A Raisin in the Sun: Quest for African Identity and Universality

Lorraine Hansberry revolutionized black theatre in America in 1959 when her play *A Raisin in the Sun* became the first play on Broadway by an African American woman. This trailblazing play won for Hansberry the coveted New York Drama Critics Circle Award making her the fifth woman, the youngest playwright, and the first woman in America to be so honoured.¹ It is a play about what kind of conviction and commitment it takes to bring hope out of hopelessness, courage out of fear, and idealism out of fatalism. The play deals with a black family - the Youngers - and their ordeal of trying to move out of a segregated Chicago borough.

Commenting on the twenty-fifth anniversary production, the *New York Times* drama critic, Frank Rich, hailed *A Raisin in the Sun* as the play that "changed American theatre for ever" by forcing "both blacks and whites to re-examine the deferred dreams of black America."² He further said that the play portrayed all Hansberry's concerns
about a black family "with a greater realism and complexity than had ever been previously seen on an American stage."³

A Raisin in the Sun celebrates both black culture and black resistance to white oppression through many generations. Hansberry says, "The thing I tried to show was the many gradations even in one Negro family, the clash of the old and new, but most of all the unbelievable courage of the Negro people."⁴ The three generations of the Younger family depicted in the play differ in dreams, speech patterns, and religious, musical and stylistic preferences within and African-American and African traditions, thus displaying the richness and diversity of black culture. Yet they are unified in their heroic defiance of white hostility and threats. The issue is not integration. The test that the Youngers face relates to their willingness to take potentially fatal risks to get out of an intolerable situation and to force change upon an oppressive system.

The dreams that Big Walter's family have about the insurance money's uses represent a cross-section of Black America's dreams that have been systematically suppressed by white racism. Walter Lee wants to enter business by becoming a partner in a liquor store. Beneatha attempts to develop her intellect and be of service to humanity by practising medicine. Ruth likes Travis to grow up in a decent home in a decent neighbourhood. Lena desires to save her
family from the dissolution threatened by the internalized social and economic pressures embittering them all. Just as Shakespeare expanded the boundaries of the revenge tragedy of Thomas Kyd to include pressing political issues of his day as well as the most significant universal concerns, Hansberry stretched the domestic drama to include three hundred years of historical dreams and struggles as well as universal hopes and frustrations. The family in the play is the most extended one possible. All the generations of blacks brought to the United States are represented in the play in microcosm and through them finally all of humanity.

In the plays of Alice Childress, Lorraine Hansberry, and Ntozake Shange three images which appear most frequently are "the black male in search of his manhood," "the black male as a walking wounded," and "the evolving black woman." The black male in search of his manhood is shown either as a creature who is in the process of becoming a mature human being or one who is too incapacitated to search for manhood. Though he may reject his ethnicity during the search, he reaches maturity when he realizes that his manhood does not hinge upon his acceptance by anyone but himself.

In Alice Childress' Mojo: A Black Love Story, Teddy represents those black males who refuse to let poverty and bad
luck keep them from growing into fine black men who accept responsibility for their families. The dual protagonists Lena Younger and Walter Lee in A Raisin in the Sun and the conflict centered on their differing ways of looking at the world are what give the play dramatic tension as well as intellectual and emotional appeal. In addition, this duality provides a structure that points to the tragedy of Walter's reach for the American Dream.

In the play there is a conflict involving the carfare Walter who needs to get to work as well as numerous other conflicts before and during the breakfast. Walter's comic, poetic, male-chauvinist lament, "Man say to his woman: I got me a dream. His woman say: Eat your eggs," is one of the most memorable speeches in modern drama. Hansberry's accomplishment in the play thus reflect and matches her high intentions and gives it the same visionary force as Miller's Death of a Salesman.

Ironically, the positive qualities of character which should lend dignity to Walter's character such as his iron will, his high expectations of himself, and his determination to succeed, are those which reduce him to the role of a villain when he is compared to his mother. However, no real enmity exists between Walter and his mother. Though opposites in
their ways of looking at the world and in their responses to it, they are united by love for each other and for their family. Both seek to improve the conditions affecting their lives.

Lena Younger's thinking is restricted by time. Her thinking is that of a Black woman born near the turn of the century in a racist American society. She does not understand the modern ways and thinking of her children. "Something has changed," she tells Walter:

You something new, boy. In my time we was worried about not being lynched and getting to the North if we could and how to stay alive and still have a pinch of dignity too ... Now here come you and Beneatha -talking 'bout things we ain't never even thought about hardly, me and your daddy. You ain't satisfied or proud of nothing we done. I mean that you had a home; that we kept you out of trouble till you was grown; that you don't have to ride to work on the back of nobody's streetcar - You my children - but how different we done become. (62)

This statement makes clear that racial conditioning has had as profound an impact on her life as that of gender.
Mama's reflections on yesteryears provide the audience with insight into her tenacity. She had clung for nearly forty years to her dream of extricating her family from the ghetto. Mama's sense of family is expressed in her remarks to Walter, her son, and Beneatha, her daughter, about ingratitude and irreverence respectively. When Beneatha becomes iconoclastic, Mama reminds her that she and Big Walter brought her up in the church and that she had better remember the values and morals they tried to teach her. Mama is spiritually rooted in African-American culture and traditions.

Mama also teaches Beneatha a lesson when the young girl says that her brother is not a man but a toothless rat. She chastises Beneatha for thinking that she is better than Walter Lee. When Beneatha tells her mother that there is nothing left to love in Walter Lee, Mama instructs her that there is always something left to love. She teaches Beneatha that the time to love someone is not when that person has done good and made things easy for everybody, but "It's when he's at his lowest and can't believe in himself 'cause the world done whipped him so" (136). In a very poignant moment, Mama cautions her naive daughter that when she starts measuring somebody, she should measure that person right
by taking into consideration what hills and valleys that poor soul has traversed before getting to rock the bottom.

The fact that Mama carries her withering plant with her to the new house suggests that the weariness of living in America is not over but will be transferred to a new location. In spite of the uncertainty of their future, the blacks steadfastly celebrate the mending of a family that had literally been torn apart. Lorraine Hansberry's aim is to capture the fervour of her characters' lives and demonstrate that they can survive whole in spite of all the responsibilities heaped upon the black woman's back. In the theatre, Hansberry could mirror not only the quagmires but the fullness of these women's lives. Wilkerson says of Hansberry, "The Theatre was a working laboratory for this brilliant woman whose sighted eyes and feeling heart caused her to reach out to a world at once cruel and beautiful."6

Lena's experience with discrimination as a young woman in the South affected her thinking. While they did not destroy her self-esteem, they did colour her outlook on life, narrowing her perspective and restricting her beliefs about what a Black person could reasonably expect to achieve in American society. The only way a Black person could escape discrimination in the South of that time was to move to the North. She is still a fighter, and proves it by buying
the house to bring about the change she now feels is needed for her family's welfare. She says, "When the world gets ugly enough a woman will do anything for her family" (62). Her belief in this change, which is her version of the American Dream, sets her at odds with her son, Walter.

In short, Lena Younger's is not the true American Dream, but a version of it reserved for Black Americans and other poor people. But her dream is unacceptable to Walter who will have nothing less than the complete American Dream, since her version of it only amounts to surviving, not living in the fullest sense. Unlike his mother, Walter has managed to escape almost completely the crippling inferiority that destroys many Blacks, particularly men. What is most American about Walter and his thinking is his acceptance of American values, rather than stereotypes, myths, and untruths about Blacks, that enables him to dream and act in a typically American way.

Another source of Walter's strength is the fact that he is male. Lena Younger's world view and range of possibilities are restricted by her femaleness whereas Walter's are enlarged and enhanced by his maleness. A further source of strength lies in his belief in himself and in his ability to do what other successful Americans have done. He
sincerely believes that he is cut out for better things. Near 
the end of Act II, scene 1, he describes himself as "a giant 
- surrounded by ants! Ants who can't even understand what 
it is the giant is talking about" (76). This strong faith in 
himself is the basis of his typically American self-reliance 
and rugged individualism.

Ironically, the influence of his own Black family 
and the values they believed in and lived by prepared Walter 
to accept mainstream American values and to strive to reach 
his goal. He was also influenced by outside forces existing 
in the society at large. These delicately balanced value 
systems provide the basis for the biculturality which 
characterizes the Afro-American. At the same time, this fact 
of biculturality underscores the two levels of universality 
inherent in the Black American experience. The dreams, hopes, 
and fears of the Younger family are universal reflections of 
those shared by people of all races all over the world. 
These are universally American aspirations.

Walter's image of his father matches the old stereo-
type of the hard working, long-suffering Black male who 
literally worked himself to death. Lena says,

1 seen ... him ... night after night ...
come in ... and look at that rug ... and
then 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 ... (117).

There is no way Walter could forget this image, and the cheque becomes the symbolic representation of the senseless waste of his father's life. Other tangible signs of it are the cramped, roach-infested apartment, the shabby furniture, and the worn out rug on the floor. No matter how much he may have loved his father, it would be unthinkable to want to replicate his father's life. For this reason, the young white men of his age personify for him the true American Dream, a dream he knows he is worthy of:

Mama - sometimes when I'm downtown and I pass them cool, quiet-looking restaurants where them white boys are sitting back and talking 'bout things ... sitting there turning deals worth millions of dollars ... sometimes I see guys don't look much older than me. (61)

The stimulation that he gets downtown from seeing the young white men is quite different from that which he gets from the Black musicians at a Southside Chicago bar called the Green Hat:
You know what I like about the Green Hat? ... I like this little cat they got there who blows a sax ... He blows. He talks to me ... And there's this older guy who plays the piano ... and they got a sound ... They got the best little combo in the world in the Green Hat ... You can just sit there and drink and listen to them three men play and you realize that don't nothing matter worth a damn, but just being there. (93)

The former source of stimulation invites action, while the latter induces inactivity. The actions of the young white men stimulate him to hope, dream, think, even scheme. Black music, on the other hand, becomes for him a kind of drug or narcotic that lulls him into a state of listlessness which allows him to escape depression.

Walter's personal stake in his dream is to be balanced by the primary purpose for which he seeks it - a radical change in his family's living conditions. This change is much wider in scope than Lena's planned move from their apartment to a larger suburban home. It means a wholly different and improved standard of living, a substantial move up the socio-economic ladder, the complete abandonment of poverty, and the chance to live the kind of life most Americans
dream of living. The selflessness and nobility of this dream give Walter's character its dignity and spiritual dimension.

In making his decision to move into white neighbourhood, Walter acknowledges his links not only with his family but also with his race through the past, present, and future generations. He is moved not by a yearning to live near whites but by a refusal to let whites spit on his family's faces and also by a desire to obtain material basis for a good life for them in spite of whites. The plot reveals both the diversity of the family members seen as representatives of the African-American community as well as their unity and bravery in standing up to the insults, threats and near-certain violence.

Childress, Hansberry and Shange view black women from a special angle. One image which dominates their plays is "the evolving black woman," a phrase which embodies the multiplicity of emotions of ordinary black women for whom the act of living is itself heroism. Self-respecting, self-sufficient, and assertive, these women force others around them to recognize their adulthood. Beneatha Younger in the play typifies the evolving black woman. Though the daughter of one-time sharecroppers, Beneatha aspires to become a physician. In several speeches, she implies that becoming a doctor is
far more important to her than finding a husband. She is professionally oriented and places no emphasis on entrapping a "bread winner." She is a young intelligent black woman who is aware of her capabilities and refuses to let anyone, including both her suitors, George Murchison and Joseph Asagai, minimize her potential.

Both George Murchison and Joseph Asagai, like Walter, are male chauvinists. They display traditional attitudes towards women, though in varying degrees. The middleclass American black, George Murchison, regards Beneatha's desire to be a doctor as laughable. When she tries to talk to him seriously, he advises her:

... to cut it out, see - The moody stuff, I mean. I don't like it. You're a nice-looking girl ... all over. That's all you need, honey, forget the atmosphere. Guys aren't going to go for the atmosphere - they're going to go for what they see. Be glad for that. (88)

Not surprisingly, Beneatha dismisses him as a fool.

Her other suitor, the African student Joseph Asagai, cannot be so easily dismissed since he is somewhat complex and highly appealing. His mixture of idealism and sophistication,
his seeming role as spokesman for many of Hansberry's political and philosophical views, and his willingness to die either to free his country from colonialism or simply to aid its progress lend him the aura of a romantic hero. He is capable of such insensitive comments as "Between a man and woman there need be only one kind of feeling" and "For a woman it should be enough" (49). In spite of all his revolutionary attitudes, Asagai is, in this one area, a traditional and fallible male. Unlike George Murchison, however, he is willing to listen to Beneatha and take her career goals seriously. He enables their relationship to grow thus and leaves open the possibility that he may eventually free himself of his remaining chauvinism.

Like Beneatha Younger, Florence in Alice Childress' Florence is classified as an evolving woman. Florence is a positive image of black womanhood. She refuses to use racism as an excuse for not trying to improve her lifestyle. She represents those black women who refuse to despair in the sight of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Instead of applying for public assistance, she sets out to become self-sufficient in a profession that she considers dignified. It is her determination to succeed which makes her a character to be admired.
The evolving black women in Childress' *Wine in the Wilderness* and Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf* are preoccupied with themselves because they have been disappointed by the men who came into their lives. These are women who have had their share of "deferred dreams." They are no longer willing to play the role of "Woman-behind-her-man" before men who appreciate neither their submissiveness nor their docility. These women rebel and claim that no man is ever going to oppress them again. They are not women who feel that all men are insensitive beasts. Instead, they are women who have become independent because of their fear of being abused physically or emotionally in subsequent relationships.

In spite of the special problems she has faced as a woman and other differences stemming from her education and idealism, Beneatha is essentially very similar to Walter. This similarity is accentuated in the stage directions which introduce her: she is "as slim and intense as her brother" (17). It is further emphasized by the way he shares her fantasy about being African. Moreover, she and her brother are both driven by egotism to get as much of the insurance money as possible for their personal goals. There is a similarity in their response to the loss of the money. Like Walter, she rises out of her despair to make an active commitment to the white-surrounded
house, thereby gaining a corresponding sense of solidarity with her family.

All these resemblances suggest that men and women differ far less than traditional views would have us believe. Many of the "differences" are artificially induced by their cultures. Beneatha and Walter rightly come to see that their real opponents are not each other but the entire system of privilege and exclusion based on many false distinctions.

Hansberry's dual aim of demonstrating that the African heritage of black Americans is a glorious one and "that the ultimate destiny and aspirations of the African people and twenty million Negroes are inextricably and magnificently bound up together forever" is fulfilled in a variety of ways in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Hansberry indicates the linkage in the stage directions by saying that Lena's "bearing is perhaps most like the noble bearing of the women of the Hereros of Southwest Africa" (22). Beneatha's willingness at the end of the play to entertain Asagai's proposal that she live with him in Africa suggests a symbolic as well as personal link between the blacks of America and those of Africa. In addition, Beneatha's intense reaction against anything smacking of white-washed American culture, prompted in part by Asagai's "teasing" remark that her straightened hair reflects the "assimilation" of American
blacks (48), leads her to change to an Afro-hairstyle. She wears the African dress that Asagai has given her, plays African music on the record player, and attempts an African dance. By this Hansberry introduces her audiences to the beauty of all these vital aspects of African tradition.

Walter's drunken decision to join his sister in fantasizing about being African provides a comic interlude that has serious overtones, especially in regard to his relation to Africa. His first words upon taking on the role of the African are significantly, "YEAH ... AND EHIOPIA STRETCH FORTH HER HANDS AGAIN! ..." (68). In his imagination Walter becomes one of those "fighters with spears" and starts "actively spearing enemies all over the room" (69). Moreover, he confirms his support for anti-colonialist struggle, like the one with which Asagai is involved in Nigeria, by saying, "Me and Jomo ... That's my man, Kenyatta" (69). This is a pointed allusion to Kenyatta's imprisonment by the Kenyan colonial government for agitating for independence. The poetic language Walter uses in his imaginary speech differs widely from his everyday speech. It is the kind he would have used as a leader in Africa. Its eloquence highlights the evocative language of the oral traditions of the Africans.

In _A Raisin in the Sun_ Hansberry demonstrates a craft which is superior to mere skill in plot construction. With
her awareness of the differing speech patterns of characters, which provide the specifics of their background through the language they use. Hansberry affirms the fact that the use of "black English" or "black English vernacular" is a legitimate part of the evocation of African-American culture. Her lively delineation of widely contrasting speech patterns such as those of Mrs. Johnson, Lena, Beneatha, Lindner and Asagai show the immense range within even a single language in Pan-African culture. It is significant that the most important speech defying the white attempt to keep blacks in their place is delivered by Walter. His announcement to Lindner that he and his family have decided to occupy their house is made in "black" English:

We don't want to make no trouble for nobody or fight no causes, but we will try to be good neighbours. That's all we got to say. (138)

In this context, Walter is saying that he refuses to be bought off. He is firm in his conviction that how he would act in future would depend on how the whites act. Walter's defiance expressed in "black" English indicates how Hansberry would defend the African-American idiom and the right to use the speech that most precisely expresses the emotions and experience of a people. In her essay, "The Negro Writer and His Roots: Toward a New Romanticism," Hansberry says thus:
The speech of our people has been the victim of hostile ears and commentary. That there are tones and moods of language that the African tongue prefers, escapes attention, when that attention would demand admiration of beauty and color rather than mere amusement or derision. The educated are expected to apologize for slurrings that haunt our speech; the mark of ascendency is the absence of recognizable Negro idiom or inflection. It is an attitude that suggests that we should most admire the peacock when he has lost his colors. Perhaps someday they will know it is not mere notes of music which command us - "When Malindy sings." \(^{11}\)

It must however be borne in mind that Hansberry did not attempt to recreate the African-American idiom with the precision of a linguist. Like Mark Twain in *Huckleberry Finn*, she uses a modified form of speech that gives a realistic touch to her dialogue in so far as the nuances of vocabulary and patterns of speech reveal heritage and character traits. In fact, what Hansberry projects through the diversity of her black character's speech patterns and the uniformity of those of the white characters is the richness and complexity of African-American culture. In her attentiveness to the specifics of the culturally shaped speech, Hansberry depicts not only
the breadth of African-American culture but also emphasizes that its language, society, and art are not monolithic entities. This is exemplified by Lena, Murchison, Beneatha and others who in their speech patterns reveal their education and social levels, interests, and awareness of oppression.

Hansberry's interest thus is more comprehensive than an interest in the use of language for the creation of a realistic surface. By juxtaposing Beneatha's desire to return to the African tradition with the involvement of her mother and sister-in-law in African-American culture, she has not only delineated the diversity of black culture, but also expressed a viewpoint similar to that of Jordan who asserted that we must recognize "the need to abhor and defy definitions of Black heritage and Black experience that suggest that we are anything less complicated, less unpredictable, than the whole world." 12

The arrival of George Murchison for his date with Beneatha and his distaste for what he regards as her reversion to the primitive afford Hansberry another chance to comment on African culture. George's speech derogating Beneatha's views on African heritage actually provides much positive information about Africa that Hansberry wishes to place before audiences:
In one second we will hear all about the great Ashanti empires; the great Sanghay civilizations; and the great sculpture of Benin - and then some poetry in the Bantu and the whole monologue will end with the word **heritage**! (72)

He is opposed to a woman's "thinking". Black heritage to him "is nothing but a bunch of raggedy-assed spirituals and some grass huts" (72).

Asagai, a young Nigerian activist studying in America, is the catalyst for Beneatha's growing awareness of the need to fight for black people's rights and women's rights. Asagai teases Beneatha about multilating her hair by trying to straighten the beautiful curls made by Mother Africa. He brings her traditional African attire. But he suggests to Beneatha that she must not focus on the trivial blackness as expressed through garments but must work toward making blacks free to choose their destiny. He teaches her about striving for her own identity and independence as a woman and as a black. Accepting the call, Beneatha grows into a low level activist, one of the few black females to be designated as such in the literature of the period by black women dramatists.

Asagai, with his Western education and his strong and loving sense of the traditions of his people, is clearly
the kind of African leader Hansberry depicts. He intends to bring many changes to his village and seeks to eliminate "illiteracy and disease and ignorance." But he feels that the ultimate judges of his actions must be his "black countrymen" and that if he does something profoundly detrimental to their way of life they would be justified in slitting his then useless throat" (124-25).

Hansberry uses Asagai as a symbol of black struggle and freedom. Asagai views himself as a liberator, a militant. He is consumed with thoughts of independence, as Beneatha notes.

... All your talk and dreams about Africa and Independence. Independence and then what? What about all the crooks and petty thieves and just plain idiots who will come into power to steal and plunder the same as before -- only now they will be black and do it in the name of the new Independence. (124)

Asagai insists that he plans to return to his country where he will lead a revolution against an oppressive white government. This brilliant young embodiment of the Black Power Movement in America and Africa poignantly reveals that he will go home to teach and work while activists plan and organize the revolution. He argues that there must be a revolution to rid his country of illiteracy, disease, and
ignorance, which by the way are the same ailments that plague blacks and poor people in America. It is in this fusion of suffering of the blacks in both America and Africa that Hansberry shapes Asagai as the symbol of humanity's interconnectedness.

For Hansberry, the key to liberation for blacks in America and around the world is political power which could be attained through solidarity. Hansberry uses Africa in the play as a symbol of black struggle and freedom. Asagai, an African revolutionary, models for Beneatha the attitudes and commitment needed in order that blacks might secure full citizenship in America and the world. Asagai tells Beneatha that he would like to take her back to their ancestral home, Nigeria. He tells her that once they are home they would pretend that there were never three hundred years of separation. Hansberry makes it clear that African-Americans and their counterparts in other parts of the world are a family who must unite in order to reconstruct a world that looks upon people of colour with hostile eyes.

The play's only white character is portrayed with humour and deliberately ironic juxtaposition. Hansberry makes Lindner's presentation of his mission dramatically ironic because everything seen of the Younger family defeats the "rational"
core of Lindner's argument. His central point is that people are happier when they live in a community in which the residents share a "common background." From his viewpoint, "Negroes" and whites obviously do not have that common background. Hansberry has Lindner describe his community as a striking parallel to what the audience 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 (103)

Lindner's conniving dishonesty provokes disgust at his behaviour and applause for Walter's unhesitant refusal.

The character most neglected by the critics as also by the other characters in the play is Ruth. Her life is the most traditional, circumscribed and empty. It is a life of sacrifice and being sacrificed. She performs work that she hates for a woman whom she despises. She then comes home to a husband who neither berates her for not supporting him enough nor ignores her, and to a son who gives her affection but only limited respect. When she encourages Lena to use the insurance money to make a trip to Europe leaving the family
behind and seeking fun for once in her life, she reveals her own longing for such a release. Ruth's outlet is vicarious pleasure in Beneatha's ability to break through many of the barriers that box Ruth in. That is why she is so willing to make financial sacrifices to help her sister-in-law. Like the other members of the Younger family, she is not prepared to die without fighting back, at least until the system has choked the breath out of her. The house represents her one chance at salvation. She clings to it fiercely, even when the others are ready to relinquish it. It represents her last hope to regain the attention between her and Walter, worn down as they are by the pressures of their lives.

A Raisin in the Sun is first and foremost a celebration of black life with all its diversity and creativity in speech, music, and other cultural forms and of black strength through generations of survival and struggle. Like Alex Haley's Roots published seventeen years later, the play depicts black values being passed on from generation to generation, with each generation adding its own contribution but retaining the wisdom and the will-to-freedom of its predecessors.

The Washington Post critic David Richards has argued that to view the play "memory in terms of evolving race relations or the class struggle, as some are wont to do, is
to acknowledge only part of its greatness" and that "what makes "Raisin" universal is Hansberry's fierce moral sense." His argument has considerable validity. On the anti-integrationist side, Harold Cruse deplores Raisin as "the artistic, aesthetic and class-inspired culmination of the efforts of the Harlem leftwing literary and cultural in-group to achieve integration of the Negro in the arts." In other words, it is a "most cleverly written piece of glorified soap opera," a "second-rate" play about working class Blacks who "mouth middle class ideology." This is a narrow view which denies the play its evocative power and its universality. The play contains generally acknowledged universal themes such as marital and generational discord, conformity versus respect for diversity, the struggle for women's rights, idealism versus cynicism, the dangers of misdirected ambition, and religious versus atheistic humanism. At the same time, these themes are linked inextricably to black experience and black perspective. Hansberry does not treat racial content and universality as though they are mutually exclusive. Instead, she implies that the underlying assumption that only the lives of whites have universal significance is another of the many racial misconceptions based on the inability of a large number of whites to view blacks directly. The point is that the specifics of the lives of blacks, carefully observed, are no less universal than the specifics of the lives of whites.
REFERENCES


5. Lorraine Hansberry, A Raisin in the Sun (New York Random House, 1959) 15. All further references are to this edition.


7. Alice Childress, "Florence" in Masses and Mainstream, 3 (October 1950) 34-37.


