other, they were able to recognize the hypocrisy of the whites. They join together with dedication and love to fight against hypocrisy. Instead of shrinking inside they exhibit themselves against vice. It is clear that Hansberry’s focus is not on a single family, but on the whole of the black race.

Baldwin and Hansberry were at opposite extremes in many things, the operative forces that spurred them were the same. They worked against the moral sickness of their countrymen. They saw search for identity as a typical American problem. Unaware of their origin, their identity blacks have fabricated an image of themselves, and they have tried desperately to fashion their life in accordance with that image. They think that it is important to be white and think it is a shame to be black. They are unable to repress their inner anxiety resulting from the compulsive urge to discover their identity. Hansberry also believed that the nature of the American society is the main factor that prevented blacks from knowing who they are. American society pushes the blacks into a state of dependency. Blacks are forced to accept poverty, ignorance and a second class citizenship. In fact the blacks were degraded, dehumanized and finally victimized and destroyed by white colonists before emancipation and by new authorities after emancipation. He is forced to learn
western culture. He lacks identity American society, has granted very little opportunity to blacks to develop and grow. So both Baldwin and Hansberry urged the whites to see the reality of black life and recognize the self and humanity of black man.

Hansberry and Baldwin were fully aware of the responsibility of Negro writers to their own people and to their country men. In the words of Steven R. Carter “Hansberry saw uncommon possibilities in the common tongue and pushed her writing simultaneously toward a heightened sense of reality and its transcendence in the direction of the ideal” [Carter 38]. She wanted the whites to reconsider the standards used to judge and dismiss the black Community. She is not for a race but for humanity as a whole. Her hatred is not towards men but the injustice inflicted by some on many. She believed that the function of the artist was to effect a change towards a human ideal by the presentation of reality. To Hansberry, the artist had not only a clear responsibility to present truth but even clearer commitment to create and maintain hope for the honourable future, a time free of the exploitative relationship which presently disables so many human beings. As a black writer Baldwin believed that “the public life and the private life are an invisible whole” and artist must present the existential knowledge of experience to man by means of a personal perspective. [Fred L Standley 15]. Baldwin wanted the writer to bear witness to life and its possibilities and free men of their illusions.

Like other black male writers Baldwin also dealt with the black male experience in America pointing only sketchy or uninteresting portraits of black
women. Baldwin’s women appear conceptually limited figures as measured by the standards drawn by the fundamentalist church, as such they view themselves as wives, mothers, sisters and lovers. No woman character is ultimately so acceptable to Baldwin that she is to be viewed as equal to the male characters. Baldwin’s women are placed “in a supportive serving position in relation to the males and male images in their lives” [Standley 28]. In Hansberrys plays black women remain integral to theme of each work. She portrayed black women in real terms not as perverted character of some one’s nightmare. To Hansberry woman is in possession of full human nature and perfectly equal with man in moral values and status. She explodes the wrong image of woman, projected by the male writers. Incidentally the theatre has been to Lorraine Hansberry a sort of stimulant to saturate certain highly and rare reaction and natural responses to racial issue between the black and white, to fulfill the urge to write and defend the female cause. Hansberry is aware that traditional definitions of woman are incomplete and woman suffer because of such a wrong image. Lorraine Hansberry remains a staunch feminist advocate. She is not a defender of persecuted women. She does not view the suffering women from the narrow view of a black woman witnessing the angst and misery of women. On the other hand it is as a human being she studies woman suffering and by extension human suffering.

Lena Younger in _A Raisin in the Sun_ easily fits Hansberry’s description of a strong woman who is the back bone of her people. She is very anxious to pass on to her children and grand children the values she has held in common
with her husband. She is strong in the belief of her God and she loves her family, she teaches them self respect, pride and human dignity. Sister Margaret in James Baldwin’s *The Amen Corner*, on the other hand, struggles to protect her son, from destruction which she believes awaits anyone foolish enough to emulate her husband. Lena Younger feels that she must recreate the father for her children. Margaret is dedicated to expelling any memory of her husband from her son’s mind, failing to do this, she is determined at least to debase that memory. Lena draws strength from religion and her conduct affirms the worth of a life of love and consideration for others. This is in direct contrast to Margaret who corrupts religion and creates a church which is removed from the reality of life – a place in which one can hide from commitment to the struggle which full living entails. While Lena remembers life with her husband as a rewarding struggle by two people sustained by love and trust, Margaret looks back in guilt at her early experiences with her husband. She sees her youthful love and sexual desire for him as the result of evil, destructive forces in the world. Lena remembers a life of sharing, Margaret remembers being forced to struggle alone. Hansberry’s father is an absent member, a memory kept alive by his wife. Baldwin appears to challenge the distortions of memory which threaten the lives of his wife and son. Unlike Lena, Margaret fears living freely, and is also tragically incapable of risking love. For her, both roads are lined with snares and she has determined not to risk but rather to retreat in the face of obstacles. So Hansberry’s women possess great moral strength. Beneatha and Ruth are other examples. They often look to the future with optimism. In all of
her writings, Hansberry speaks strongly and persuasively about the role of black women. Woman, like man, is a gift of world” [qtd in Margaret Wilkerson 244]. Baldwin’s females characters, though good and beautiful never possess the courage and strength similar to that of Hansberry’s characters. Hansberry presents female characters as the embodiment of all energy and creation. In a radio interview with Studs Terkel in 1959, Hansberry observed “that obviously the most oppressed group of any oppressed group will be its women and that when they are twice oppressed” they often become “twice militant”. [qtd in Carter 160] Actually, of course, Hansberry’s whole way of life was a repudiation of the limitations that society has tried to place on women. Instead of seeking fulfillment in the traditional, limiting roles of homemaker, mother, pillar of the church, and sexual toy, she sought it in areas in which men did – in artistic creation, in intellectual speculation, in political struggle, in public speaking and in the pursuit of about all aspects of life. She peopled her dramas, with many powerful female characters whose strength was like that of their creator.

Lorraine Hansberry’s male characters are multidimensional figures who are admirable in many respects, who struggle valiantly against a variety of personal and social pressures. Consider Walter Lee Younger in A Raisin in the Sun. His maturing into manhood includes not only a gathering of his own strength to fight racist system but also a recognition of the strengths and talents of women. Sidney Brustein in The Sign in Sidney Burstein’s Window is an extraordinarily sensitive Jewish liberal who cares deeply about the sufferings of
others, who strongly opposes all forms of social and political oppression, and who displays concern to the point of meddling daily in the lives of those around him. His sister’s suicide is crucial to Sidney’s development since it leads him to see how his male–supremacist fantasizing has harmed his wife. Sidney is reflective enough to understand what has been done to Gloria and the reason that she killed herself, and he realizes that he, like Alton and Gloria’s clients, has caused immeasurable damage by upholding a false concept of women. He also realizes that he must free himself from all such concepts and see his wife as the individual she is, if their marriage is to be preserved. At the same time, he decides that he must take a stand against the drug pushing that helped to destroy the seventeen year old boy and Gloria, and he finds that his wife wishes to be an ally in this struggle. The full complexity of Hansberry’s view of men is revealed in her portrayal of Alton Scales. Like Walter Lee, Asagai and Sidney, Alton is a character with many admirable and sympathetic traits. Rev. Neilsen in *Les Blancs* is modelled on Albert Schweitzer. He possess all of Schweitzer’s wonderful accomplishments and qualities. Perhaps the definite choice concerning women is made by Tshembe Matoseh in *Le Blancs*. Through these and through other equally complex and credible male characters, Hansberry makes a more moving and more disturbing case against man’s oppression of woman than if she had created male villains with no redeeming traits. She shows all too clearly and painfully the manifold ways in which the doctrine of male supremacy can damage the characters of even the most sensitive, intelligent, and heroic females – and males – in our society. Conversely, she
argues that in Sidney Brustein’s words, “people wanna be better than they are” [The Sign 317]; that men and women can change, become partners in struggle, and develop a society that nurtures equality. Baldwin’s male characters, always “seem groping from immense loneliness” [Standley 9] in search of love. They give too much importance to sex and love. But at the same time they are straightforward, realistic, aggressive and masculine.

Baldwin’s and Hansberry’s plays evoke sufficient interest from the point of view of dramatic and literary techniques. The action, characterization, dialogue and language all contribute to the total meaning of their plays. The setting of their plays provides proper background to the development of the action and growth of various characters.

Hansberry’s plays fit within the bounds of a realistic well made play which contains a coherent plot, elaborate characterization, interesting complications and climaxes by means of which dramatic interest is consistently maintained. She observes the unities of action, place and time. Majority of the characters in her plays are round characters. Hansberry’s greatness rests on putting the apt words in the mouth of her right characters. She is adept in handling the speech patterns of her more educated black characters. She considers African – American music as a central part of African – American culture. Hansberry’s treatment of spirituals, jazz, blues and other aspects of African culture proves this point. As the embodiment of courage and strength spirituals play a prominent role in the life of her characters Group ties and a sense of group belongingness become a special feature of Hansberry’s,
characters. Family occupies a supreme position in her plays. Influence of family upon Hansberry is clearly evident in many parts of her plays.

Family and church play a significant role in Baldwin’s plays. His inability to capture the dramatic form is evident in his plays. The plays have no direct plot. *Blues of Mr. Charlie* is made even complicated by a number of fluctuations. There are fluctuations in at least three major aspects of the production, time, locale and acting style. The crude monologues of the third act of *Blues of Mr. Charlie*, highlight, however, the difficulty of the novelist turned playwright. He denied opportunities of character development. A kind of ‘freezing’ of action can be noticed during the time in which the character’s inner struggle is fully brought out. But at the same time his characters have the same kind of depth and complexity with which the characters in his novels are endowed. A sense of group belongingness is absent among his characters. But they are aware of their problems in the society and appear with a will to survive that gives them their particular identity. The prose style of the play is elegant, has it own rhythm and is also precise. Baldwin used as many simple words as possible so that none faces any difficulty in understanding them. Characterization especially of Sister Margaret, Luke and David in *The Amen Corner* is very realistic, for it throws light on the socio historical factors incapacitating black man, black youth and black women. Like Hansberry Baldwin also gives much importance to black music. Music is the medium through which Baldwin achieves enough understanding and strength to deal with the past and present. Baldwin and Hansberry appear similar in the
One difficulty that Baldwin cannot abandon with, is rhetoric style, an astonishing flow of high eloquence.

Hansberry and Baldwin succeeded in establishing the Negro experience as of immediate relevance to a society concerned with the problem of identity or alienation. Their art would supply the black pride which would free the blacks from the psychological enslavement they have endured for more than two centuries in an essentially racist white society. They showed that black community was in urgent need of justice and brotherhood. Both James Baldwin and Lorraine Hansberry achieved authentic dramatizations of the black identity and experience and their goal was the elimination of racism in America.