UNIVERSIDAD DE COSTA RICA

SISTEMA DE ESTUDIOS DE POSGRADO

THE CONSTRUCTION OF BLACK MANHOOD IN LORRAINE HANSBERRY'S *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*, FROM A NEGATIVE TO A POSITIVE MODEL: AN ECLECTIC THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF MANHOOD

Tesis sometida a la consideración de la Comisión del Programa de Estudios de Posgrado en Literatura para optar al grado y título de Maestría Académica en Literatura Inglesa

JOSE ROBERTO SARAVIA VARGAS

Ciudad Universitaria Rodrigo Facio, Costa Rica

2012

Acknowledgements

Agradezco a Marta Sánchez por su dirección y apoyo, al igual que a los miembros de mi comité, quienes dedicaron horas de su tiempo para indicarme correcciones. También agradezco a Juan Carlos Vargas por sus consejos y por su ayuda con el material bibliográfico. Asimismo, agradezco a mi familia por el apoyo recibido y su paciencia. Finalmente, envío un agradecimiento especial a mi antiguo director Álvaro Salas (Q.D.E.P.), por haberme apoyado y dirigido mientras estuvo en este mundo.

"Esta tesis fue aceptada por la Comisión de Estudios de Posgrado en Literatura de la Universidad de Costa Rica, como requisito parcial para optar al grado y título de Maestría Académica en Literatura Inglesa".

Dra. Montserrat Sagot Rodríguez,
Representante de la Decana
Sistema de Estudios de Posgrado

M.Sc. Marta Sánchez Salazar,
Directora de Tesis

Dra. Gilda Pacheco Acuña,
Asesora

M.L. Alder Senior Grant,
Asesor

M.L. Ivonne Robles Mohs,
Directora
Programa de Posgrado en Literatura Inglesa

José Roberto Saravia Vargas,
Candidato

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER THREE

CHAPTER FOUR

Resumen

A primera vista, la obra de teatro *A Raisin in the Sun*, de Lorraine Hansberry, aparenta promover una imagen negativa de la masculinidad negra. No obstante un análisis ecléctico de la misma que incluye las propuestas estéticas de Nietzche, los conceptos de masculinidad de Robert Bly, los modelos de masculinidad de Michael Kimmel y las propuestas de autoras y autores negros como bell hooks y Haki Madhubuti contribuye a la construcción de una masculinidad negra diferente. Este modelo incipiente de masculinidad negra rechaza los patrones patriarcales de las masculinidades blancas tradicionales y se dirige hacia una masculinidad negra más positiva, auto-consciente y que afirma más la vida.

Lista de abreviaturas usadas en este estudio

By Lorraine Hansberry:

ARS: *A Raising in the Sun*

By Friedrich Nietzsche:

BGE: *Beyond Good and Evil*

EH: Ecce Homo

HATH: *Human, All Too Human: A Book of Free Spirits*

TBT: *The Birth of Tragedy*

WTP: *The Will to Power*

TSZ: *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

Se utilizaron las abreviaturas convencionales para los libros de la Biblia.

CHAPTER ONE

A. Introduction

Given that, traditionally, literature has been perceived as a "mirror" (Aristotelian *mimesis*) reflecting society, the play *A Raisin in the Sun*, by Lorraine Hansberry, may be seen as a functional manifestation of a plurality of values and thoughts that most African Americans hold, such as ethnic pride, identity, and rebellion against white oppression. This study, however, will not attempt to view literature as a mirror reflecting *any* single truth about society. Instead, it holds literature to be a partial, tentative *manifestation*[1] of sundry and complex segments of a dynamically evolving society. In this sense, Hansberry's play will not be considered the *norm* to disclose *the ultimate or incontrovertible truth* about black masculinities in the United States, but it serves to exemplify, one way among many, that the conceptual understanding of black masculinities can be apprehended at a particular historical point and time. While historical black masculinity might have been pigeonholed into certain stereotypical clichés, such simple categorizations of a vast population seem wildly inappropriate given recent literary theory and theories coming out of sociological and cultural studies. The notion that there is a fixed number of black masculinites seems as absurd as saying that there is a fixed number of white masculinites. Who would accept such a claim for the so-called "white population," which has historically always been viewed as multifarious, dynamic, evolving, and complex?

[1] Some key concepts throughout this study will be emphasized with italics.

This type of essentialist thinking and ontological certainty, rooted as they are in outdated notions of "truth," "objectivity," positivism, and varying forms of empiricism, reduces a vast social complexity of black masculinities to stereotypical and banal simplicities. For example, notions that considered African cultures simplistic and primitive, or worse yet, savage and barbarian were commonplace during the years of slavery. Philadelphia doctor Charles Caldwell is one of the most notorious examples, for he stated in his *Thoughts on the Original Unity of the Human Race* that Africans ate human flesh "of choice" and also described sexual intercourse between blacks "as loose as that of apes and monkies." Likewise, Caldwell argued that in terms of Africans "instead of advancing in knowledge, or even retaining what they have received," the development of Africans would ultimately "retrograde," and that they could never progress beyond their original primitive state, for Africans could only hope to be "returned to their original ignorance" (qtd in Johnson 300).

The status of blacks has been tied to savagery since earlier times than their arrival to the US. In fact, George Fredrickson stresses the existence of this kind of prejudice against Africans before the establishment of the English colonies in North America:

> It is clear that among Englishmen there was indeed a vague prejudice against blackseven before the first colonists set foot in North America. As a result of early contacts with Africa, Englishmen tended to associate blackness with savagery, heathenism, and general failure to conform to European standards of civilization and propriety. (191)

In this light, even if they were faint, early negative associations with blackness were taken by the English to their new settlements. Along with this idea of savagery with which the English associated Africans, other associations were also present. Even though their position has been much debated, Oscar and Mary Handlin state that Africans were tied to servitude from the beginning of the English colonies even though slavery as a legal institution was yet to be formed: “The condition of the first Negroes in the continental English colonies must be viewed within the perspective of these conceptions and realities of servitude” (25). Although the blacks who arrived at the continental English colonies were not numerous during the first three-quarters of the seventeenth century, they arrived at a society in which “a large part most of the population was to some degree unfree; indeed in Virginia under the Company almost everyone, even tenants and laborers, bore some sort of servile obligation” (Handlin 25). The Handlins add that under the conditions of such times, the lack of freedom of blacks was both commonplace and shared with servants from other countries:

> The Negroes' lack of freedom was not unusual. These newcomers, like so many others, were accepted, bought and held, as kinds of servants. They were certainly not well off. But their ill-fortune was of a sort they shared with men from England, Scotland, and Ireland, and with the unlucky aborigines held in captivity. (25)

Although this position is debated by other academics, Carl N. Degler among them, the Handlins believe that under those circumstances, blacks shared the possibility of becoming free as any other servant: “Like the others, some Negroes became free, that is, terminated their period of service. Some became artisans; a few became landowners and

the masters of other men. The status of Negroes was that of servants; and so they were identified and treated down to the 1660s" (Handlin 25). The Handlins stress the fact that during those times, the word "slave" was used but meant a form of low servitude with no legal meaning (26). However, they state that the use of this term varied rapidly and lacked an appropriate historical register:

> Yet in not much more than a half century after 1660 this term of derogation was transformed into a fixed legal position. In a society characterized by many degrees of unfreedom, the Negro fell into a status novel to English law, into an unknown condition toward which the colonists unsteadily moved, slavery in its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century form. The available accounts do not explain this development because they assume that this form of slavery was known from the start. (26)

Although the origins of slavery as an institution in the British colonies are still unclear, the Handlins offer an explanation rooted in indentured servitude. For them, this model of labor treated blacks differently than the treatment that "white" Europeans received. While the latter were encouraged to emigrate voluntarily to North America through laws limiting their terms of servitude, the former, who were not voluntary emigrants, were treated conversely:

> Farthest removed from the English, least desired, he [the black man] communicated with no friends who might be deterred from following. Since his coming was involuntary, nothing that happened to him would increase or decrease his numbers. To raise the status of Europeans by

> shortening their terms would ultimately increase the available hands by inducing their compatriots to migrate; to reduce the Negro's term would produce an immediate loss and no ultimate gain. (30)

This led to a shift of mentality that pictured blacks as perpetual slaves, and many laws reflected this change as well. For example, in 1661, a law in Virginia assumed that some blacks served for life and, in 1670, a law stated that "all servants not being christians [sic]" brought in by sea were slaves for life (30).

As early as in 1669, the Virginia law inflicted a severe blow to the human condition of the black slaves: "It allowed punishment of refractory slaves up to and including accidental death, relieving the master, explicitly, of any fear of prosecution, on the assumption that no man would 'destroy his owne estate'" (Degler 71). Moreover, in the 1700s, white people had already formed a negative image of black people and disseminated it across the North American continent. As Earl Conrad notes; "They projected arguments about Negro unreliability; the blacks were dangerous, they stole, they were capable of the rape of white women, they were insurrectionary, they would not fight the Indians, they had no fidelity for His Majesty nor relationship to the English tradition" (30). These biased descriptions of the Africans in the US shaped the thought of many whites and contributed to the creation of a widely held identification of Africans and savages that were unable to understand the concept of "civilization." In fact, the Handlins state that with the slave codes after 1700, blacks were recognized formally as not being governed by the laws of other men and, thus, they were seen less as human beings and more as chattel (34).

Along with these derisive notions, before the independence of the US, the conceptualization of blacks as being cowardly and mischief-prone was reinforced even by no one less than George Washington himself, who said:

> Many Negroes and mulattos have concealed themselves on board the ships in the harbor. Others have attempted to impose themselves as freemen tomake their escape . . . In order to prevent their succeeding . . . such Negroes are to be delivered to the guards which will be established for their reception. (qtd in Johnson 192)

These words by Washington, even if not solely related to blacks—whites could also attempt to evade the war—suggest the negative perception of black people during revolutionary times.

During the Revolutionary War, blacks were regarded as property and could not be freed in spite of the moral contradiction of slavery and the struggle of freedom against tyranny that ignited the war against England (Nash 23-24). For Gary Nash, the prejudice against black people was embedded into the minds of those who fought for the freedom of their country: "The black slave had been held in total subjection for so long that white men could hardly conceive of him as a free man. To free slaves was to concede the Negro qualities which white society had said were absent in him—and whose absence justified racial slavery" (Nash 25). Whites were unwilling to forget slavery. During this period of time, the density of the black population and the political unrest also ignited fear of blacks in whites:

> With black slaves 25 percent of the population (and in some counties 50 percent), fear of slave revolts grew. George Washington had turned down

> the requests of blacks, seeking freedom, to fight in the Revolutionary army. So when the British military commander in Virginia, Lord Dunmore, promised freedom to Virginia slaves who joined his forces, this created consternation. (Zinn 81)

Since whites could not think of slaves as free individuals, as Washington's attitude suggests, the possibility that those kept in slavery turned against their masters—and at the same time gained freedom—increased the fear and negative perception of blacks in the white population.

After the independence of the US, black people continued subjected to the system of slavery and whites feared them too much to free them:

> The second factor in the hardening of racial attitudes after 1790 was the fear which the free Negro inspired. He was feared because of the brutality of the slave system, which it was widely assumed would not be forgotten by the black man once he gained his freedom—and, with freedom, the opportunity to avenge past oppressions. The free Negro was feared because it was assumed that he would go to the aid of his black brothers and sisters who were still in chains . . . The free Negro was also feared because white men had exploited his women for decades, incurring in a massive national debt which might be repaid by an assault in kind upon white womanhood. (Nash 25-26)

Slavery, consequently, added fear to the distorted vision that whites maintained of black people. At the same time, this fearful attitude helped maintain the system of slavery in the new, independent country.

During the years prior to the Civil War, blacks were perceived in the South as troublesome, inferior, and insurrectionist. In the same manner, the North was not totally supportive of blacks, either. According to Earl Conrad, slaves in the South were suspicious of the North as much as Southern whites were: “The slaves looked upon the Northern officialdom as an uncertain semi-enemy. They knew that the North often returned fugitive slaves, that free Negroes above the Mason-Dixon line were only quasi-free, that the vituperation of Northern officials, leaders, churchmen, spokesmen often equaled than of the Southerners” (120). Blacks faced harsh treatment on both sides and both sides viewed them as second-class human beings.

During Reconstruction, notions of blacks were not positive, either. Whites saw them as being job-stealers and whites rejected the black militia. As Conrad notes, “the militia was political as well as military; its political symbolism and activity made it doubly despised. Its entire meaning was Black Advance” (Conrad 156). This, along with the lack of protection blacks faced as free slaves, as Conrad states, led to revolts, riots, and killings of blacks by whites. In Conrad's words, the black man “was eligible for the same treatment as the bison and the Indian. That was the line of one entire wing of the newly conceived Southern Democracy: extermination” (160).

Between 1900 and 1914, blacks were seen as a menace to social stability and racial clashes were frequent. In fact, whites expressed prejudice and violence against blacks at notorious level of impunity during these years:

> In this climate of opinion violence against black people could proceed relatively free of moral censure. Between 1900 and the outbreak of World War I, more than 100 Negroes were lynched throughout the

> country. Little was done in North or South to protect the black from "lynch law." Often victims of lynch mobs were subjected to the cruelest torture before being killed. (Weiss 142)

Blacks were regarded as dangerous and that justified open violence against them. According to Weiss, racial riots were rampant in the US during that time. Whites would use any altercation with blacks as a cause for extreme violence and lynching (142).

Between 1920 and 1950, blacks were increasingly perceived as second-class citizens. Apparently, they lived in equality, but in reality they were always at an inferior level compared to whites:

> The systematic denial of Negro rights reached its culmination when the administration of Woodrow Wilson inaugurated Jim Crow policies in the federal civil service. Thus, the pattern of segregation which had been worked out over the past two decades on the state level was extended to the national government. (Weiss 143)

Under the guise of "the comfort and best interest for both races" (Weiss 143), President Woodrow Wilson enacted a legal system that eroded the rights of blacks and their hope for equality. Wilson declared that during those times "the black man found himself more threatened, more despised, and more discriminated against in his own land than at any time since emancipation" (143). While Jim Crow laws apparently protected the rights of the blacks and guaranteed social stability, in reality they deepened discrimination against blacks. Real estate owners who sold or rented houses to black tenants in white neighborhoods were threatened by letters or by bombs with no arrests following. Likewise, segregation in schools ensured a poorer education for blacks (Cohen 147).

This aided to set black people on a lower social level while it guaranteed white supremacy.

At the time in which *A Raisin in the Sun* was written (1958), blacks were depicted as being a potential threat to social peace mainly due to their fight to abolish segregation. Lorraine Hansberry herself experienced this fear and resentment:

> In order for the family to purchase a home in a previously all-white neighborhood,her father had to wage a legal battle all the way to the US Supreme Court. When the family finally moved in, the home was attacked by a racist mob—a brick hurled through the window narrowly missed the eight-year-old Lorraine. Earlier she had lived in a ghetto, the product of rigid housing segregation which kept all blacks, regardless of income, confined to the same neighborhood. (Wilkerson 4)

All the former stereotyped characterizations of black people reflect this totalizing, essentialist mindset that, in essence, makes the particular richness of black individualities "invisible," to use Ralph Ellison's classical sense of the word.

Black masculinities, conversely, exhibit a historical evolution and cultural diversity no less rich than any other segments of the population. The fixed apprehensions of black men and the negativity associated to this group have been negative influences on black masculinity that many writers have worked to undermine. Hansberry, one such writer, has depicted an apparently negative image of black masculinities in *A Raisin in the Sun* only then to later question this image so successfully that one could rightly say, to use the language of contemporary literary criticism, that she "deconstructs" the traditional notion of black masculinity only to then offer a

countervailing position. From an initial reading, one may perceive the black male characters in her play as an example of what Earl Ofari Hutchinson calls “the assassination of the black male.” For him, mainly for economic reasons, the massive communication media has played a pivotal role in depicting black males as possessors and promoters of negative social values that poison society. The media portrays black men as aggressive, dim-witted, and crime-prone. He sharply criticized Bill Clinton's “racial healing” speech in 1995 for the same reasons: “If Willie the racial healer really believed one or more of the stereotypes that black men are criminals, derelict, lazy, violence-prone, and sexually irresponsible dregs, I wouldn't be surprised” (14). For Hutchinson, these stereotypes are strong because their roots can be traced back to the first interactions between whites and blacks and are reinforced by contemporary politicians:

> The image of the malevolent black male is based on a durable and time-resistant bedrock of myths, half-truths, and lies. The image was created during the European conquest of Africa, nurtured during slavery, artfully refined during the nadir of segregation, and revived during Ronald Reagan —George Bush—Newt Gingrich years. I'm not picking only on Willie. Many have profited handsomely from the lucrative growth industry America has fashioned out of black-male bashing. (Hutchinson 14-15)

Hutchinson's words reveal not only the durability but also the complexity of the elements at play to construct, nurture, and promote these negative depictions of the black male on all social levels.

The same negative depictions of black males that Hutchinson criticizes are perceivable in the characters of Hansberry's play. In this light, one could mistakenly believe that Hansberry is indeed engaging in this demonizing discourse as well. This perception, however, is superficial, for Hansberry, instead of just confining her male characters to a stereotyped and fixed nature, depicts a continuous sense of evolution in the personality of her male characters. With the exception of George Murchison, the rest of her male characters experience moments of self growth and personal advancement.

To perceive *A Raisin in the Sun* as solely an example of the assassination of the black male becomes a short-sighted vision of the play because such vision fails to take into account that within this liteary work Hansberry maintains consistently a radical critique of blacks who mimic, accept, and promote white standards. Given that Hansberry is writing in the 1950s, before the black liberation movement of the 1960s, she is not only deconstructing traditional notions of black masculinity but shattering them in order to forge the many new identities of black masculinities that came into being in the 1960s which, in the end, produces a text that is constantly influx and at play.

i. The author

Lorraine Vivian Hansberry (1930-1965) was an African American playwright who was born and grew up in Chicago. Her own words let us know that she soon learned the hardships of life by watching her surroundings. Margaret Wilkerson, a biographer of Hansberry presents the following Hansberry's own description of her childhood:

> I was born on the South Side of Chicago. I was born black and a female. I was born in a depression after one world war, and came into my adolescence during another. While I was still in my teens the first atom bombs were dropped on human beings at Nagasaki and Hiroshima. And by the time I was twenty-three years old, my government and that of the Soviet Union had entered actively into the worst conflict of nerves in human history—the Cold War. (7-8)

Since her childhood, Hansberry came to understand the harshness of her surroundings: these poor children's lives were not simple or peaceful. As she herself wrote of her childhood:

> Above all, there had been an aspect of the society of kids from the ghetto which demanded utmost respect: *they* fought. The girls as well as the boys. THEY FOUGHT. If you were not right with them, and sometimes even if you were; there they were of an afternoon after school standing waiting for you in the sunshine: a little gang of them in their gym shoes, milling close together, blocking off the sidewalk, daring you to break for it . . . (Hansberry 65)

By being exposed to situations like the one above, Hansberry learned to face others and to stand up for herself, even if that meant risk. Stephen R. Carter in *Commitment amid Complexity: Lorraine Hansberry's Life in Action* also describes the difficulties and hardships of Hansberry's childhood in similar ways and shows the influence of Hansberry's father in her nonconformist character:

> During her childhood, Hansberry attended a predominantly white public school while her parents fought against segregation. Hansberry's father engaged in a legal battle against a racially restrictive covenant that attempted to prohibit African-American families from buying homes in the area. (41)

Hansberry's father became an example for her. From him, she learned that blacks had to fight because, even though the law declared all individuals equal, blacks in reality faced enormous social disparities.

She then became more active for the cause of African American rights. In 1951, one of her letters to her friend Edythe reveals her incipient participation in the political cause of African Americans: “Fact is, I have finally stopped going to school and started working. Which means a lot of things. I work for the new Negro paper, FREEDOM, which in this time in history ought to be *the* journal of Negro liberation . . . in fact, it will be” (Hansberry 97). In her letter above, Hansberry not only discloses her direct participation in the emerging black newspaper but also her faith in the press as a means for achieving freedom. In addition, her position as a writer for that newspaper becomes highly relevant, for she was influenced strongly by Louis E. Burnham, a radical black activist, who also worked for the newspaper *Freedom*:

> The editor wore a large black moustache in those days . . . The altogether commanding personality of Louis E. Burnham . . . The things he taught me were great things: that all racism was rotten, white or black, that *everything* is political; that people tend to be indescribably beautiful and

> uproariously funny. He also taught me that they have enemies who are grotesque and that freedom lies in the recognition of all of that and other things. (Hansberry 99-100)

Her work at that newspaper marked the beginning of her lifetime dedication to the struggle for equal rights. Hansberry then became fully committed to fight for black equality, as another of her letters reveals:

> Quite simply and quietly as I know how to say it: I am sick of poverty, lynching, stupid wars, and the universal maltreatment of my people and obsessed with a rather desperate desire for a new world for me and my brothers. Supposed to get married by September. Spirit: Happy and defiant. (Hansberry 103)

Hansberry saw in her writing the means for promoting the social change that she desired so much. As her former letter announced, she became a married woman.

In 1953 she married the editor and writer Robert Nemiroff, who "acted as her sounding-board-advocate-critic" (qtd. in Wilkerson 17), but divorced him in 1964, a year before her death of cancer. In 1959, she became the very first African American woman to have a play produced in Broadway. *A Raisin in the Sun* also won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, making Hansberry the youngest and the first African American writer to obtain this award.

She spent the peak of the Civil Rights movement in the US (1955-1965), which inspired and helped her write awareness-raising literature. In fact, according to the writer and civil-rights activist James Baldwin, Hansberry was prescient about many of the increasingly troubling conditions in the world, and worked to remedy them through

literature (xiv). He believed that "it is not at all farfetched to suspect that what she saw contributed to the strain which killed her, for the effort to which Lorraine was dedicated is more than enough to kill a man" (Baldwin xiv).

Even though she never acknowledged it openly, a number of critics have considered Hansberry a lesbian, probably due to her 1957 letter to a lesbian periodical, *The Ladder*:

> I'm glad as heck that you exist. You are obviously serious people and I feel that women, without wishing to foster any strict *separatist* notions, homo or hetero, indeed have a need for their own publications and organizations . . . Thus, I feel that THE LADDER is a fine, elementary step in a rewarding direction. (qtd. in Katz 425)

This letter, as well as the news of her divorce from Nemiroff in 1964, was not widely known at the time of her death: in 1965 the Gay Liberation movement did not exist and many women would not admit their lesbian identity for fear of reprisals. According to *Voices from the Gaps* (http://voices.cla.umn.edu), it was not until the 1980s that feminist scholars began connecting Hansberry's feminist vision with a lesbian identity. That Hansberry was part of a minority is important because it might explain her connection with black men as a minority group, and why she vindicates them in her play.

In June, 1964, about six months before her death, Hansberry reflected on her own life and her role in the black liberation movement:

> Do I remain a revolutionary? Intellectually—without a doubt. But am I prepared to give my body to the struggle or even my *comforts?* This is what I puzzle about.

> Am [sic] now sitting thinking about many things. All the narrowness and selfishness of this last year of my life seems to crowd in on me. I have just finished reading an article on Harlem in the current "Look" and hardly feel that my existence is justified, let alone the "style" of life that I lead. (Hansberry 256-257)

Here, Hansberry's words reveal her dissatisfaction with her life and her own role as a revolutionary. In fact, a month later she expressed her desire to go to the South to find out what kind of revolutionary she was (Hansberry 257), but her health never allowed her to do it.

Lorraine Hansberry's well-known books are several, some of them published by her ex-husband after her death:

A Raisin in the Sun (1959)

A Raisin in the Sun (a film) screenplay (1961)

The Drinking Gourd (1960)

The Movement: Documentary of a Struggle for Equality (1964)

The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window (1965)

To Be Young, Gifted and Black: Lorraine Hansberry in Her Own Words (1969)

Les Blancs: The Collected Last Plays / by Lorraine Hansberry (Edited by Robert Nemiroff in 1994)

ii. The Play

A Raisin in the Sun is Hansberry's first play, and writing it was not an easy task for her. In fact, Hansberry had to struggle with her inner insecurity, tiredness, and frustration in order to complete it:

> Wish to God I could drink. (I have re-read my play a couple of times to my disgust. Had a new idea—a libretto. But have quietly resolved—yes, I will piddle around with a libretto after (1) the play is finished—(2) my novel is WELL underway—I mean it!) . . .
>
> The truth is much of it [the play] *is* labored—much. However, reads well—and for the first time begins to approximate what I wanted to say . . . I am either cracking or turning into a fugging genious. You decide. (Hansberry 107)

Hansberry's lack of confidence, coming in part from her constant revisions and changes to her original manuscript, hints at the amount of work that she invested in her first play. Such an investment of time also made her feel that her work was going to be worth the effort although she often felt unsatisfied with it and tried to quit on several occasions.

In spite of all her obstacles, Hansberry finished *A Raisin in the Sun*, and her letter to her mother on the day of the play's premier discloses her feelings of accomplishment, nervousness, and her view of her own work:

> So if it is a poor show I won't be able to blame a soul but your youngest daughter. Mama, it is a play that tells the truth about people. Negroes and life and I think it will help a lot of people to understand how we are just as complicated as they are—and just as mixed up—but above all, that we have among our miserable and downtrodden ranks—people who are the very essence of human dignity. (Hansberry 109)

Such a depiction of the complexities of black people was not only the result of Hansberry's creative talent, however. Indeed, the play was deeply related to Hansberry's own life, for she had a rough idea of the characters since her childhood:

> The gestation period [of the play], too, had been long, perhaps more than twentyyears. She'd been imagining the Younger family—Mama, Walter Lee, Ruth, and Beneatha—since she'd stood at the edge of her elementary school playground and looked on admiringly as her classmates swaggered and talked tough. She couldn't be like them, but she understood their pain, and could try to give them a voice. (Sinnott 66-67)

For Hansberry, the play did not mean just an exercise of her artistic talent. More than that, *A Raisin in the Sun* was the culmination of her lifelong dream of giving her people an opportunity to speak. Hansberry had previously criticized the book *Spartacus*, by Howard Fast, on account of its failure to tell the story from the point of view of the slaves. For her, the actual heroes were those in chains because, by having nothing, they were forced to live heroically every day (Sinnott 67). *A Raisin in the Sun* in a way served as the voice of those in unprivileged positions that she saw lacking in other works.

The characters in the play also share a strong resemblance with Hansberry's family. For example, Mama, the head of the Youngers, is modeled after Nannie, Hansberry's own mother. Similarly, Hansberry declared in an interview that Beneatha, the intellectual character in the Younger family, who was also flighty, inconsistent, and very passionate, was Hansberry herself in a recent past (Sinnott 69). Originally, Hansberry intended the title of the play to be *The Crystal Stair*. However, as she gradually realized that her play was mainly about having dreams or keeping them in the

face of crushing frustration, the poem “Harlem,” by Langston Hughes, gave her a new idea for the title. Its new name became *A Raisin in the Sun* (Sinnott 70). According to Sinnott, she called her play *A Raisin in the Sun* “after the withered dreams of her characters, of her people, and even, maybe especially, of her father. Lorraine dedicated the play to her own Mama, who had armed herself against the threatening white mobs nearly twenty years before. Yet Carl Hansberry's legacy of hard work, struggle, and dashed dreams is woven into every single page” (71).

A Raisin in the Sun depicts the struggles of the Younger family in a poor black neighborhood in Chicago. The family is composed by Walter Lee, the protagonist, Lena, Walter Lee’s mother, Ruth, Walter’s wife, Travis, Ruth and Walter’s ten-year old son, and Beneatha, Walter’s sister. Walter Lee and Beneatha are concerned about the money their mother will receive from the insurance company after the father’s death. Both have different views on the use of that money. While Beneatha expects to receive some help for her medical studies, Walter, whose mentality is overly focused on money, wants to invest it in a liquor store. However, nobody in the family supports his idea. In fact, none of the women in the family respects him as a grown man, so they do not take any of his ideas seriously. This attitude hurts him increasing his eagerness to prove to the family that he is able to become a successful businessman. After much arguing, to the family’s surprise, Lena ends up buying a house in a white neighborhood and entrusts the rest of the money to Walter. He must put part of it in the bank and use another part in his business. Walter gives all the money to his friend Willy Harris to secure the business, but instead Willy goes away with the money. Walter crumbles down, making the women in the family both pity and despise him. Then Walter learns that the white people do not

want blacks moving into their neighborhood, and placing monetary interests over the family's pride and their own human rights, he decides to negotiate with them when they offer to buy the house. When he is about to complete this transaction, Walter experiences an awakening of manhood. The play ends with the Youngers preparing to move into their new house.

A Raisin in the Sun has a relevant role in the field of men's studies**.** The protagonist, Walter Lee, can easily be perceived as a man who struggles for his manhood, a ***leitmotif*** in this area of study. At the same time, Lorraine Hansberry intends to portray a negative perception of the US black man. Her main character, as well as other minor characters in the play, pursues traditional "negative" masculine roles, with the resulting harmful consequences. Apparently the main hero's choices represent the conventional perspective of the manhood-achieving process, but as the play develops, a more positive and life-affirming image of a freer black man emerges through the hero, which points to the establishment of a new concept of black manhood.

A Raisin in the Sun is also a play that has been appraised as an important contribution to feminism, for it discloses the active gender roles at that time. The play portrays the traditional role of the housewife, represented by Ruth, in contrast to the emerging role of the literate, educated working female, which Beneatha embodies. It also presents the struggle of three women, Lena, Beneatha, and Ruth, with the "man of the house," Walter Lee. In his desire to be a successful man, Walter Lee wants to acquire a privileged position in the family and, in order to achieve this role, he oppresses both his wife and his sister, and disregards his mother's advice.

Walter's language, along with that of the rich young man George Murchison, Beneatha's boyfriend, become rich elements in feminist analysis because both men disclose subtly as well as openly ideas of the patriarchal discourse. Walter's calling black females, for example, "a race with small minds" (*ARS* 1.1 35) and Muchinson's reference to Beneatha's feelings as "the Garbo routine" (*ARS* 2.2 96) manifest patriarchal ideas of male intellectual superiority, which serves as a means of perpetuating male domination over women. They also manifest the way in which patriarchy treats women's problems as unimportant and dismisses them as exaggerated or totally illusory.

The public greatly appreciated *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Vogue Magazine* praised it generously in 1959. *A Raisin in the Sun* won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for the best US play of the season and brought Hansberry ten percent of the weekly gross of $41,000 and the sum of $300,000 that Columbia pictures paid for the movie rights along with other financial arrangements for her as the writer of the movie script (qtd in Hansberry125).

Hansberry's play ran for almost two years and originated other works, which I will enumerate briefly:

1964: The film *A Raisin in the Sun*, a 1961 drama film directed by Daniel Petrie and starring Sidney Poitier, Ruby Dee, Diana Sands, Roy Glenn, and Louis Gossett. The adaptation was based on the play by Lorraine Hansberry (IMDb *A Raisin in the Sun 1964*).

1973: The musical *Raisin*, directed by Donald McKayle, who also directed the choreographies. Its cast featured Virginia Capers as Lena, Joe Morton as Walter, Ernestine Jackson as Ruth, Debbie Allen as Beneatha, Ralph Carter as Travis, Helen

Martin as Mrs. Johnson, and Ted Ross as Bobo. The production won the Tony Award for Best Musical (Barnes 49).

1989: The TV film *A Raisin in the Sun* directed by Bill Duke and starred by Danny Glover as Walter Lee, Starletta DuPois as Ruth, Esther Rolle as Mama, and Kim Yancey as Beneatha (IMDb *A Raisin in the Sun TV 1989*).

2008: The TV film *A Raisin in the Sun* starred by Sean Combs as Walter Lee and directed by Kenny Leon. The film also featured Sanaa Lathan as Beneatha, Audra McDonald as Ruth, Pylicia Rashad as Lena, Justin Martin as Travis, Bill Nunn as Bobo, among others (IMDb *A Raisin in the Sun TV 2008*).

A number of reader guides have also been published since the play is also part of the literary staple taught in schools in the US. For example, *A Raisin in the Sun* by Rosetta James in 1992 and *Reader's Guide To Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun,* by Pamela Loos, 2008 are among these.

B. Justification

A Raisin in the Sun was chosen for the present study due to the following reasons: its iconic historical and cultural value among blacks and whites, its particular treatment of themes such as manhood and related themes (black manhood, manliness, and black masculinity), its contribution to feminism and men's studies and the possible implications of this contribution, such as raising awareness of stereotypes, and its undeniable role in black literary studies worldwide.

As an icon of African-American literature, *A Raisin in the Sun* ostensibly depicts a negative image of black manhood through its submission to traditional white models of

masculinity. However, an analysis of the play reveals an opposite impression, disclosing an incipient construction of a more positive model of black masculinity, and a contribution to gender studies.

The great acceptance that this play has among not just black critics and readers but also among the white press, makes it a prototype of a more generalized idea of black masculinity**.** For the white press, “A Negro wrote this show. It is played, with one exception, by Negroes. Half the audiences here are Negroes. Even so, it isn't written for Negroes. . . . It's a show about people, white or colored. . . . I see 'A Raisin in the Sun' as part of the general culture of the US” (Murray 19). For black critics, such as Lerone Bennett, Jr., the “universality” of the play lies precisely in its particularity, that is, its connection to a local African American ethnicity. Bennett sees it as a manifestation of African American identity (232).

Even if African American scholars, like Nemiroff, Bennett and others, like John C. Walter, consider the play an accurate manifestation of the lives that most African Americans understand and recognize, this point of view, as noted in the introduction, will not be kept in the present study, which will be cautious of not becoming normative about what constitutes an African American life in the 1950s. This study will follow instead Michael Kimmel's idea that “a history of manhood must, therefore, recount two histories: the history of the changing ‘ideal’ version of masculinity and the parallel and competing versions that coexist with it” (6). This justifies the choice of Bly's more traditional, mainstream ideas of “masculinity,” and Nietzsche's concepts of the last and higher men as aesthetic representations of manhood evolution.

The second reason for choosing *A Raisin in the Sun* is its open and direct treatment of the theme of manhood. Although this work has been widely analyzed and discussed from the feminist perspective, little has been said about it in terms of masculinity. In the play, the female characters assess without hesitation the manhood—or lack of it—of the male characters. This concept is strongly related to the topic of this study, that is, the construction of black manhood and its derived psychological and sociological phenomena, such as black masculinity and manliness.

Likewise, the reasons to analyze masculinity as a means to perceive a character's manhood are three. One is the need to view manhood as a dynamic, evolving concept within dynamic, evolving contexts, for isolating manhood from its socio-historical and cultural contexts will in turn treat manhood as a fixed, essentialist concept. The second reason to analyze masculinity as the manifestation of a character's manhood stems out of an apparently fixed idea of manhood in the play. Hansberry's play seems to suggest that manhood is fixed through her female characters' statement that Walter Lee lacks "his manhood." Thus, a necessary issue to be explored is the female characters' intuition concerning a male character's manhood or lack of it. The play suggests that the female characters are able to observe specific behaviors which they link to their ideas of manhood. In this light, they perceive socially constructed behaviors (masculinities) to assess manhood.

The third reason to analyze masculinity as the vehicle of manhood is the potential of the former as a socially perceptible manifestation of the latter. Since manhood, also viewable as male gender identity, is basically a subjective, personal concept, it is not easy to perceive it. Individuals, instead of perceiving another person's manhood or even

their own, resort to social constructs to assess it. In other words, they use masculinities as the means to perceive both their own and external kinds of manhood.

Both the need to view manhood as a dynamic, context-bound idea and the potential of masculinities to manifest a constantly evolving manhood may be greatly useful when further exploring men's studies, specifically the field of black masculinity. This study aims to explore the ways in which black masculinities are envisioned and used to create a sense of black male gender identities.

It is worth mentioning the fact that the play directly treats black manhood as one of its topics although the work was written by a black woman. This fact shows the dissociative nature of literature: while a writer's "creativity" produces a text, the text is independent from the writer and the author *is* the language (Barthes). Thus, according to Barthes and Foucault, since texts and authors are independent, the gender of a particular author may not be necessarily determinative or refective in the writing. In other words, some female writers can write "like men," and some male writers can emulate the *écriture féminine*, the idea proposed by French writer and philosopher Hélène Cixous in her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" to refer to a specifically female way of writing (875-93). However, this study focuses rather on the diverse constructions of manhood that the play activates in the minds of the readers, and not on the levels of accuracy that the author has obtained in writing like a so-called man or in creating "lifelike manly" characters.

Barthes's and Foucault's perception of the text as an independent entity from the writer serves to highlight a number of important considerations about possible contradictions derived from establishing a direct link between the text and the author.

For example, if a man is unable to write as a woman, can the same be said about a woman who intends to write as a man? A possible answer in agreement with Cixous is that women, who possess their own discourse or *écriture féminine,* are indeed able to write as men because they can view male discourse from a female perspective—the perspective of *the other*—and can thus imitate it. The same cannot be said about men because, according to feminists, male writing is nothing but the discourse of patriarchy, from which men are unable to escape. Advocates of this viewpoint fail to observe that women themselves are also immersed in patriarchy and that their experience is shaped by its discourse as much as the male experience. Moreover, the thesis that women can escape from patriarchal discourse because they are *the other*—that is, they are marginalized and oppressed—similarly fails to consider that patriarchy oppresses both men and women. hooks[2], for example, has stressed the oppressive and even life-threatening influence of patriarchy in men (*We Real Cool* xiv). In this sense, the discourse of women would vary little from that of men since patriarchal discourse would be equally unavoidable for both. In this light, if women are able indeed to free themselves from patriarchal discourse and can produce some sort of *écriture feminine,* aware men who wish to free themselves from patriarchy could equally produce a form of masculine-specific writing or *écriture masculine* to which women would not have access. If that is true, Hansberry's writing (along with all that of other female writers) would thus lose its value for an analysis of masculinity. This, however, is not the case: *A Raisin in the Sun* serves as an example of a work written by a woman that allows the analysis of masculinities.

[2] bell hooks has chosen to write her name with no capitalization. This study will respect her choice.

Linking the author and the work produces a similar contradiction in terms of ethnicity as well. A hypothetical situation can exemplify this. Let's think that the only one with authority to write about a particular minority is a member of that minority. For instance, let us say that only black people possess a closer understanding of the experience of blacks as a minority group, if compared to white people concerning this experience. However, denying the value of some texts about minority groups written by authors of the hegemonic group, only on this ethnic basis, is narrow-minded and does not necessarily contribute to raising identity-awareness to easing racial tensions. Besides, in doing so, minorities will be following the same elitist pattern of hegemonic groups by excluding those not belonging to their group and denying them a voice.

An explanation of this contradictory effect stems from Foucault's idea that discourse is the creator of a reality. In his words, discourse "constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned (44). In this light, the more individuals structure discourse around racial issues, for instance, the stronger such issues will become. Similarly, the more race is affirmed as an identity principle, the more segregation it can cause. This in turn highlights the importance of viewing complex issues like gender and racial identity not from a closed, one-sided view but from an open, eclectic, and multifarious one.

Another reason for analyzing masculinity in the play is related to the effects of *feminism* on male society, which call for newer definitions of both men and women. With the arrival of feminism, women questioned men's identity and roles in society

(Wollstonecraft). This has led to a new construction of *womanhood*, one which is not defined in male terms or within the limiting frame of patriarchy.

In order to construct this new image of womanhood, the first step that feminists have taken is to reveal the patriarchal schemes in culture, language, and literature (Kimmel 3). This action has helped many women realize that patriarchy relies on both directly oppressive resources and subtle means of perpetuation (Kimmel 3). By rejecting both, women have been able to deconstruct the idea of "feminine" in pursuit of a new concept of womanhood that is not male-devised (Kimmel 3). This new idea of womanhood, in turn, has severely affected the patriarchal idea of manhood since the male image established by patriarchy became deconstructed as well (Kimmel 3). Patriarchal human beings used women—that is, the patriarchal idea of the latter—, as an object for defining themselves. However, women soon rejected being an object which, in turn, was used to define men and started constructing an independent, autonomous self-image. Thus, this new self-image for women questioned explicitly the male model and, in fact, shook it to its roots (Kimmel 3).

Feminism, nevertheless, keeps perceiving men as patriarchal beings. As the feminist view of women implied an assault on patriarchy, the new images of masculinity should also undermine the male-centered social order to prevent falling back into patriarchal patterns of redomination of women.

One more reason for choosing this analysis on masculinity is to contribute somehow to the eradication of stereotypes. It is well-known that black people have been victims of prejudice as a consequence of white, hegemonic ethnocentrism. For instance, black people have often been labeled as "lazy," "less intelligent," "violent." Hansberry's

A Raising in the Sun departs from this reality, but, conversely, allows the reader to construct different models that question these negative stereotypes.

Finally, even though the focus of this study is black masculinity in *A Raising in the Sun*, an American play, this study may be also productive in terms of supporting and fostering the studies of black masculinity in Costa Rican literature as well. Also, it may inspire further research on all masculine models in Costa Rican literature. Charles McForbes, from Quince Duncan's short story *Los Cuatro Espejos*, as well as Fernando Rodríguez and Don Rafael Montalvo, from Carlos Gagini's *El Árbol Enfermo*, may serve as examples.

C. Critical Overview

A great amount of material associated with men's studies can be found on the market. However, this material is seldom of academic character. Many published books are merely picture books or books about famous or attractive men and their key to success. One of them is *Body and Soul: The Black Male Book*, by Duane Thomas, which consists basically of pictures and does not discuss the issue of black male identity. Another example of the most popular trend in books about men is *The Complete James Bond Lifestyle Seminar* by Paul Kyriazi. Again, the nature of the book seems more commercial than critical. In addition, some non academic books tend to be books of a more reflexive character. They mention several topics that attract men's interest, like health, work, and family, and provide advice and anecdotic examples to promote reflection. Many of them are centered on the relationship father-son or husband-wife and are more motivational in nature. *The Way of the Superior*

Man: A Spiritual Guide to Mastering the Challenges of Women, Work, and Sexual Desire, by David Deida, is an example of these works.

Among the sources, many books about masculinity are about sexuality or depict a series of parameters related to the family. One of these books is Terrence Real's *I Don't Want to Talk about It: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression*. In this book the relationship parent-son is especially evident since the writer affirms that depression is a father-to-son transmitted problem. Hence, the book approaches the problem of male depression and offers information on how to identify it and how to cope with it.

In spite of the scarcity of theoretical books on masculinity, some may be found. One of them, greatly valued, is Robert Bly's *Iron John: A Book about Men*. Because Robert Bly has received some negative criticism for his "superficial approach" to manhood and his apparent hostility against feminism, and because this author is widely referred to in this investigation, given the context of this discussion, supplementary information about this author becomes imperative here.

Bly is a celebrated US poet and translator of important poets (e.g., Federico García Lorca, Juan Ramón Jiménez, and the Swedish poet Tomas Transtromer) whose books of poetry include *Eating the Honey of Words: New and Selected Poems, The Night Abraham Called to the Stars, The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart: Poems for Men,* and *Silence in the Snowy Fields.*[3]

[3] Robert Bly's translations are widely respected. Bly, in fact, nearly single-handedly made Latin American poets popular to the English speaking audience in the 60s and 70s. His translation, as well as those of W.S. Merwin, helped gain worldwide recognition for some of the most celebrated of Latin American poets and played no small part in bringing about the so-called "boom" of Latin America, which made the names of Borges, Márquez, Cortázar, Neruda, and Vallejo nearly household words in US and

Iron John is considered one of the pillars of men's studies since it provides an insight into several patterns that are common to the majority of men—Bly is cautious in mentioning that homosexual men might not share his ideas. The North American media have reviewed this book very positively. Deborah Tannen, from the *Washington Post*, writes about Bly's book in her blurb, claiming that it is "a brilliantly eclectic written meditation . . . an invaluable contribution to the gathering public conversation about what it means to be male—or female" (qtd. in Bly). Likewise, *Newsday* notes its positive perception of Bly's *Iron John* by stating that it combines erudition with enthusiasm in a very appealing analysis of myth, literature, psychology and anthropology, which poses this book as "thought provoking an exploration of men and masculinity as any in recent years" (qtd. in Bly).

Yet while Robert Bly has been praised for his book *Iron John A Book about Men*, and for his anthology of poems about men *The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart: Poems for Men*, he has also faced sharp criticism from feminists who consider him bitterly opposed to feminism, probably in part because of these words in his introduction to *Iron John*:

> Some energetic women, at that time in the nineties, chose and still choose soft men to be their lovers, and in a way, perhaps, their sons. The new distribution of "yang" energy among couples didn't happen by accident. Young men for various reasons wanted their harder women, and women began to desire softer men. It seemed like a nice arrangement for a while,

---

European academia.

> but we've lived with it long enough now to see that it isn't working out. (3)

In this light, many feminist groups claim that Bly resents the advances of feminism, for it has provided women with a voice and autonomy, which has caused unhappiness and suffering among contemporary men. Feminists feel that Bly's short-sightedness undermines many of the actual accomplishments of feminist theory and practice. Interestingly enough however, his statement that the evolving gender roles in society has caused current men's unhappiness and pain (4), although prejudiced against feminism at a first glance, has found some support from the point of view of clinical psychology. William S. Pollack seems to confirm, in part, Bly's observation: "although there is much to be gained by each gender respecting the other's skills and capacities—and much that men can learn from women—this alone will not help men understand their own pain or adapt to a changing world" (57).

Similarly, Bly has been criticized for his approach to manhood, which a number of his critics consider superficial. Since *Iron John* draws its theories out of a mythic reading of a fairytale instead of relying directly on scientific socio-cultural research, these academics consider it ineffective or invalid. Bly's methodology to treat masculinity in his public conferences relies heavily on myth indeed: "In 1980, the Lama community in New Mexico asked me to teach a conference for men only, their first, in which about forty men participated. Each day we concentrated on one Greek god and one old story, and then late in the afternoons we gathered to talk" (Bly 3-4). Academics thus disregard his work in the field of masculinity for such reasons and

associate it with “pop psychology.” Yet, notwithstanding these often valid critiques of Bly, especially those related to his view on feminism, his abundant contribution to men’s studies and his ideas about masculinity are far from being shallow or unfounded.

A last aspect on Bly's profile worth mentioning is his inclination toward poetry compilation, translation, and production. Along with James Hillman and Michael Meade, Bly collected more than four hundred poems by renowned male and female writers dealing with masculinity in the book *The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart: Poems for Men*. Besides, Bly himself translated poems like Neruda's “Melancholy inside Families” and Rainer Maria Rilke's “Sonnets to Orpheus VIII.” The poems in this compilation are carefully grouped in sections highly relevant from the perspective of masculinities, such is the case of “The Naïve Male”[4] and “The Second Layer: Anger, Hatred, Outrage.”[5]

Besides compiling or translating works from other authors, Bly’s own poetry has helped raise awareness about sensitive social issues, such as the inhumanity of war.

---

[4] This section includes Alden Nowlan’s poem “The Rites of Manhood.” This poem, while describing a young sailor’s interaction with a young woman, realistically depicts the contrastive behavior of a man who is by himself and when he is with his friends: “—and what keeps this from being squalid is / what’s happening to him inside: / if there were other sailors here / it would be possible for him / to abandon her where she is and joke about it / later, but he’s alone and the guilt can’t be / divided into forgettable pieces” (Bly, Hillman, and Meade 267). The poem, in the lines above, depicts the young man’s inner feelings and their effect on his behavior. By doing so, it also reflects on the sailor’s conflict between a superficial, irresponsible “manhood” and his growing realization of a deeper masculinity: “he’s finding out what it means / to be a man and how different it is / from the way that only hours ago he imagined it” (Bly, Hillman, and Meade 267).

[5] Similarly, the section “The Second Layer: Anger, Hatred, Outrage” includes the poem “Harlem,” which was greatly responsible for Hansberry’s inspiration to write *A Raisin in the Sun*: “What happens to a dream deferred? / Does it dry up / Like a raisin in the sun? / Or fester like a sore— / And then run?/ . . . / Or does it explode? (Bly, Hillman, and Meade 267). The idea of dreams deferred and their emotional consequences in the male psyche that this poem portrays was cleverly depicted in Hansberry’s play.

His poem “At a March against the Vietnam War” exemplifies this: “We have carried around this cup of darkness / We have longed to pour it over our heads / We make war / Like a man anointing himself” (*The Light* 35). His poetry also reflects on the possible meanings of manhood. In “The Executive’s Death,” he criticizes some roles traditionally associated with masculine social roles, like corporate work: “The crane handler dies / the taxi driver dies, slumped over / In his taxi. Meanwhile, high in the air, executives / Walk on cool floors, and suddenly fall: / Dying, they dream they are lost in a snowstorm in mountains” (*The Light* 3). For Bly, the corporate world has deprived men from all sense of individuality. This is the type of man of whom Bly says that “unless he has an enemy, he isn't sure that he is alive” (1). Another area of interest in Bly, the poet, is that of racial conflict. In “Hatred of Men with Black Hair,” he says: “We distrust every person on earth with black hair; / We send teams to overthrow Chief Joseph’s government; / We train natives to kill Presidents with blowdarts; / We have men loosening the nails on Noah’s ark” (*The Light* 36).

In summary, Bly's thinking is not only highly political, helping a great number of men reflect on their masculinity by means of his public speeches and his publications, but his position from the psychological point of view is validated in A *New Psychology of Men,* a book edited by clinical psychologist Ronald F. Levant and William Pollack. This publication explores some of Bly’s ideas from a socio-psychological point of view. For example, Pollack discusses Bly's idea of the “wild man”:

> The other argument is that men must eschew the loving nurturance of women and return to their primitive, essentialist, masculine male roots alone—into a mythos of early "strong-men," "wild men," and cthonic men of steel and iron. Such return to the archaic or primitive roots of early male development may be correct in identifying the depth of the experience toward which men must grope, but it seems wholly useless as an integrated solution to the complexities of modern adult life in postindustrialized societies—societies that must become more gender-respectful and less gender-phobic. (57)

Levant and Pollack analyze in more detail the value and limitations of his idea of the wild man. This in turn suggests that Bly's insights on masculinity should not be totally discarded from a socio-psychological perspective.

In *A new Psychology of Men*, Levant and Pollack compile the work of other researchers, along with their own, that addresses specifically issues related to black masculinity:

> Yet another is Majors and Billson's (1992) work on "cool pose" in black males. In Majors's [sic] analysis, cool pose is a particular form of masculine behavior that functions as an adaptation to racial oppression but at the same time exacts considerable costs on black males themselves. (qtd. in Levant and Pollack 17)

This element of "cool pose" becomes relevant in the present study, especially because, being *A Raisin in the Sun* a play, Hansberry's own directions about the gestures and

posing of the characters on stage are found in detail. Such poses of the characters may in turn offer insight into their masculinities.

Other theoretical books offer a socio-historical view of masculinity revising the different conceptions, images, and stereotypes of manhood over the years in US history. Nevertheless, the fact that the majority of books about masculinity have been written by white men is not a minor issue. Since white authors are in a different socio-cultural level from those of minority groups, these books might offer limited input in terms of minority groups' values or beliefs, including those of black men's. In spite of such a limitation, these books will be explored as well.

This study will explore the historical development of black masculinities in the US through written historical accounts by both black and white authors. One of them is *The Invention of the Negro*, by Earl Conrad. This book offers a glimpse of the history of black people since they were taken out of Africa until the Twentieth century. Another valuable source of historical information is *Africans in America*, by Charles Johnson. Although this book contains a great deal of fictional narrative, it also offers historic material and theory to be considered in this study. For example, Johnson depicts the difficult life of the slaves when he describes the strict restrictions imposed on them during the years prior to the war for independence; "harsh restrictions were imposed to prevent slaves and free blacks from holding meetings" (165). In this light, Johnson's book not only offers a race-based or social view of the blacks but also one based on class and politics.

The topics of ethnicity and sexuality are frequent in written material on black men. *Black Men on Race, Gender, and Sexuality*, by Devon Carbado, for example, addresses the idea of relationships between the black man and the black woman and mentions topics like chauvinism in black men. It is worth mentioning that the predominant topics in books about black men are aggression, domestic violence, street gangs, or drug trafficking. Elliot Liebow's *Tally's Corner: A Study of Negro Streetcorner Men* is a good representation of this kind of literature.

Some other books denounce the influence that the mass media has had in creating and expanding a negative image of the North American black man. *The Assassination of the Black Male Image*, by Earl Ofari Hutchinson, can be considered among these. This book seems useful for the analysis proposed in the present work because it may enrich the horizons for a new image of black American men.

Black masculinity has specifically been addressed by authors like bell hooks in her book *We Real Cool Black Men and Masculinity.* hooks acknowledges the prevalence of stereotypes to which black males have been associated with:

> Seen as animals, brutes, natural born rapists, and murderers, black men have had no dramatic say when it comes to the way they are represented. They have made few interventions on the stereotype. As a consequence, they are victimized by stereotypes that were first articulated in the nineteenth century but hold sway over the minds and imaginations of citizens of this nation in the present day. (xii)

hooks also highlights the powerful victimizing effect of such stereotyped thought. Black men are powerless against it because these prevalent, negative ideas have prevented

black males from defending themselves. She develops later this idea of victimization and the lack of voice in her book *Yearning. Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* when discussing black male representation in the movie *Do the Right Thing*:

> The denial of agency is most apparent in the characterizations of black men. It is bitterly ironic that the two black male leaders, Martin Luther King and Malcom X, whose images are sold in the community were highly educated, articulate critical thinkers, yet the person who attempts to keep their memory alive, Smiley, is inarticulate, unable to verbally convey the power of their message. (179)

These ideas of generalized negative images of black men that were coined a century ago but which have a victimizing, voice-depriving effect on black men and their representations even today are worth exploring.

In terms of the previous criticism and research surrounding *A Raisin in the Sun*, one of the most abundant perspectives is feminist analysis and research. This has been so since Hansberry declared herself a feminist. Other researchers and critics have adopted a socio-historical perspective and have devoted their efforts to the analysis of the context in which the play was produced, and how it manifests the socio-historic period of time. A few interpretative efforts depict some of the play's social or psychological motifs and themes, such as family, friendship, courage, pride, materialism or endurance. This, in turn, stresses the value of the present work as a contribution to the field of men's studies.

D. Hypothesis

In *A Raisin in the Sun,* Lorraine Hansberry seemingly portrays a negative image of black manhood through black men's "affirmation" of traditional white models of masculinity; however, a deeper analysis of the play reveals an opposite, positive impression and discloses the contribution of gender studies to a construction of a more affirmative model of black masculinity.

E. Main Objective

To observe the evolution of black masculinity in *A Raisin in the Sun* through an eclectic analysis of the traditional "white" and black perceptions of masculinity as well as their differences with black men's and black women's new insights on black masculinity.

F. Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the role of traditionally held ideas of manhood by whites in constructing a generalized negative image of the black man, and to analyze the negative impact of these ideas upon both black men and women as reflected in the male and female characters of the play.

2. To analyze the gradual construction of a new model of black manhood towards a more positive image.

3. To offer a view of the evolution of black manhood models as separate and divergent from white manhood standards.

G. Methodology

Each chapter of this study focuses mainly on one stage of evolution of manhood as portrayed by male characters in the play, ranging from the most traditional types, the male of the Fifties / the playboy, to the most evolved ones. Two areas of work are developed: the crisis of the traditional "white" perspective of manhood, and the emergence of a more autonomous, positive perspective of black manhood.

White authors, such as Bly, Kimmel, and Pollack will offer, at first glance, a general idea of manhood, while black authors, such as Cullen, Madhubuti and Harris, will be the basis for a more detailed and specific outlining of black manhood. The white traditional perspective of manhood will be analyzed from Kimmel's historical account of manhood in the US: George Murchison, Walter Lee Younger, and the minor male characters represent this stage, Murchison who is perceived as the typical chauvinistic man, a playboy, and a male of the fifties, Walter Lee as the failed pursuit of white manhood with its existential consequences, and the minor characters as the anti-masculine models of the fake man/outcast and the wimp. Joseph Asagai embodies the most evolved type of manhood.

The contrast between negative representations of manhood and a more evolved, *life-affirming* ones will be analyzed by exploring two male characters: Walter Lee Younger and Joseph Asagai. Robert Bly's theory of *katabasis*, the wild man, and the warrior, as well as the premises of black theoreticians like bell hooks and Haki Madhubuti, will shed light on the emerging new concept of black manhood. F. Nietzsche's aesthetics of tragedy and the tragic hero as put forward in *The Birth of*

Tragedy will also be explored in order to analyze the characterization in *A Raisin in the Sun* as a modern tragedy. Likewise, some features of Nietzsche's Overman, the Higher Man, and the Last Man will throw light upon the inner, philosophical vision of the evolution of manhood as *tragic affirmation*.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on an eclectic view in which Kimmel's playboy, Bly's fifties male and manhood as a process, and the features of black manhood as proposed by black theoreticians bell hooks and Haki Madhubuti, complement each other and help elucidate the construction of black manhood in Hansberry's *A Raising in the Sun*. Nietzsche's conceptions of the tragic hero's will to power as reflected in the characterization, the higher man and the last man complement this analysis.

A number of considerations are relevant in regard to the theoretical framework of this study, in terms of both language and content. In terms of language, this project will use the terms theory, manhood, and masculinity. In terms of content, it will consider Kimmels's and Bly's traditional manhood models that both authors respectively depict in *Manhood in America* and *Iron John: A Book about Men* respectively. This study will also explore the concept of manhood construction that Bly presents in *Iron John* and will observe the features of black manhood presented by other authors.

The term *theory*, in this study, denotes a philosophic stance about a series of steps, tools, and ideas to face a reality. In other words, the term *theory* here describes a variety of ideas or methods to perceive and interpret the text.[6] This project will also use the term manhood to refer to a male gender identity set in a specific socio-temporal

[6] This is referred to the Saussurean idea of text, which is a structure of signifiers and signifieds.

context (Kimmel 4-5), while the term masculinity will denote the socially constructed and regulated expression of the male gender identity (Kimmel 5).

The term manhood may represent a cognitive problem, for readers can perceive it as either manliness or masculinity. Manhood or manliness has to be understood as a psycho-philosophic dimension of man, closely related to man's self-perception. In other words, both terms denote an inner being or an internal nature of man that men believe to possess. This inner being is not the essential man, but a perception resulting from an introspective analysis, still philosophically superficial since it does not arrive at the essential man.

This dichotomy represented by the terms manhood and manliness goes along with the idea of gender identity, gender being understood as something "in the mind of a person . . . more elusive . . . Many people confuse gender identity, one's inner perception of one's gender, with gender self-expression (how one externally chooses to present one's inner identity to the world)" (Altman).

Once again, the terms manhood or manliness are not to be considered the essential, fixed nature of man. As Michael Kimmel, in *Manhood in America*, puts it: "we often endow manhood with a transcendental, almost mythic set of properties that still keep it invisible. We think of manhood as eternal, a timeless essence that resides deep in the heart of every man" (4). Instead, manhood is more dynamic, less mythic:

> Putting manhood in historical context presents it differently, as a constantly changing collection of meanings that we construct through our relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with our world. Manhood is neither static nor timeless. Manhood is not the manifestation

> of an inner essence; it's socially constructed. Manhood does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological constitution; it is created in our culture. (Kimmel 5)

The definition of manhood used in this study, that is, a dynamic, time-bound, and cultural construct, comes from Kimmel. The term masculinity follows on Virginia Woolf's idea that gender is socially defined, so it will be understood as the behavioral codes that a particular society has proposed, accepted and established as "manly." Although this perspective of gender is not widely accepted yet, its use is becoming more frequent progressively. For example, an online magazine for women's health has embraced it contrasting it to the term "sex":

> Gender is often confused with sex. However, sex generally refers to biology and anatomy. People are said to be of the male sex or the female sex, as determined by three sets of characteristics: external sex organs, internal sex organs, and secondary sexual development at puberty. The word sex is also used to mean sexual intercourse or activity.
>
> By contrast, gender refers to a set of qualities and behaviors expected from a female or male by society. Gender roles are learned and can be affected by factors such as education or economics. They vary widely within and among cultures. While an individual's sex does not change, gender roles are socially determined and can evolve over time. (*Engenderhealth*)

For this study, the concept of masculinity will be the parameter to envisage and outline an individual's manhood. Although manhood is an internal and individual idea, it is also

manifested, perceived, and evaluated socially. As a result, men have to prove constantly their manhood within their family, circle of friends and in their workplace, a process that forces men to constantly "prove" their masculinity before others which Kimmel calls *Compulsive Masculinity* (240).

Along with the concepts mentioned above, this study also considers as content-related issues Kimmel's traditional models of manhood in his book *Manhood in America* and features of black manhood by other authors. All these will provide useful tools for analyzing and disclosing the evolution of black manhood as portrayed in Hansberry's play.

The negative impact of the traditional models of manhood described by Kimmel in *Manhood in America* and by Bly in *Iron John*, and embodied in Hansberry's male character of *A Raisin in the Sun* will be central in this analysis. These models in fact represent the traditional conceptualization of manhood in the US. Taking into account that such established models were considered *hegemonic* in their socio-temporal context, in this study they will not be bound to the ethnic plurality that more modern models of manhood are subjected to. Considering that before the 1950s, concepts like ethnicity and minority were not yet fully developed, blacks and whites were generally influenced by the same models of manhood perceived as a single, unchanging social construct. This study will follow on this hegemonic and fixed view of older manhood models when analyzing them since the purpose here is to observe their influence and not to deconstruct these older models.

A. Michael Kimmel's Historical Overview of Manhood in the United States

Being a man or a woman has always posed a diversity of sometimes contrasting and even contradictory meanings, and this is especially true of the history of such a complex society as the US. Men and women have been caught between two main opposing forces: a force representing traditional values and a force representing change. Current men can perceive how, while defining "manhood," they have to turn either to the precepts already established by society or to the instability of new values—some of which have not even been accepted yet and have, in fact, no rightful place in the social order. Thus, in order to understand the situation of the male characters represented in the play *A Raisin in the Sun*, the subject of this discussion, a prior account of the different concepts of manhood becomes demanding.

During the years right after the independence of the US in 1776 to the early 1800s, the model of manhood was that of the Self-Made Man: "independent, self-controlled, and responsible" (Kimmel 18). He was also strong, brave, and hard-working (mainly outdoors). During this time, in a clear reaction against British aristocratic models of the genteel man, the aristocractic ideal was rejected. As Kimmel states, "by contrast, British manhood and, by extension, aristocratic conceptions of manhood . . . were denounced as feminized, lacking manly resolve and virtue . . ." (Kimmel 19). In this particular respect, the celebrated US nineteenth-century thinker Washington Irving once stated that "we send our youth abroad to grow luxurious and effeminate in Europe; it appears to me, that a previous tour on the Prairies would be more likely to produce that manliness, simplicity and self-dependence, most in unison with our political institutions" (qtd. in Kimmel 19).

Although this model of manhood belongs to past times, its influence is present even today. The idea of the *frontier* that fascinated not only Irving but also the men of those early times, is still one of the deeply rooted motives in US mainstream white idiosyncrasy.

During approximately the next hundred years, the rugged individual became the model for the definition of US manhood. Kimmel explains this emphasis on the values of rugged individualism: "Men, by contrast, were pushed out to western dude ranches to take in the masculinizing freshness of the out-of-doors. Men, after all, had to rediscover masculinity. Riding the range, breathing the fresh country air, and exerting the body and resting the mind were curative for men . . ." (Kimmel 135). The effects of this type of man are also present nowadays. Not long ago, advertising campaigns showed billboards depicting the "Marlboro man," an icon taken from this rugged individual.

During the 1940s, the military manhood and the *noir* hero entered the scene, "The cowboy or detective hero of the 1930s returned from the war with a darker, more sinister, and more sexual undertone in the film noir of the postwar era. . . . The heroes of *noir* films were grittier, tougher, colder, and far more cynical. Typically, the noir hero was a returning soldier who was alienated from the life he had left" (Kimmel 232). Although the influence of this type of masculinity seems absent nowadays, the film and TV characters from *Rambo* and *The A-Team* during the 1980s to the *X-Men* from the 2000s still depict the old model's influence.

After the *noir* hero, during the 1950s, manhood veered towards traditional values. Kimmel portrays this time as "normality":

> . . . while men sought to define a normal masculinity, they situated themselves in a vast sprawl of "normalcy."
>
> In our stereotypic image the 1950s was an era of quiet, order, and security. What we like to remember as a simple time, "happy days," was also an era of anxiety and fear, during which ideas of normality were enforced with desperate passion. "The effort to reinforce traditional norms seemed almost frantic," writes the historian William Chafe. The 1950s was a decade of containment. (236)

During this decade of 50s, two new types of men also started to emerge: the Play Boy and his "brother" the Soft Male. Kimmel describes playboys as mostly luxury-liking males who like to relax. For him, playboys spend most of their time inside. They like their apartment and enjoy making cocktails. They like putting up a little mood music on the phonograph as well as inviting in a female acquaintance for a quiet discussion on Picasso, Nietzsche, jazz, sex (255). For Kimmel, the playboy "was a domesticated bachelor, closer to the dandified Billy Dimple in *The Contrast* than either of the other male roles, a stereotypic ladies' man now offered up as a new model for manliness" (255). The soft males, who started to appear along with the playboys, were men who were quiet (almost too quiet) and sensitive. They showed their "feminine" side and were considered "sweet" and "gentle" by women. However, the playboys criticized the early soft males because, from their point of view, the soft males "identified too much with the feminine side." The soft males turned into "flabby parodies of the physical male" and their sons grew up without paternal guidance and adult male companionship, turning into "she-spawns" by age twelve (qtd. in Kimmel 256).

For the purpose of this study, George Murchison, one of the characters in Hansberry's play, will be analyzed within this playboy paradigm; the soft male, along with his sublimation, the anti-masculine figure of the wimp, will be exemplified by the character Bobo, and Walter Lee Younger, the tragic hero, will be analyzed in the light of the pursuit of the Self-Made man.

B. Robert Bly's Conceptualization of Manhood

Robert Bly's conception of the manhood-achieving process as present in *Iron John* includes the following concepts: awareness of the self, rites of passage, contact with the Wild Man, *Katabasis*, the inner warrior, awareness of duties and responsibilities, pride, and learning. These concepts, to be elucidated as they are introduced in my analysis, are drawn from the fairy tale "Iron John," also known as "Iron Hans," written by the Grimm Brothers. In this fairytale, Iron John, a fearful, hairy man who lived at the bottom of a lake is captured and kept in a cage at the King's palace. The prince, a young boy, releases him and goes to live with the creature. There, the young prince learns about responsibility as he fails to keep Iron John's treasure and is sent to experience hunger and poverty but always protected by the monster. Finally, the prince becomes a good warrior and frees a kingdom, marries a princess, and meets his parents again. Also, he frees Iron John from the spell that had turned him into a monster. The fact that Bly's concepts about masculinity come from a fairytale has hurt Bly's credibility. Nonetheless, it could be said that precisely this very fact, far from hindering his credibility, could validate it, if we consider that fairy tales feed from myths, the same substance of which

the creative power of cultures is made of, as Nietzsche reminds us in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

In this context, in spite of divergences, psychologists like William Pollack acknowledge the value of Bly's work: "In recent years, commentators on the fate of men's psychology—most notably Robert Bly (1990)—, have unearthed a new mythos of cthonic [sic] Iron Men to mentor forgotten males back into a network of healthy, vibrant masculinity" (36). Bly starts by making an overview of the kind of American men up to the present:

> The men who live today have veered far away from the Saturnian, old-man minded farmer, proud of his introversion, who arrived in New England in 1630, willing to sit through the services of an unheated church. In the south, an expansive, motherbound cavalier developed and neither of these two "American men" resembled the greedy railroad entrepreneur that later developed in the Northeast, nor the reckless I-will-do-without culture settlers of the west. (1)

As it is perceivable, in this socio-historic view of manhood, Bly asserts that there have been different kinds of men, which highlights the idea that the concept of manhood is neither fixed nor singular. His words also point to the change that the contemporary man has undergone, which provides room for considering multiple evolving ideas of manhood.

Bly continues depicting another man that appeared afterwards, the fifties male:

> He got to work early, labored responsibly, supported his wife and children, and admired discipline…This sort of man didn't see women's soul well, but appreciated their bodies, and his view of culture and America's part in it was boyish and optimistic. Many of his qualities were strong and positive, but underneath the charm and bluff there was, and there remains, much isolation, deprivation, and passivity. Unless he has an enemy, he isn't sure that he is alive. (1)

This kind of man was the man who lived the end of World War II. Also, this type of man corresponds to the model of masculinity that Walter Lee Younger and George Murchison exhibit in Hansberry's play.

According to Bly, this kind of man possessed positive traits. He had confidence, was strong, was a good provider, and also acted as a protector not only of his family but also of his nation. From Bly's perspective, Reagan was "a mummified version of the Fifties male" (1). However, the man of the 1950s had a great proclivity towards aggression and oppression; in addition, his lack of openness and receptiveness were strong undermining forces in his personality:

> The Fifties man was supposed to like football, be aggressive, stick up for the United States, never cry, and always provide. But receptive space or intimate space was missing in this image of a man. The personality lacked some sense of flow. The psyche lacked compassion in a way that encouraged the unbalanced pursuit of the Vietnam war, just as, later, the lack of what we might call "garden" space in Reagan's head led to his callousness and

> brutality toward the powerless in El Salvador, toward old people here, the unemployed, schoolchildren, and poor people in general. (Bly 2)

Since this image of a man was also dangerous and closed-minded, Bly's overall opinion was that this man was a negative figure. According to Bly, "the Fifties male had a clear vision of what a man was, and what male responsibilities were, but the isolation and one-sidedness of his vision were dangerous" (2).

As a reaction to this male image, the 1960s introduced a new vision in terms of male roles and manhood, in part due to the outcome of the Vietnam War. In Bly's words "the violence and waste of the Vietnam war made men question whether they knew what an adult male really was. If manhood meant Vietnam, did they want any part of it?" (2).

The feminist movement also played a strong role in the rejection of the male image of the fifties during the sixties. This movement "encouraged men to actually look at women, forcing them to become conscious of concerns and sufferings that the Fifties male labored to avoid" (Bly 2). Men then started a process of introspection and redefinition of their image, for they found new elements to add, "as men began to examine women's history and women's sensibility, some men began to notice what was called their *feminine* side and paid attention to it. This process continues to this day and . . . most contemporary men are involved in it in some way" (Bly 2).

However, Bly is not satisfied with the resulting image of a sensitive man. According to him, this image is gentle and reflexive, but it restrains men:

> There's something wonderful about this development—I mean the practice of men welcoming their own "feminine" consciousness and nurturing it—this is important—and yet I have the sense that there is something wrong. The male

> in the past twenty years has become more thoughtful, more gentle. But by this process he has not become more free. He is a nice boy who pleases not only his mother, but also the young woman he is living with. (2)

Bly then argues that the "soft man" is not strong enough to fit the idea of a complete man. He perceives "soft men" as "lovely, valuable people" who "are not interested in harming the earth or starting wars. There's a gentle attitude toward life in their whole being and style of living" (2, 3). Nevertheless, he states that these males are not fulfilled as men because they lack an aggressive element within. According to Bly, the man needs this element in order to achieve the life-giving state; otherwise, although good, he will be a passive man with no energy and, thus, incomplete:

> But many of these men are not happy. You quickly notice the lack of energy in them. They are life-preserving but not exactly life-giving. Ironically, you often see these men with strong women who positively radiate energy. Here we have a finely tuned young man, ecologically superior to his father, sympathetic to the whole harmony of the universe, yet he himself has little vitality to offer. (3)

Bly notices that these men are not only unhappy but in great pain, too. Bly states that "the amount of grief and anguish in these younger men was astounding" (4). He also mentions the remoteness of "soft males" from their fathers and the problems in their relationships as the sources of this suffering. In addition, according to Bly, these men are not well prepared to face the problems of life successfully since they need to be aggressive enough to face potentially dangerous situations. Moreover, this type of man needs strength to carry on during the difficult times, which he lacks in Bly's opinion:

> [Soft men] had learned to be receptive, but receptivity wasn't enough to carry their marriages through troubled times. In every relationship something *fierce* is needed once in a while: both the man and the woman need to have it. But at the point when it was needed, often the young man came up short. He was nurturing, but something else was required—for his relationship, and for his life. (4)

From Bly's perspective, this kind of aggressiveness is not only beneficial but also highly necessary in order to be a complete and a happy man. In fact, he continues his criticism towards the soft males when he states that "the 'soft' male was able to say, 'I can feel your pain, and I consider your life as important as mine, and I will take care of you and comfort you.' But he could not say what he wanted, and stick by it. *Resolve* of that kind was a different matter" (4). He continues noticing the lack of self-assessment and energy in the males emerging from the sixties.

Bly analyzes the process of achieving manhood. His coined concepts and useful ideas include that of the *warrior*, defined as an inherently aggressive man. This image of the *warrior* is his proposal against the dull softness of the contemporary man. He argues that men need to possess energy, courage, and decisive action to cope with life.

Another concept from Bly's book, borrowed from mythic criticism, is that of *initiation*, which is linked to that of *rites of passage* found within many tribal civilizations and underground groups. According to Bly, the idea of initiation states that in order to be a man, a boy must learn from a man. "It's becoming clear to us that manhood doesn't happen by itself; it doesn't happen just because we eat Wheaties. The active intervention of the older men means that older men welcome the younger men into

the ancient, mythologized, instinctive male world" (15). For Bly, a central part of this initiation is establishing contact with what he calls "the wild man": "every modern male has, lying at the bottom of his psyche, a large, primitive being covered with hair down to his feet. Making contact with this Wild Man is the step the Eighties male or the Nineties male has yet to take" (6).

Once the learning process has reached a certain degree, the boy is put on a trial that will decide if he will become a man or not. However, Bly asserts that our society does not provide either respected initiators or official rites of passage, so many young boys become adults physically, but they are not men because psychologically they are not mature enough and older men cannot teach them: "In our culture there is no such moment [initiation]. The boys in our culture have a continuing need for initiation into male spirit, but old men in general don't offer it. The priest sometimes tries, but he is too much a part of the corporate village these days" (15).

One more concept taken from Bly's discourse is *katabasis*, a Greek term that stands for the moment in which a man's life has reached its lowest point. From Bly's perspective, a man cannot be complete if he has not gotten to a point in life in which his pride is utterly shattered and his self-confidence is at its worst level. A man needs *katabasis* in order to become reflexive. By being at his lowest level, a man will be able to start a process of introspection which will signal his faults, mistakes, defects, and inadequacies. This in turn will make the man able to redirect his path in life and will widen his perspective, for he will be seeing his reality from a perspective that otherwise would have been very difficult to adopt. For Bly, the moment of *katabasis*, roughly

translated as hitting bottom, that is, one's lowest stage in life, is one of the marks of the transition between a boy and a man.

To summarize, Bly's different "stages" of the manhood-achieving process will serve here to explore the evolution towards manhood, as portrayed in the different characters of *A Raising in the Sun.*

C. The Black Male's Image from the Perspectives of Earl Ofari Hutchinson, bell hooks, Luke Charles Harris, Jim Cullen, and Haki Madhubuti

Black male thinkers like Earl Ofari Hutchinson claim that the media are responsible for planting negative stereotypes about black men in the mind of black people themselves: "Blacks watch the same TV programs, read the same newspapers, listen to the same radio programs that practically from the cradle to grave throb with and reinforce racial and gender stereotypes. It is virtually impossible to be immune from this social pollution" (Hutchinson 169). bell hooks, a renowned black feminist, has noted in her book, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* the intense debate over black male representation. hooks is aware that in such a debate, black female writers are also blamed for consciously contributing to the creation and perpetuation of this flawed image of the black male:

> Those works, as well as writing by contemporary black women writers in general, were seen as being anti-black male, as consciously promoting negative representations. . . .

> Black women writers have responded to the charges that they consciously portray black men "negatively" by defensively pointing out to the accuracy of their representations or by invoking the notion of a transcendent artist who is somehow divinely inspired and therefore not fully accountable for the images emerging in her work. (*Yearning* 70)

In regard to these negative representations, hooks observes a degree of accuracy and highlights the generalized tendency to relate male negative behavior with racial oppression: "Many of us were raised in homes where black mothers excused and explained male anger, irritability, and violence by calling attention to the pressures black men face in a racist society where they are collectively denied full access to economic power" (*Yearning* 75).

In addition to the potential accuracy of such negative representations, her words above show a relationship between racial oppression and power structures. She then examines the way in which denying access to power is linked to specifically male images and in turn to patriarchy:

> Historically the language used to describe the way black men are victimized within racist society has been sexualized. When words like castration, emasculation, impotency are commonly used terms to describe the nature of black male suffering, a discursive practice is established that links black male liberation with gaining the right to participate fully within patriarchy. (*Yearning* 76)

From hooks's point of view, black liberation and access to power not only imply participation in economic power but also mean entering into a privileged gender position in relation to women: “Embedded in this assumption is the idea that black women who are not willing to assist black men in their efforts to become patriarchs are 'the enemy'” (*Yearning* 76). For her, the discourse about black male liberation actually acts as another oppressive force on black women and, therefore, must be deprived of sexism: “Until black women and men begin to seriously confront sexism in black communities, as well as within black individuals who live in predominantly white settings, we will continue to witness mounting tensions and ongoing divisiveness between the two groups” (*Yearning* 76).

hooks views patriarchal masculinity as highly dangerous to black men:

> Masculinity as it is conceived within patriarchy is life-threatening to black men. Careful interrogation of the way in which sexist notions of masculinity legitimize the use of violence to maintain control, male domination of women, children, and even other men, will reveal the connection between such thinking and black-on-black homicide, domestic violence, and rape. (*Yearning* 77)

Although she utterly disagrees with patriarchy, she is conscious that simply blaming men or presenting them as victimizers is not the solution. For her, the most acute problem is the lack of an alternative model for men to follow: “we have not begun to create new norms of masculine behavior, blueprints for the construction of self that would be liberating to black men” (*Yearning* 75). As a possible answer to this, hooks favors an

inclusive form of feminism in which both women and men have relevant participation (*Yearning* 64). For her, this joint effort may help men to redefine themselves: "Still, the most visionary task of all remains that of re-conceptualizing masculinity so that alternative, transformative models are there in the culture, in our daily lives, to help boys and men who are working to construct a self, to build new identities" (*Yearning* 64).

hooks views class as a powerful force that inevitably affects gender constructions. In her *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, she describes the relationship between class and patriarchal models of manhood:

> Patriarchal socialization says you are responsible if you get a job, bring your wages home, and provide for your family's material well-being. Yet poverty and lack of job opportunities have prevented many black males from being responsible in the patriarchal sense of the term. Many black males accept this definition of responsible manhood and spend their lives feeling like a failure, feeling like their self-esteem is assaulted and assailed on all sides, because they cannot acquire the means to fulfill this role. (*We Real Cool* 85-86)

hooks does not fail to remind us of Hansberry's visionary message in *A Raisin in the Sun* concerning the impact of capitalism upon black masculinity:

> Black power militants were ruthless in their critique of capitalism. They unmasked the corruption in the labor force in America announcing for the black man that whether or not he had a legitimate job, one that would give him value in the eyes of white folks, no longer mattered since nothing about the capitalist structure was legitimate. Within that system

> everybody was a thief, everybody a gangster, everybody on the take. This was the struggle Lorraine Hansberry had prophetically predicted would take place in her play *A Raisin in the Sun.* (*We Real Cool* 16)

For hooks, capitalism, far from liberating black men and offering opportunities to improve their already inferior economic class, forces them to become as greedy as anybody else. This is what happens to Walter Lee Younger, the main character of Hansberry's play, for he measures his masculinity only in economic terms.[7]

Poverty and the materialism promoted by patriarchal and capitalist models, however, are not the only obstacle that black men face in their liberation and resulting construction of their self. According to hooks, even privileged and educated black males fall prey to social pressures emanating from racism:

> Today many smart black men who have been well-educated know that they are not supposed to be critical thinkers and they do not try to be. A black man, even an educated one, who thinks critically is still regarded suspiciously in mainstream culture. Oftentimes educated black males in well-paying jobs learn to assume a "go along to get along" pose so as not to appear threatening to white co-workers. (*We Real Cool* 41)

As a mode of illustration again, in *A Raisin in the Sun*, George Murchison, the wealthy and educated young man who courts Walter Lee's sister Beneatha, fits well the above

---

[7] Describing Walter Lee's internal struggle, Wilkerson writes that he "believes that the money itself is synonymous with life." Indeed, when asked by his mother "since when did money become life?" Walter Lee responds, "It was always life. . . . We just didn't know it." Learning to play the game from watching white men, Walter believes what Wilkerson calls a popular notion of manhood that says "the possession of money and the things it can buy will make him a man in the eyes of his family and society." (*We Real Cool* 16) Walter's words reveal the extent to which capitalism has oppressed him. He holds a totally capitalistic view of life and for him money is the supreme goal in life, both as a parent and as a man.

description for he has assimilated white patterns of masculinity to the point of rejecting his black heritage.

In addition to hooks, who focuses mainly on how patriarchy and capitalism force black men to assume a specific masculine model, other black authors specifically reflect upon the traits that black masculinity need to display. Authors Luke Charles Harris, Jim Cullen, and Haki R. Madhubuti agree that the black man should foster a number of distinctive traits in order to tell himself apart from white models of masculinity. Luke Charles Harris thinks that the black man must develop two traits: solidarity and self-assessment. Concerning solidarity, Harris says, "progressive Black men especially need to cultivate the habit of consistently working together with the many Black women who have helped to construct vibrant and powerful perspectives that illuminate the various problems facing our [black] community" (384). This means that black men must nurture gender equality, so that the idea that the priorities of black men are superior to those of black women must be eradicated:

> What are the lessons we must learn? Henceforth, we must challenge the idea that Black women have suffered less than Black men and that, therefore, the problems of Black men are more urgent than those of Black women; we must reject the perception that problems of Black women are the mere "by-products" of the concerns confronted by Black men; we must repudiate the notion that Black women must put loyalty to their "race" first, even in cases where they have been victimized and /or marginalized by Black men because of their "gender." (Harris 385)

In regard to self-assessment, Harris sees it as a tool to fight patriarchy within their community: “most important, Black men must learn to repudiate the notions that they are entitled to walk through the door of liberation first and that they can be liberated without fully confronting the destructive characteristics of patriarchy within the Black community” (385, 386). In other words, black men first have to recognize that patriarchy acts destructively within their community and then they have to eradicate such influence.

For Jim Cullen, black men must face combat and must nurture authority. He thinks that black men have perceived combat as a way of achieving manhood and thus obtaining freedom. In his essay “I’s a Man Now,” he quotes Thomas Long, a black man who became a soldier: “If we hadn’t become sojers, all might have gone back as it was before…But now tings can neber go back, because we have showed our energy and our courage and our naturally manhood” (qtd. in Cullen 499). Cullen uses Long as an example to stress that the most important effect of fighting as a means for achieving manhood reflects upon the family itself, for this action endows black men—former slaves—, with authority within their families:

> “Suppose you had kept your freedom witout enlisting in dis army; your chilen might have grown up free and been well cultivated as to be equal to any business . . . But it would always have been flung in dere faces —‘Your fader never fought for he own freedom’—and what could dey answer? Neber can say that to dis African Race anymore.” (qtd. in Cullen 499)

Long's words reveal the value of fighting for black people. Since they belong to a minority, they must always be fighting the oppression of hegemonic groups. For him, fighting is not only a matter of personal commitment but also a matter of education of one's children.

Authority, which Cullen sees as a result of facing combat, becomes another trait black males need to forge. As African-Americans tend to consider the Bible as one of the sources of principles to be followed, a religious perspective of authority must go in line with the biblical command that dictated that men have authority over women, and that women must obey men: "Unto the woman He said, . . . thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen.3:16). Under this rule, male authority, both among blacks and whites, is equated to patriarchy, a "sacred" code that has turned women, and in the context of the blacks, the black woman, into a second-class human being.

The question of male authority that Cullen holds as very important is subject of controversy especially among the feminist movement, which poses new challenges to the construction of modern manhood models. Bly sees in this deconstruction of male authority the reason why many men look unhappy and weary. He says: "many of these men are not happy. You quickly notice the lack of energy in them. They are life-preserving but not exactly life-giving. Ironically, you often see these men with strong women who positively radiate energy (3). Even those more progressive men who fight traditional patriarchal premises and search for new manhood models need to feel a degree of authority. But this authority of "the new male," this masculine model seemingly resulting from the influence of feminism on masculinities, should not be an

authority over women, for this would mean a return to patriarchy. Thus, a reasonable question is how this authority would be exercised? A possible answer would be that this patriarchy-free "new male" would exercise his authority in conjunction with that of the woman's, especially the one he is living with, and especially when it comes to raising children, adopting, in this way, a family role different from that of the traditional provider. As Fasteau, author of the book *The Male Machine*, puts it:

> There is another level of resistance however, to masculine involvement with child care. Being a father, in the sense of having sired and having children, is part of the masculine image, but fathering, the actual care of children, is not. Men who spend a lot of time taking care of their children —washing, dressing, feeding, teaching, comforting, and playing with them—aren't doing quite what they should be. (Fasteau 92)

Fasteau stresses the level of rejection that traditional masculinity models ascribe to fathers who take care of their children actively. In the light of this critic's words, traditional masculinity sees direct interaction among fathers and small children as "out of place" and "inappropriate." The same can be said about black fathers specifically. The absence of black fathers in the families is alarming. According to Madhubuti, "the majority of Black children under the age of 18 live in families that include their mothers but not their fathers, while one in every five white children lives with just his or her mother" (viii). The following figures show the low level of participation and lack of involvement of black men when building and staying in a family:

> In 2007, 52% of all marriages ended in divorce. Thenumber has risen over 70% in our African-American community. Overall, 1 in 3 children are

> raised in single-parent home. Seven out of ten, black children resided in similar homes. Black men displayed immaturity in sexual relationships. More often, an individual by the age of 35 has at least one child from an unmarried or divorced woman. (Brooks)

In other words, and going back to Cullen, his ideas of combat and authority, although important in the process of building black masculinity, can be misperceived as an attempt to promote patriarchy, if viewed in the light of gender relations as purely a power struggle. To avoid this misinterpretation, combat and authority must be considered, instead, as part of the traditionally neglected role of the male in the process of raising children.

Black author Haki R. Madhubuti claims that black men must possess four specific traits: self-awareness, cultural consciousness, commitment to their children, and honesty to themselves and to their wives. For him, black men should be conscious of their past and present and must be able to build their future. In his book, *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?* Madhubuti states that lack of self-consciousness is one of the major problems black men face: "One of the tragedies of Black life in America is that too many black people never acquire insight into their own existence. They *just do not know who they are.* And, this confusion about *identity* and *source* is at the core of our ignorance . . . Afrikan American people have little knowledge of themselves" (ii). Knowing about himself, therefore, becomes essential in the establishment of the new black man in the US, according to Madhubuti.

For Madhubuti, "Culture, 'shared understanding', is that medium in which values are transmitted from generation to generation. . . . A people's consciousness, the way

they view and operate in the world, is shaped by their (or another's) culture." (6). For him, black manhood and black culture cannot be separated because culture is inherent to self-awareness. As he says, "The way people view themselves and the extent to which they rise up to any situation and decide their own course is a serious cultural question." (6). However, black men have overlooked this cultural component, according to Madhubuti. He thinks that, in general, black people have little understanding of their own culture and, therefore, pay little attention to the educational values transmitted by the white dominant culture to their children. He argues that black men's misconceptions of their own culture have been partly shaped by this lack of understanding (5).

Another aspect that a black man must develop in Madhubuti's perspective is that of a responsible parent**.** Many black men abandon their female partners when they become pregnant, an undesirable situation, considering that the father figure is greatly important for the healthy development of children: "fathers are the missing links in the lives of many young Afrikan Americans" (189). For him, the presence of a responsible father is preponderant in the life of a young child:

> In an increasingly dangerous and unpredictable world, absent fathers add tremendously to the insecurity of children. It is common knowledge that children function best in an atmosphere where both parents combine and compliment their energies and talents in the rearing of children. Even if pregnancy is an accident, it is clear that once a decision is made to bring a child to term, the rearing of that child cannot be accidental. (189)

The image of a black man as a father is, in Madhubuti's eyes, an image that many black men choose to neglect, "most Black men give very little thought to the lifelong

commitment that fathers *must* make to their children" (191). For him, once a man fathers a child, his role as a father is mandatory and must not be bypassed.

One last trait required for the advent of a new black man is that of being honest to themselves and to their wives. For Madhubuti, one of the most common excuses of a black man is that black women do not understand black men (170). He states that "This denial of reality is not uncommon among Black men…Until Black men can honestly face themselves and communicate with themselves, they will not be able to relate meaningfully to Black women" (189). In this light, the success of the relationship relies greatly in the honesty of the black man to admit that a woman is not a passive, second-class person, but one who actively evaluates his behavior and offers necessary input for potential social changes among African-Americans.

In summary, the black authors consulted for the purpose of this study happen to offer a series of traits concerning black masculinity which are greatly helpful in the analysis of the sociological phenomenon of black masculinity and its evolution in Hansberry's play.

D. Friedrich Nietzsche's Concept of the Higher Man

I have chosen Nietzsche as part of the underlying structure of this analysis, mainly based on his aesthetic view, given that we are dealing with drama, the form of art that, *par excellence*, represents for Nietzsche a sort of conciliation of Dionysian and Apollonian life forces and hence, a justification of *life* and the world (*TBT*).

I am fully conscious, however, that the use of Nietzsche's thought for the theoretical analysis of a work like this may pose, for different scholars, two main

objections, both valid in part. First, Nietzsche's philosophy may be viewed as restrictive or even prohibitive for the analysis of black masculinity in general, since his thinking apparently embodies white hegemonic standards only. Second, Nietzsche has been widely criticized for an apparent male-centered view of the world in his works.

Although true to some extent, when these views are scrutinized through Derrida's vision of texts and meaning, for example, these objections tend to weaken which, in turn, allows and justifies the use of Nietzschean philosophy and aesthetics in the analysis of a work written by a black woman and depicting the world view of the black men of her times. Therefore, a foreword concerning this "reader-text" hermeneutics becomes necessary.

Minority groups often claim that mainstream, hegemonic authors should not be taken into account for analyzing the marginal reality of these groups because these authors do not represent an accurate view of their experiences. While at a first glance this position seems valid and fair, it actually rests upon the binary opposition of center versus margin that Derrida calls logocentrism and to which he openly objects:

> The system of language associated with phonetic-alphabetic writing is that within which logocentric metaphysics, determining the sense of being as presence, has been produced. This logocentrism, this *epoch* of the full speech, has always placed in parenthesis, suspended, and suppressed for essential reasons, all free reflection on the origin and status of writing, all science of writing which was not technology and the *history of a technique*, itself leaning upon a mythology and a metaphor of a natural writing. It is this logocentrism which, limiting the internal system of

> language in general by a bad abstraction, prevents Saussure and the majority of his successors from determining fully and explicitly that which is called "the integral and concrete object of linguistics." (*Of Grammatology*, "The Outside and the Inside")

For Derrida, Western thought is shaped by a series of binary operations that highlight one specific meaning construction while obscuring many other possible readings of a text. In order to uncover these other readings, Derrida proposes inverting the binary operations present within texts:

> In a traditional philosophical opposition we have not a peaceful coexistence of a vis-à-vis, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand. To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment. (*Positions* 41)

For example, let us take members of a minority group who reject the views of a mainstream author about them, while at the same time, they consider themselves entitled to analyze a mainstream author. Such analysis would be inaccurate under the same premise that experience is different and thus, their view is invalid.

A similar situation occurs when considering claims that Nietzsche represents the hegemonic thought because he promotes patriarchy and ignores women in his works, departing from the feminist view which perceives that patriarchy is a given construct of society; that is, society is essentially patriarchal. Such a belief falls into what Derrida calls a "transcendental signified." A transcendental signified is a concept whose meaning originates directly within itself and does not follow a differential or relational

association with any other realities. As a result, this transcendental signified becomes the center of meaning, or "prior truth" which allows to structure other ideas of meaning around it (Bressler 124). For Derrida, such "prior truths" are not accurate mental structures because they are understood without being compared to other signifieds or signifiers, which for him is impossible as it is perceived when he discusses the idea of representation:

> The so-called "thing itself" is always already a representamen shielded from the simplicity of intuitive evidence. The representamen functions only by giving rise to an interpretant that itself becomes a sign and so on to infinity. The self-identity of the signified conceals itself unceasingly and is always on the move. The property of the representamen is to be itself and another, to be produced as a structure of reference, to be separated from itself. The property of the *representamen* is not to be *proper* [*propre*], that is to say absolutely proximate to itself (*prope*, proprius). *The represented* is always already a *representamen. (Of Grammatology,* "The Outside ~~Is~~ the Inside*")*

Specifically, feminism assumes that patriarchy is a monolithic constant, present in all societies, that enjoys a perennial privileged position. In doing so, feminism fails to observe different power structures at play within such societies. For example, even though women have been traditionally defined in terms of men, that is, they have been given an attributive status in the binary oppositions for building masculinity within a patriarchal society, feminism has radically opposed to these binary operations. From this opposition, feminism has successfully forged a construction of womanhood detached

from patriarchal premises. While achieving a voice and building their own definition of womanhood, women have also built a vision of masculinity in feminist terms. This highlights a shift of centers and margins in the power structure of woman-man, which is more evident in the academic fields: nowadays masculinity is mostly defined in feminist terms in the academic sphere. This illustrates Derrida's idea that concepts do not have meaning by themselves nor are they utterly hegemonic or fixed to centers or margins.

Derrida's idea of shifting positions can be applied to a situation in which, say, Nietzsche's aesthetics is used like a kaleidoscope to “see” the dynamics of human relationships beyond culture, gender, race, and time. Since Nietzsche's proposition of philosophy is an aesthetic one, morality is subject to aesthetics as well: aesthetics would establish itself “beyond good and evil”. From a Derridean perspective, all signifiers and signifieds owe their meaning to their interrelationships, but such meanings change based on the relational elements at play. A close analysis of social groups reflects the same idea, since marginal and central groups shift their power positions in different levels of society, contain different levels of power themselves, and gain or lose power in comparison to other marginal and hegemonic groups. Applied to Nietzsche, a Derridean reading acquires a similar analysis. To reject Nietzsche's aesthetics as a source of literary analysis on the basis of his misogyny, for instance, can be somewhat narrow-minded. Again, from a Derridean reversal of the construct of presence-absence, Nietzsche's alleged misogyny would not necessarily prove his alliance with patriarchy, for it could be *also* interpreted as a possible detachment from it. This Derridean *reading* in turn, can enable a broader vision of Nietzsche's ideas that can permit their application in modern literary analysis of marginal groups.

Friedrich Nietzsche's conception of the Dionysian tragic hero in *The Birth of Tragedy* and his figures of the Last Man, the Higher Man, and the Overman—an extended metaphor of tragic/Dionysian evolution—contribute to the exploration and clarification of a number of key concepts valuable for the purposes of this analysis, such as the warrior, initiation, and self-affirmation.[8]

In *The Birth of Tragedy* (*TBT*), Nietzsche mentions two principles or forces present in Nature, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, merging in a perfect balance in the production of Greek tragedy as a work of art:

> These two very different drives go hand in hand, for the most part in open conflict with each other and simultaneously provoking each other all the time to new and more powerful offspring, in order to perpetuate in them the contest of that opposition, which the common word "Art" only seems

[8] Using Nietzsche, a nineteenth-century white European writer, to analyze a classic work of an African-American female writer of the fifties might well raise a series of charges, among them Eurocentrism. All these claims however can be challenged when one applies the Derridean principle of the possible and plausible double meaning:

> . . . logocentric thinking . . . has its origin in Aristotle's principle of noncontradiction: A thing cannot both have a property and not have a property. Thanks to Aristotle, maintains Derrida, Western metaphysics has developed an either-or mentality or logic that inevitably leads to dualistic thinking and to the centering and decentering of transcendental signifieds. Such logocentric way of thinking, asserts Derrida, is natural for Western readers, but problematic. (Bressler 125)

Concerning Eurocentrism, from this Derridean perspective, Nietzsche's thought, traditionally linked to European values, represents instead a most anti-Eurocentric thinker, considering his furious attack against the very foundation of Europeanness: Christianity. Likewise, Capitalism, another ideology representing Eurocentric ideals is aggressively defied by Nietzsche:

> Just see these superfluous ones! They steal the works of the inventors and the treasures of the wise. Culture, they call their theft--and everything becometh sickness and trouble unto them! Just see these superfluous ones! Sick are they always; they vomit their bile and call it a newspaper. They devour one another, and cannot even digest themselves. Just see these superfluous ones! Wealth they acquire and become poorer thereby. Power they seek for, and above all, the lever of power, much money--these impotent ones! (*TSZ* XI)

Although it is undeniable that Nietzsche has been used to promote Eurocentrism, his severe criticism of capitalist values contradicts directly the idea that his thought is restricted to a mere vehicle to promote Eurocentric ideas. This in turn opens the possibility of viewing his ideas as non-Eurocentric as well, following the Derridean idea of multiple meanings. Nietzschean philosophy and aesthetics should not be excluded when analyzing works by members of minority groups.

> to bridge, until at last, through a marvellous metaphysical act of the Greek "will," they appear paired up with each other and, as this pair, finally produce Attic tragedy, as much a Dionysian as an Apollonian work of art. (*TBT* 1)

The Apollonian principle is associated with illusion, dreams, beauty and order: "In accordance with the root meaning of his association with brightness, he is the god of light. He also rules over the beautiful appearance of the inner fantasy world . . . is the symbolic analogy to art in general, through which life is made possible and worth living." (*TBT* 1)

Contrastingly, the Dionysian principle is associated with intoxication and irrationality. It also represents the flux of life and, therefore, chaos and unpredictability. Nietzsche takes hold of Schopenhauer's imagery to describe "the tremendous *awe* which seizes a man when he suddenly doubts his ways of comprehending illusion, when the principle of reason, in any one of its forms, appears to suffer from an exception." He continues, "if we add to this awe the ecstatic rapture, which rises up out of the same collapse of the *principium individuation* is from the innermost depths of a human being, indeed, from the innermost depths of nature, then we have a glimpse into the essence of the *Dionysian*, which is presented to us most closely through the analogy of *intoxication*" (*TBT* 1).

These two impulses, although related to the aesthetics of tragedy[9], are contained in the psychological and "moral" framework of the human being. From this viewpoint, applying these principles to explore the aesthetic dynamics of the play by Hansberry *A Raisin in The Sun* is a worthwhile and challenging task, since they permeate both the work of art itself and the evolutionary process to manhood embodied mainly in Walter Lee, the tragic hero.

Seeing the process of manhood from the Apollonian-Dionysian, what *appears* is but a complex set of randomly converging elements, permanently emerging in life's cycles. In other words, while the process of becoming a man *appears* like an "Apollonian," linear progression in which one stage leads to another, the Dionysian, the chaos contained in the process, goes within. In Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* the Apollonian-Dionysian appears in a sort of reconciliation. It is as if Dionysus "absorbs" Apollo. Hence, the higher man is Dionysian, which implies a *tragic morality* leading to the Overman. The tragic phenomenon is not about misfortune or misery, but a necessary "evil": the destruction from which life emerges.

---

[9] Before considering modern tragedy, it is paramount to review the concept of classic tragedy. Classic Greek tragedy follows Aritotle's principles in his work *Poetics*. For him, the definition of tragedy is as follows:

> Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. (VI)

Among the elements that make up tragedy, Aristotle finds dramatic action as the most important:

> Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all. Again, without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be without character. (VI)

Although characters represent the actions, Greek tragedy also possesses a distinctive element that is as necessary as the characters to deliver the actions to the audience: the tragic chorus. For Aristotle, the role of the tragic chorus is also of great importance: "The Chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole, and share in the action . . . " (XVIII).

Evil is necessary to achieve good, for “man needs what is most evil in him for what is best in him” (*TSZ* LXIII 5). This complex metaphysical comfort dealing with construction through annihilation—the Dionysian-Apollonian vital interplay—is the foundation of the morality of the overman, a moral complexity that resembles what Bly calls *katabasis*: “If a friend arrived depressed and ashamed, saying, ‘I've just been fired,’ Jung would say, ‘Let's open a bottle of wine; this is wonderful news; something good will happen now’” (Bly 70-71). In this evil lies *the* tragic principle: the necessary destruction for the affirmation of life, which leads to the higher man, in Nietzsche’s terms, and to manhood in Bly’s.

The Nietzschean principle of evil is deeply connected with the concept of the higher man stage that leads to the overman stage. The higher man is one who, in face of his own destruction, still is able to overcome himself and say YES to life. The higher man is, in fact, an ontological state that represents the condition of existential anguish, defiance, and constant quest. The higher man is profoundly human and then makes mistakes, but these mistakes are one more stage in his process of self-overcoming. Zarathustra's metaphor of the “three metamorphoses of the spirit” depicts this process. First, the spirit becomes a camel, bearing all burdens with resignation: “What is heavy? so asketh the load-bearing spirit; then kneeleth it down like the camel, and wanteth to be well laden” (*TSZ* I). Then, the camel becomes a lion: “What is the great dragon which the spirit is no longer inclined to call Lord and God? 'Thou-shalt,' is the great dragon called [sic]. But the spirit of the lion saith, 'I will'” (*TSZ* I). Finally, the lion becomes a child: “Innocence is the child, and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a game, a self-rolling wheel, a first movement, a holy Yea” (*TSZ* I). Walter, the tragic hero in Hansberry's play

and subject of the present discussion, can be said to be in the camel-lion metamorphosis since he is fighting like a warrior to overcome himself in search of self-affirmation.

CHAPTER THREE

The Aesthetics of the Play in the Characters: The Evolution of Black Manhood

In *A Raisin in the Sun*, manhood is a constant and refers to the idea of being a man, as perceived socially and philosophically. That is, the play presents the idea of manhood—the identity of the male gender—, through the idea of masculinity—the social expression of the male gender. In this sense, the images of the male human beings embodied in George Murchison and Walter Lee are depicted negatively through the "unmanly" behavior of both men. In addition, Walter Lee, the main character, is portrayed repeatedly as a man who has not achieved his manhood or his status of being an accomplished man. Nevertheless, Walter's manhood—or lack of it—is continuously assessed by means of social and behavioral parameters, which will eventually serve as a means to perceive his progress towards achieving his manhood.

The negative portrayal of black manhood in Hansberry's characterization manifests the dynamics of the manhood-achieving process in terms of Bly's, Kimmel's, and Nietzsche's perspectives. George Murchison, the wealthy black young man, represents Kimmel's image of the playboy, Bly's concept of the Fifties male, and Nietzsche's figure of the last man in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*; Walter Lee, the main character, is like a boy, in Bly's characterization, and a failed attempt to become a self-made man, in Kimmel's perspective, and a tragic hero in Nietzschean aesthetics. Walter's two friends stand for prototypes of the last man, in Nietzschean terms, and anti-masculine patterns, in Kimmel's view. The female characters, which will not be

analyzed in depth here for reasons dealing with the central theme, permeate the whole drama and play a certain kind of *chorus* role, helping to complete the main hero's profile.

A. The Playboy and the Fifties Male: Murchison, an Image of the Anti-tragic Figure

George Murchison is one of the most visible "negative" depictions of traditional manhood in the play in Bly's, Kimmel's, and Nietzsche' views. Borrowing concepts from Bly and Kimmel, Murchison would be more like a combination of the Fifties male and a playboy. From a Nietzschean perspective, Murchison's profile would fit Zarathustra's Last Man.

For Bly, the Fifties male had a negativity highlighted by his "isolation and one-sidedness of his vision [which] were dangerous" (2). This was a masculinity model for which strict social normality and tradition were fundamental. Not fulfilling the established roles of masculinity, like fatherhood and breadwinning, meant becoming a failure as a man.

Kimmel reinforces this idea of fixed rules that were vital to the Fifties male:

> In our stereotypic image [*sic*] the 1950s was an era of quiet, order, and security. What we like to remember as a simple time, "happy days," was also an era of anxiety and fear, during which ideas of normality were enforced with desperate passion. "The effort to reinforce traditional norms seemed almost frantic," writes the historian William Chafe. The 1950s was a decade of containment. . . . The trappings of gender failure

> were all around us in the 1950s, and American men discovered what happened to men who failed, especially the sons of men who failed as breadwinners and fathers. They became homosexual, they became juvenile delinquents, they became Communists—soft, spineless dupes of a foreign power, who were incapable to stand for themselves. (236-237)

This fear of failing pushed men toward holding frantically the traditional norms and severely criticizing those who did not obey them. Resignation to the social order was, to sum up, the norm of the Fifties man, a highly *negative* attitude towards life.

The Fifties male, Kimmel says, is perceived through his egocentric correctness and need for normality and for *fitting in*: "In the 1950s, American men strained against two negative poles—the overconformist, faceless, self-less nonentity, and the unpredictable, unreliable nonconformist" (236). In Kimmel's words, the Fifties male struggled for a middle point, "Men had to achieve identities that weren't too conforming to the march of the empty gray flannel suits lest they lose their souls; but they couldn't be too nonconforming lest they leave family and workplace responsibilities behind a frantic restless search for some elusive moment of ecstasy" (236).

In Hansberry's play, George Murchison is a typical Fifties male: he thinks he is always right, demands without giving, is incapable of understanding women, and rejects his cultural heritage. Murchison criticizes his prospective girlfriend, Beneatha, and his brother-in-law, Walter Lee, because he sees the nonentity in him and the nonconformist in her. Murchison sees in Walter Lee just a poor limousine driver, a representative of the "empty gray flannel suit," while Beneatha, due to her strong character and activism,

exemplifies the nonconformist extreme. In the play, the dialogue manifests all polar attitudes that both Murchison and Beneatha, hold concerning the cultural heritage of blacks and, therefore, their envisioning of black masculinity. Those given circumstances are disclosed to the reader or audience by the scene in which Murchison picks up Beneatha to go to the theater. In his interaction, this man constantly belittles the woman that he is supposed to take out with prickly comments that pierce through the most external layers of the young woman's identity until they reach the core. Consistent with a dramatic action that generates stage tension, he initially mocks her appearance: "*George: (To Beneatha)* Look honey, we're going to the theatre—we're not going to be in it...so go change, huh?(*ARS* 2.1.80).[10] As the dialogue in the scene progresses, one can see that the mockery of Beneatha continues and penetrates to her inner self; Murchison, not satisfied with making fun of Beneatha's appearance, directs his turrets to her beliefs about black heritage to legitimate patriarchal oppression: "*George:* . . . ---and then the monologue will end with the word heritage! *(Nastily)* Let's face it, baby, your heritage is nothing but a bunch of raggedy-assed spirituals and some grass huts! (*ARS* 2.1.81).

Murchison's disrespect for Beneatha is constant and his attitude is oppressive, for he is always imposing his "right" point of view upon hers (*ARS* 2.1.80). His rejection of Beneatha's appearance is rooted in his desire for normality, which Bly describes as the Fifties man's incapacity to "see women's souls well" (1). George's aggressive attitude is not merely about Beneatha's hairstyle; it is about his incapacity to understand women's motives. Beneatha is attempting to deviate from the rules of normality and, as a Fifties

[10] The quotations from *A Raisin in the Sun* will be introduced with the initials *ARS* and will end with their respective page number. They will come from the edition listed in the bibliography unless specified otherwise.

male, George cannot tolerate this. When he promptly commands her to “get dressed,” he is implying that Beneatha is not dressed in the pattern of normality; therefore, she is being *eccentric*. He even “defines” the term *eccentric* for Beneatha without hesitation, feeling apparently assured of his words and opinions, which are grounded on those established patterns of normality that give him security. As Kimmel would put it concerning this attitude, “while men sought to define a normal masculinity, they situated themselves in a vast sprawl of 'normalcy'” (236). Normality implies tradition and tradition is a solid ground for the Fifties man; enforcing it, provides him with confidence, for it also enforces his masculinity. Murchison symbolically embodies the patronizing discourse of the male Chauvinist who must prove himself more intelligent, knowledgeable, and powerful than any woman. Therefore, tension in the play escalates because the dialogue turns itself into rapid exchange of sarcasm, which illustrates the strained relationship between empowered females and a recalcitrant masculine model.

According to Bly, the interior thought of the Fifties man was different from his exterior: “underneath the charm and the bluff, there was, and there remains, much isolation, deprivation, and passivity” (1). Again Murchison exemplifies this assertion. Murchison only *appears* self-assured, but he is not. The fact that he feels entitled to make decisions over the woman's body suggests a lack of power over his own being. For instance, he cannot change the color of his skin, as he would probably like to, because in his inner being, Murchison is ashamed of his race. This becomes evident in the scene when Beneatha, appears showing her natural, African hairstyle:

(*Beneatha looks at him slowly, ceremoniously, lifts her hands and pulls off the headdress. . . . George freezes mid-sentence* . . .)

George: What in the name of—

Ruth: . . . You expect this boy to go out with you with your head all nappy like that?

Beneatha (looking at George): That's up to George. If he's ashamed of his heritage--

George: Oh, don't be so proud of yourself, Bennie—just because you look eccentric.

Beneatha: How can something that's natural be eccentric?

George: That's what eccentric means—being natural. Get dressed.

(*ARS* 2.1.80)

Concerning this rejection of his African heritage, Murchison's display of self-assuredness only hides his fears of being with a woman who values her black inheritance. Thus normality is but a facade to conceal his self-denial. When Beneatha confronts him and places him in a predicament of deciding between his Black heritage or his public reputation, Murchison quickly changes the topic and clings frantically to his own sense of security: the idea of normality. Murchison's self-denial disguised under normality is also disclosed when he visits the Youngers later. Walter Lee, in an unusual and, from Murchison's perspective, embarrassing display of Black pride, greets him and calls him "Black Brother," to which Murchison promptly replies "Black Brother, hell!" (*ARS* 2.1.79).

Murchison's image fits not just that of the 1950s male but also has some characteristics of Kimmel's playboy. As a playboy, Murchison is depicted as an immature man who views life with triviality. The playboy philosophy was based on the belief that "American men experienced their manhood most profoundly when they were boys at play, not men at work" (qtd. in Kimmel 255). For Bly, this philosophy views males as "boys" and not as "men." In *Iron John*, he metaphorically states that boyhood is an underdeveloped stage of male life that must be overcome to achieve manhood when he describes the reasons and feelings of the boy when he must abandon his house to live in the forest with the Wild Man (14).

Playboys were criticized because they tried to break free from their obligations to pursue a dream-like life. Kimmel, quoting Ehrenreich, describes this male model:

> *Playboy*, Ehrenreich argues, attacked "the bondage of breadwinning," offering instead "a coherent program for the male rebellion: a critique of marriage, a strategy for liberation (reclaiming the indoors as a real for masculine pleasure) and a Utopian vision." (254)

Murchison loves luxury and a good lifestyle; he is superficial and hollow. For him, going to the theater with his girlfriend, dressing up and even studying are only part of the rules to gain reputation for the sake of social acceptance. Studying is not only mechanical but superfluous. This is evident when Beneatha questions him about the meaning of studying, "*George*: (*With artificial patience, counting his fingers*) It's simple. You read books—to learn facts—to get grades—to pass the course—to get a degree. That's all—it has nothing to do with thoughts" (*ARS* 2.2.97). Even his relationship with Beneatha

evidences his hollowness and superficiality. All he wants from her is that she becomes a beautiful companion to enjoy simple talks:

> *George*: . . . 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. Drop the Garbo routine. It doesn't go with you. As for myself, I want a nice, simple, sophisticated girl, not a poet, O.K? (*ARS* 2.2.96)

Murchison's words "nice," "simple," and "sophisticated" are a series of concepts opposed to that of "a poet." They summarize his definition of his ideal girlfriend. By rejecting what he calls Beneatha's "moody stuff" (*ARS* 2.2.96), he is attempting to position himself in the quiet, pleasurable atmosphere that playboys enjoy.

The playboy mentality encouraged men to "break with the responsibilities of breadwinning, without, somehow, losing their manhood" (Kimmel 257). George indeed refuses every responsibility or commitment, as well as to seriously listen and try to understand his girlfriend's emotional or economic needs.

The playboy's superficiality and lack of commitment is depicted as well in Murchison's lack of a political stance and his failure to perceive political commitment in others. For example, Murchison's inability to see what Beneatha sees politically is evident when he sees Beneatha's new hairstyle, "Oh, don't be so proud of yourself, Bennie—just because you look eccentric" (*ARS* 2.1.80). The fact that Beneatha is trying to make a political stand for her heritage is misinterpreted by George. He fails to perceive this by just calling her "eccentric." This scene has a direct historical connotation.

According to Robert Nemiroff, “The scene in which Beneatha unveils her natural hair is an interesting example of historical issues. In 1959, when the play was presented, the rich variety of Afro styles introduced in the mid-sixties had not yet arrived: the very few black women who wore their hair unstraightened cut it very short” (introduction x). Since Beneatha unveiled an Afro style, the idea of being proud of her African heritage is highlighted. George’s clear lack of understanding her statement is perceived better when Beneatha questions him about how something natural can be eccentric, to which he answers, “That’s what eccentric means—being natural. Get dressed” (ARS2.1.80).

From a Nietzschean aesthetic perspective, this image of the “playboy attitude” would be the type of mentality that numbs the spirit and renders a person unable to seize life. Playboys are happy men who have learned to seize only the pleasurable side of life, while refusing to see the unpleasant side. This negation of life's wholeness is present in Murchison. He is only willing to accept that part of life that hides a Dionysian reality, like the value of Beneatha's political and racial position confronts. This is why he says to her angrily: “This is stupid! I don’t go out with you to discuss the nature of 'quite desperation” or to hear all about your thoughts'” (*ARS* 2.2.96-97).

George is visibly uncomfortable about having a meaningful conversation with his girlfriend. He does not care at all about Beneatha’s intellectual interests or political thoughts. Indeed, George does not consider important to communicate with Beneatha. In fact, Beneatha’s needs as a human being, her own need of communication with her partner, both as his girlfriend and as person, are none of Murchisons’s concern. As Kimmel would describe this situation,

> The playboy was all sexual prowesses without responsibility, blemish-free sex fantasies with blemish-free nubile women. As the magazine's title intimated, American men experienced their manhood most profoundly when they were boys at play, not men at work. (255)

The mutual understanding that women display and their understanding of the lack of maturity in men is significant in Hansberry's play; this feature denotes a "superiority" worth analyzing from Nietzsche's perspective of the Will to Power.

Beneatha has already realized that George definitely will not even try to understand her. As a result, she looks for support in another female character, her mother:

> *Beneatha*: Mama, George is a fool—honest. (*She rises*)
>
> *Mama*: . . . Is he, baby?
>
> *Beneatha*: Yes.
>
> . . .
>
> *Mama*: You sure?
>
> *Beneatha*: Yes.
>
> *Mama*: Well—I guess you better not waste your time with no fools. (*ARS* 2.2.98)

Lena not only believes in Beneatha's judgment but stays by her side, despite the fact that both women have just had a serious argument after which Beneatha calls her mother 'tyrant' (*ARS* 1.1.51-52). This scene poses a good instance to see the *struggle* between female and male forces in terms of the will to power of a male-dominated milieu. The women's interaction and mutual understanding is but a balancing force that helps internal

equilibrium in adversity, represented in this case, by the presence of an egocentric black male in Hansberry's play. This scene provides the reader and the audience with a glimpse of the historical dynamics of the times concerning gender. Lena is able to understand her daughter and thus she provides support when the young woman needs it. Conversely, Murchison undermines his girlfriend. He is never a source of support for his girlfriend, as he is not interested in knowing her as a whole human being. As Kimmel explains: "[The] *Playboy* transformed the way men viewed women, separating them into distinct categories. Wives were the enemy, mothers were abstractions to be venerated, and other women were soft playthings to be seduced" (254).

Again, from a Nietzschean perspective, Murchison represents a typical prototype of the will to power of the Last Man: a constant appeal for normality, the denial of his own nature, his egocentrism, his subjecting to white social appearances, his not taking risks, are all seen by this character as morally appropriate, a morality that highlights not just a negativity of manhood, but also a nihilistic view of life typical of someone who dreads opposition and struggle. In a word, he embodies Zarathustra's Last Man: "Turning ill and being distrustful, they consider sinful: they walk warily. He is a fool who still stumbles over stones or men!"(*TSZ*, Prologue 5)

The idea of normality as the source of George's confidence, that is, the crutches his security and masculinity rest upon, is also manifested through his apparent repartee skills: George has an answer for everything:

> *Ruth*: Will somebody please tell me what assimila-who-ever means!
>
> *George*: Oh, it's just a college girl's way of calling people Uncle Toms—but that isn't what it means at all. (*ARS* 2.1.81)

Murchison's rhetorical ability is not used to clarify the others' doubts but to impose upon others, to humiliate the "inferior." Again, Murchison's "will to power" emerges to compensate self-limitations and frustrations. By humiliating the "inferior," he is re-establishing "normalcy", so his own self cannot be questioned.

The Nietzschean principle of Will to Power refers to a constant struggle in *Life*:

> [Anything which] is a living and not a dying body . . . will have to be an incarnate will to power, it will strive to grow, spread, seize, become predominant - not from any morality or immorality but because it is *living* and because life simply *is* will to power. (*BGE* 259)

The Will to Power, as an inherent trait of life, looks for its own growth and benefit. In human interaction, this "contest" is a constant. Murchison and Beneatha's unhealthy relationship, as displayed in Hansberry's play, is a good example. As Murchison belongs to a minority group, he needs to exercise his own will to power upon his own racial group to compensate his lack of predominance in the white world. This also explains why he is always clinging to "normal" values that are purely white. Nietzsche would describe this attitude as a "craving for equality . . . expressed either by the wish to draw all others down to one's level (by belittling, excluding, tripping them up)" (*HATH* 300).

Interestingly enough, at the end, he does not solve Ruth's doubt and makes Beneatha bitter and resentful: "*Beneatha*: I don't like that, George" (*ARS* 2.1.80). In return, Beneatha herself will define "assimilationist" for Ruth:

> *Beneatha (cutting George off and staring at him as she replies to Ruth*): It means someone who is willing to give up his own culture and submerge

himself completely in the dominant and in this case *oppressive* culture! (*ARS* 2.1.81)

When she stresses the word "oppressive," Beneatha evidences her resentment against oppression, whether it is coming from him or culture itself.

George Murchison's despotism and selfishness are negative traits that reinforce the image of the last man, that is, those who Nietzsche would call "a lower, less valuable kind of beings" to contrast with those "whose life is ascending" (*WTP* 586 C). Murchison assumes that Beneatha has to adapt to his point of view. He overlooks her needs refusing to talk to her about her concerns on cultural heritage. Instead, he just repeats his command: "go change, uh?" (*ARS* 2.1.80). His language lacks politeness, which reveals a self-centered nature that only expects obedience from the other:

Beneatha: I am trying to talk to you.

George: We always talk.

Beneatha: Yes—and I love to talk.

George: (*exasperated*, *rising*) I know it and I don't mind it sometimes … I want you to cut it out, see—the moody stuff, I mean. I don't like it … (*ARS* 2.2.96)

From an aesthetic perspective, the above interaction between Beneatha and George is significant, for it shows a contrast between "ascendant" and "descendant" manifestations of the Will to Power. While Beneatha's will to power appears *vital*, since it generates struggle and conflict in line with Life course —she rejects conformity—, George's displays the opposite: stagnant, demeaning, weak. On trying to impose his will on her, Murchison reveals a "descendant" will reflected on a lack of "responsibility, self-assurance, and ability to posit goals for oneself" (*WTP* 898).

Conversely, while Beneatha tries to enhance their relationship as a couple by trying to lead it into deeper stages, George is only interested in imposing his own selfish will, to secure a position that can prevent him from making real commitments and decisions. On the surface, he looks stronger than Beneatha since he is the one deciding for both, but on a deeper and more vital level, he is but a "last man" who prevents himself from action by giving in to white social rules. In other words, Murchison prefers to stay in what Nietzsche calls a "comfort zone." This "comfort zone" becomes a "means of relief: absolute obedience, machinelike activity, avoidance of people and things that would demand instant decisions and actions" (*WTP* 45).

In Nietzschean terms, Murchison would be the "spiritually consumptive" type of human being: "Hardly are they born when they begin to die, and long for doctrines of lassitude and renunciation" (*TSZ* IX). This reminds us of Bly 's criticism of the *Fifties man* when he says that the Fifties male was extremely passive (1). In his conformism, Murchison fails to affirm life. For him, happiness can be reduced to simply following the established social norms of the white majority. His attitude, like that of a "negative nihilist" (*WTP*), contrasts sharply with Zarathustra's vision of the creator: being able to give birth to a dancing star (*TSZ* prologue, 5). From this viewpoint, Murchison is far from being a creator because he is dead in his inner being.

The play's dialogue ratifies that Murchison is not a creative agent. His discursive assault on black heritage becomes more revealing when one understands that the dramatic force that prompts Murchison to nullify Beneatha is not exclusively oppressing women, but it also targets men: this character also exerts his violent discourse on men that he consciously regard as "weak". Despite his condition as a guest in the house, this

man shows no respect toward Walter Lee when the latter is attempting to talk to him: "*George: (with boredom)* Yeah, sometimes we have to do that, Walter./ *Walter: (understanding the indifference, and offended)*: Yeah—well, when you get the time, man. I know you a busy little boy" (*ARS* 2.1.84). It is clear that, regardless of their mutual condition as men, Murchison and Walter Lee represent unequal embodiments of masculinity.

Hansberry's character, George Murchison, depicts the typical Fifties man for an overemphasis of normality and rigidity of thought, representing, at the same time, the negative model of an *anti-tragic* black masculinity. From Bly's view, Murchison symbolizes the immaturity of the boy who denies himself the status of a man. As a Nietzschean "anti-tragic" image, Murchison embodies the last man who rejects life's wholeness. Like a l*ast man*, Murchison conforms to the *playboy* philosophy, displaying a superficial attitude, detachment from responsibilities, self-denial and lack of respect towards others as wholesome human beings—especially women—, and a rejection of his cultural heritage.

The play's dramatic action is set in such a way as to exhibit Murchison's masculinity as a failed model. This can be seen in the reactions of the other characters around him. Beneatha, Murchison's girlfriend, establishes a fierce intellectual battle with him, refusing to submit to his authority. Although she has changed her tribal attire, a closer look on her dialogue reveals that her attitude still remains in direct opposition to Murchison's. She has become subversive:

Beneatha: I don't like that, George.

Ruth: Why must you and your brother make an argument out of everything people say?

Beneatha: Because I hate assimilationist Negroes! (ARS 2.1.81)

Beneatha's remark above reveals her unwillingness to keep silent and simply obey George's demands, which in this case she perceives as "assimilationist." The only female character who shows a certain degree of favor to Murchison is Ruth, but she does so only because he is rich:

Beneatha (Wearily): Oh, I just mean I couldn't ever really be serious about George. He's—he's so shallow.

Ruth: Shallow—what do you mean he's shallow? He's *Rich*!

Mama: Hush, Ruth. (*ARS* 1.1.48)

In the dialogue above, Ruth is simply considering George as a good prospect for an eventual marriage of Beneatha out of monetary interests, not because Murchison is a wholesome person. Conversely, Lena is more interested in Beneatha's explanation than in Ruth's opinion. In addition, when Beneatha later uses the word "fool" to describe him to her mother, the latter advises the young woman not to waste time with fools (*ARS* 2.2.98).

In addition to the almost generalized rejection that Murchison suffers from female characters, Walter Lee, his male counterpart, also refuses the yoke of his discursive domination. In this process, the dramatic action emerges as a clear picture of the contest of the will to power through human interaction, in which a centrifugal force of energies, concentrating in Walter, forces a reversal centripetal movement affecting Murchison. Walter Lee, the disrespected man of the house, proves that he can undermine

Murchison's shallow lifestyle with a simple remark: “I know there ain't nothing in this world as busy as you colored college boys with your fraternity pins and white shoes . . .” (*ARS* 2.1.84). In this way, through an unfolding process of maturity, Walter's will to power overrides Murchison's, which is reflected in his abusive discourse and static nature.

B. The Man of the Fifties, the Self-Made Man and the Last Man: Walter Lee

A Raisin in the Sun is set in an extended temporal context which, according to Hansberry, is established “between World War II and the present” (*ARS* 22). In other words, a more concrete time setting for the play would be from 1939 to 1959, which was the year of its first staging. This detail becomes important because it prompts the association of the play with the specific masculinity image that Bly defined in 1990—followed two years later by Kimmel—as the man of the 1950s.

Walter Lee Younger, the main character of *A Raisin in the Sun*, embodies a dynamically evolving masculinity process. At the beginning of the play, Walter Lee's personality appears negative for it gravitates between two different white masculine models: *the man of the Fifties* and the *self-made man*. As a member of a minority group, Walter is oppressed by the white mainstream society of his time, but at the same time, he has assimilated the very values that oppress and marginalize him, which is perceivable in the given circumstances of the play, specifically in the environmental facts and in the

previous actions.[11] Both elements make it clear that Walter Lee has married following a dream of happiness, but both adverse social conditions and the restrictive family pattern, characteristic among blacks, prevent him from attaining his dream. When the illusion of love has faded and economic hardship begins to hit, Walter Lee learns that he has to forget about his dream and stick to the pattern of his extended family, like most blacks. Lena, the mother, has the matriarch authority and the young couple has no choice but to go live under her wing.

Since Walter Lee is black and poor, job offers were restricted to a few options that barred him from social mobility: in the end, he becomes a limousine driver, a position that he loathes because it is a bitter reminder of the ghost of slavery, a social construct that lingers in the history of his ethnic group and that Walter Lee associates with black identity. Walter Lee has been trying to break free from this ghost that haunts his pretended masculinity. However, his own inner constrained black man has paradoxically internalized a servile attitude that he claims to hate, as his initial conversation with Lindner shows: "*Walter*: I mean—I have worked as a chauffeur most of my life—and my wife here, she does domestic work in people's kitchens. So does my mother. I mean—we are plain people...(*ARS* 3.1.147)

Walter's attitude reveals that his thinking actually becomes a manifestation of "The Fifties man." According to Bly, some features of this kind of masculinity were aggressiveness, lack of emotions, a strong sense of duty, isolation, and one-sided vision (2). The temporal context in which Walter moves exerts a strong influence in his thought,

[11] Previous actions are all the events that take place before the action of the play starts (Hodge 25). Hodge defines environmental facts as the fixed delineation of the place, time, and society in the play (24).

Walter is convinced to be a man of his times, although the women in his family think that he does not measure up to the model nor is he a man altogether yet. This makes him greatly anxious, which is perceived when, in order to prove his masculinity, Walter tells the women about his plans to ditch their pride and accept a white man's monetary offer in exchange for relinquishing their intention to move to his white neighborhood:

> *Walter*: . . . I tell you I am a *man*—and I think my wife should wear some pearls inthis world!
>
> *Mama*: Baby, how you going to feel in the inside?
>
> *Walter:* Fine! . . . Going to feel fine . . . a man . . .
>
> *Mama*: You won't have nothing left then, Walter Lee.
>
> . . .
>
> *Beneatha*: That is not a man. That is nothing but a toothless rat. (*ARS* 3.1.144)

Walter's efforts to play by the standards of the man of the Fifties to fit to a white society mean little to the women, for they do not perceive this masculine model as desirable.

Walter's embodiment of the man of the Fifties is not enough to turn him into an acceptable masculine figure, thus he also idealizes and assumes the personality of the self-made man, a traditional white model deeply immersed within the US white culture. Mistakenly he pursues this model as a means to prove his masculinity to both his family and the world because, for him, this is the most effective means to override the weakness that the female members of his family ascribe to him. To fulfill this goal, Walter invests all his time and efforts to pursue this white masculinity image, even though he is well

aware that he belongs to a minority group considered as second-class citizens. This can be perceived when Walter talks with his mother about his job:

> A job. *(Looks at her)* Mama, a job? I open and close car doors all day long. I drive a man around in his limousine and say, "Yes, sir; no, sir; very good, sir; shall I take the Drive, sir?" (*ARS* 1.2.73)

This fixation creates in him a dysfunctional idea of black masculinity which, in turn, adds to his further failure as a father, son, husband and brother.

This representation of the black male apparently reinforces the idea that Hutchinson proposed in 1994 about the image of the black man being assassinated by the media and literature in general. This could also suggest that, since in Hansberry's play the male figure appears by and large negative, Hansberry could actually be adopting the same discourse of black-male bashing[12]. Such an idea, however, is not necessarily true when considering that Walter Lee displays an existential evolution throughout the play towards a more Life-affirmative masculinity in terms of the self-identity of the higher man, as will be seen in the next chapter.

i. Walter as the Man of the Fifties

Walter's position to life appears in Hansberry's play as the core of a contest of the will to power: Walter's versus those of the women of the family. Dramatically, Hansberry achieves to portray turmoil in this family: a tragic action that traps the hero in a whirlpool of violence dragging the family relationships first, and then the hero's own

[12] This is similar to what Nietzsche does when he despises the eternal feminine principle, as feminists argue later. In reality, Nietzsche's provoking assertions seem to pursue one end: to incite freedom from an enslaving morality.

self image, into a dark pit of misery. Walter Lee's self-image, like that of a man of the Fifties, generates a strong negative influence in the construction of his own black masculinity. This perception leads him to see a totally different "reality" from that perceived by the other members of his family. Walter's "reality" is not self-fulfilling or gratifying, but very far from the reality of a marginalized black male. Walter's obsession with money installs in the traditionally idealized white model, which only causes him more inner tribulation. His inability to reach his goal of becoming a "Fifties man" provokes a deep anguish in him, added to his need to be acknowledged as a man within his family circle. In consequence, he falls into a vicious circle: Trying harder to achieve such white masculinity model, he fails to achieve both this artificial manhood and his family recognition. Walter, however, is totally unable to perceive how his relationship with the women in the family is becoming tenser and tenser, regardless of their pointing it out clearly to him. This pattern, typical of the man of the Fifties (Bly 1), seemingly obeys to Walter's incapacity to "see women's souls well."

One value of the man of the Fifties strongly held by Walter Lee is that the man should always be the head of the family, although this is not the case of the Youngers, for Lena, Walter's mother, carries the strongest voice for decision-making in the family. This makes Walter visibly uncomfortable, which is made evident when Lena decides to buy the new house and asks for Walter's support:

> *Mama*: I wish you say something, son . . . I wish you'd say how deep inside you you think I done the right thing—

> *Walter: (crossing slowly to his bedroom door and finally turning there and speaking measuredly)* What you need me to say you done right for? *You* the head of this family . . . (*ARS* 2.1.94-95)

Lena knows that her son wishes to be the head of the family, and that his silence and submission are not sincere, but she also knows that Walter is not ready. Thus, Walter tries to prove to his mother that he is able to make the right decisions; all he needs is the opportunity to show his potential as a family leader. Yet Lena keeps directing the family and disregarding her son's opinions and ideas. This dynamic makes Walter bitter, so he makes sure that she understands how hurt he feels: "You run our lives like you want to. It was your money and you did what you wanted with it. So what you need for me to say it was all right for?" (*ARS* 2.1.95). Even though Walter has never rebelled against his mother's authority, he highlights the fact that he is totally unhappy with the way she directs the family.

Walter Lee's belief that men should occupy a privileged position in the family also leads him to criticize and try to control his sister's life. From Walter's point of view, one of the major problems in Beneatha's personality is her unruliness. This is why Walter's conversations with her inevitably end up in arguments:

> *Walter:* Who the hell told you you had to be a doctor? If you so crazy 'bout messing 'round with sick people—then go be a nurse like other women—or just get married and be quiet...
>
> *Beneatha:* Well—you finally got it said...It took you three years but finally you got it said. Walter, give up, leave me alone—it's Mama's money.

Walter: *He was my father, too!*

Beneatha: So what? He was mine, too...But the insurance money belongs to Mama. Picking on me is not going to make her give it to you to invest in any liquor stores—and I for one say, God bless Mama for that!

Walter: (To Ruth) See—Did you hear, did you hear? (*ARS* 1.1.38)

Walter's last words addressed to his wife imply that his sister's character is hard to put up with, which explains why it is so difficult for him to get along with her. In fact, his complaint is also a façade to disguise his disapproval towards her because she is uninterested in marriage.

According to Kimmel, the man of the 1950s was certain of a number of particular social roles, "if the suburban breadwinner father didn't exactly know who he was, he could at least figure out who he wasn't. In the 1950s American men strained against two negative poles—the overconformist, a faceless, self-less nonety, and the unpredictable, unreliable nonconformist" (236). Accordingly, to Walter Lee, a pretended man of the 1950s, the idea of a woman who is not married is not only strange but senseless. Although he has no "official" authority in the Younger family, he tries to exert some authority indirectly through Beneatha, for Walter knows that his role as a man is to secure the stability of the family and his sister's behavior threatens this stability because her ways are "too radical." From his perspective of a man of the Fifties, Beneatha is one of the negative extremes that must be avoided: the nonconformist. For Walter, Beneatha directs her life in complete disregard for the current, "normal" social conventions and, therefore, she is a threat to the well-being of the family:

Walter: I just wondered if you've made up your mind and everything.

Beneatha: (Gaining sharpness and impatience) And what did I answer yesterday morning—and the day before that?

Ruth: Don't be so nasty, Bennie.

Beneatha: And the day before that, and the day before that! (*ARS* 1.1.36)

Since his sister's behavior drifts away from the idea of normality that the men of the 1950s valued so much, Walter wants to "fix" that "potential threat." By doing so, he will also be able to secure his position as the head of the family.

While Walter's words clearly reflect an oppressive manifestation of patriarchy, from his male perspective, he is acting in good faith: in his view, he is actually helping his sister and himself "Who the hell told you to be a doctor? If you so crazy 'bout messing 'round with sick peole—then go be a nurse like other women—or just get married and be quiet . . . " (*ARS* 1.1.38) As a man of the Fifties, Walter *knows* that Beneatha's decisions do not follow the social standard of normality, which will cause her problems and suffering: "*Walter*: I'm interested in you. Something wrong with that?" (*ARS* 1.1.36). Yet Walter is also protecting himself. Along with the potential problems that Beneatha's ideals may carry on her, her decisions prevent Walter from displaying his full masculinity as the man of the family because Beneatha's ideals are costly and the family is unable to carry such an economic burden: "Have we figured out yet just exactly how much medical school is going to cost?" (*ARS* 1.1.36). That is why he is constantly urging his sister to find a husband and literally throws her in the arms of George Murchison, Beneatha's wealthy boyfriend: "Girl, if you don't get all them silly ideas out of your head! You better marry yourself a man with some loot..." (*ARS* 3.1.150). His being older than Beneatha does not justify Walter's constant pressure on his sister; it is

instead a clear form of oppression against her freedom to which she strongly objects: “What have you got to do with who I marry!” (*ARS* 3.1.150). Walter's oppressive attitude results in an interesting dramatic and philosophical resource in Hansberry's play.

This oppression is particularly evident when it becomes a threat against Beneatha’s goals, and Beneatha's reaction towards his brother's reveals a strong will to power that undermines her “opponent's”. To his comments about how odd it is for a woman to become a doctor, she reacts passionately: “what did I answer yesterday, and the day before that, and the day before that?” (*ARS* 1.1.36). This response from Beneatha is particularly revealing concerning a previous action in the drama that the audience (or reader) can discover: Walter Lee's constant nagging upon his sister has been recurrent and prolonged over time. So, the audience or reader can expect Walter Lee's persecution to provoke a reaction resulting in the genesis of a clash that will eventually undermine his patriarchal drive. Following on the Third Law of Newton, Hodge argues in his book *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style* that all dramatic action is reciprocal (36). In this particular case, Beneatha's will to power manifests itself through a stubbornness that destabilizes Walter's.

Beneatha cannot explain her own weaknesses, but her continuous picking up and abandoning of hobbies responds to this dramatic clash of forces and not just to a search of self-identity. In other words, Beneatha's need to express herself is a reaction against the oppressive force that Walter Lee exerts on her. In this light, while Walter, a man of the Fifties, thinks about gathering money to become rich, Beneatha scatters the insufficient economic means of the family in activities that do not benefit the household. The force driving the aspiring doctor against her brother grows in intensity and becomes

uncontrollable: Beneatha even offends Ruth, Walter's wife, on account of her pregnancy: "*Beneatha*: It is my business—where is he going to live, on the roof?" (*ARS* 1.2.58). However, Beneatha's misdirected anger can be understood when the reader perceives the polarity of attitudes towards pregnancy that coexist in the play: while Lena is willing to welcome the baby into the family, Walter is indifferent. Ruth, on her part, is anxious and feels guilty for bringing a new member to the family and Beneatha herself sees the baby as one more burden for the Youngers. For Beneatha, Ruth embodies the attitude of patriarchal submission: after all, she is the wife of a man of the Fifties who is struggling to gain power over the women in the house. It is precisely this opposition of forces related to Walter what triggers Beneatha, which establishes a dramatic action of significant dimensions in terms of the will to power between the male and female forces in the play. There is a clear contest in which Walter's actions, for the sake of acquiring control at least over one person in the family, reveal another unconscious intention: the male force (Walter's) conspiring against the female force (Lena, the mother), the one person who has proven efficient as the head of family.

Walter's patriarchal aspirations face an obstacle: Lena. Besides trying to subdue Beneatha to his will, he has to persuade Lena that he is able to direct the family, but this task is not easy, for Lena possesses a very strong personality and seems to know her son well. Walter wants to invest the insurance money that his mother is about to receive after her husband's death in a liquor store. He thinks that this responsibility will transform him in both a good leader and a provider for the family, a typical man of the Fifties. He is convinced that the liquor store is the best means to reach his goal, but he cannot change his mother's mind alone. Thus, he asks his wife to help him. Ruth, however, not only is

totally uninterested in his liquor store but is actually against Walter's desire to speed up the license process: Walter plans to bribe the officials in charge. However, he keeps pressing his wife until Ruth finally talks to Lena about his business project:

> *Ruth*: Ain't nobody business people till they go into business. Walter Lee say colored people ain't never going to start getting ahead till they start gambling on some different kinds of things in the world—investments and things.
>
> *Mama*: What done got into you, girl? Walter Lee done finally sold you on investing? (*ARS* 1.1.42)

Walter then manipulates Lena's maternal feelings: "*Walter: (Bitterly, to hurt her as deeply as he knows is possible)* So you butchered up a dream of mine—you—who always talking 'bout your children's dreams..." (*ARS* 2.1.95). These words seem to hurt Lena as it may be inferred from her attitude at the closing of the scene: "*Mama:* Walter Lee—(*He just closes the door behind him. Mama sits alone, thinking heavily*)" (*ARS* 2.1.95). Walter's manipulative way of taking advantage of his mother's love towards him constitutes an open and clear form of oppression, another negative facet in his search for traditional masculine roles.

Walter Lee's traditional masculine idiosyncrasy also exemplifies a negative image of the way some black men handle the familial economy. As a representative of the role men used to play during his time, Walter also acts as if the man is the sole responsible provider for the economic welfare of the family. He is aware that the Youngers are going through severe economic problems but, since he considers himself as the breadwinner, he undervalues and even ignores the importance of the female work in the

family. Again, the dramatic force behind Walter Lee can be seen as a patriarchal principle of domination that rests upon an inflated perception of his self-value. He is convinced that he has the skills and wisdom to protect his family but, after failing to fulfill the role of a masculine model intrinsically alien to his own nature, Walter Lee blames the women. In this sense, the sole idea of Beneatha's becoming a doctor and supporting the Youngers is unacceptable from Walter's point of view. To him, Beneatha is just a stubborn girl who, instead of helping, is actually a burden because her school costs mean a significant amount of money that could be invested in the family instead. He believes that Beneatha is unaware of such fact, so he asks her: "Have you figured out yet just exactly how much medical school is going to cost?" (*ARS* 1.1.36). In his eyes, his sister's studies represent a great expense and a possible obstacle for his possibility of fulfilling his duty as the economic provider.

Although Walter is not the only economic support in the family, for his wife Ruth also contributes with extra money from her work, Walter disregards Ruth's effort whatsoever and only brings up the subject to manipulate Beneatha:

> *Walter*: I don't want nothing but for you to stop acting holy 'round here. Me and Ruth done made some sacrifices for you—why can't you do something for the family?
>
> *Ruth*: Walter, don't be dragging me in it.
>
> *Walter*: You are in it—Don't you get up and go work in somebody's kitchen for thelast three years to help put clothes on her back? (*ARS* 1.1.37)

Walter's strategy is twofold: first, he wants to point out that Beneatha is the only member of the family who does not contribute economically and, therefore, she should not expect a place of privilege. Second, he attempts to gain some respectability as a positive masculine model and, in order to achieve this, he must neutralize the powerful dramatic force that drives Beneatha to the medical school. By shifting Ruth's attention from his oppressive attitude toward Beneatha to his sister's "unwillingness to help," Walter Lee expects Ruth to take sides with him, which will strengthen him. Both Beneatha and Walter seek the same end, the control of the money, but the former does it passively while the latter pursues it more actively. This clash manifests all the friction in the functioning of the Youngers as a family. By using the word "sacrifices," Walter tries to highlight the importance of the role of the provider in an attempt to lower Beneatha to a position of either humiliation or gratitude and, thus, force her into to his plans for the family.

Walter's prejudice against women as economically productive figures extends to all the women in the family. Lena is another unimportant source of help in his perception. Walter sees Lena's arriving check as his hope to start his business but fails to understand that Lena, as the owner of the money, is entitled to decide how to invest it for the benefit of the family. He even considers her criterion for investing the money useless and becomes extremely resentful when he learns that his mother has "wasted" part of it in a new house. Actually, his resentment is rooted in the fact that Lena has gotten ahead in accomplishing one of the goals that have been reserved to him. From his perspective, this is part of the family male role along with providing shelter for the offspring. This is made evident when Mama tells Walter's son about it:

> *Mama*: . . . Travis—*(she takes him by the shoulder and looks at him into his face)*—you know that money we got in the mail this morning?
>
> *Travis*: Yes'm—
>
> *Mama*: Well—what you think your grandmama gone and done with that money?
>
> *Travis*: I don't know, Grandmama.
>
> *Mama: (putting her finger on his nose for emphasis)* She went out and bought you a house! *(the explosion comes from Walter at the end of the revelation and he jumps up and turns away from all of them in a fury.)* (*ARS* 2.1.91-2)

This revelation is seen by Walter as a double blow to his masculine ideals: on the one hand, contrary to the current values of a man of the Fifties, a woman acting as the provider for the family is subversive; on the other, by buying the house, this woman is preventing his access to the money to start his business and thus prove his masculinity as a self-made man.

Besides his close-minded ideas of who must be the family head and breadwinner, Walter strongly believes that men are superior to women, thus men do not have to give any account of their actions to the inferior. Even though Walter does not express it openly, he thinks that he, as a man, must have a privileged position in society, and that black men are superior to black women socially and intellectually: "*Walter (mumbling)* We one group of men tied to a race of women with small minds!" (*ARS* 1.1.35). For

Walter, the inferiority of black women is evident, thus he believes they will not be able to understand him intellectually.

This overly independent, and most of the times isolated behavior, exemplifies the lack of constructiveness of the man of the Fifties, called by Bly “dangerous” (2). From a patriarchal point of view, and also as a manifestation of patriarchy, men's alleged superiority to women must be acknowledged and “visible,” and the traditional role of breadwinner is an instance. From this stand, their actions should not be questioned or criticized.

The masculine model that Walter Lee tries to embody engages in two discursive fallacies, a causative and a conceptual one. By the first fallacy, the burden of responsibility for Walter's shortcomings or failures is transferred from him unto black women in general. Walter Lee fails as a provider, thus he blames Ruth for her “small mind” because she does not want to support his investment. In so doing, he forgets to acknowledge that she is already supporting him and the family financially. More notorious is the conceptual fallacy of Walter Lee's contradictory principle: for him, Ruth is a negative token that represents all black women as conformists, but his sister's academic ambitions are also subject of his deliberate attacks. In fact, he wants his sister to have a small mind and conform to the status quo, just like his wife! Walter Lee concludes that his sister will eventually grow tired or bored of medical school clearly, assuming that Beneatha is unfit for the profession because she is used to abandoning her hobbies quickly. For Walter, Beneatha's academic pursuit is a fad, not a true dream: as a woman, she has not weighed the implications of majoring in medicine. Worse yet, for him, she is unaware that she cannot complete the task because she is a woman and

women cannot enter the health sciences field, a masculine realm. Fallaciously, Walter blames Beneatha of having a "small mind" not because of her school ambition, but because she cannot see her own limitations.

This stereotype, enacted by Walter Lee, is referred to by R.W. Connell in his work *Masculinities*. Discussing the construction of the male role in the late nineteenth-century, Connell says that women were excluded from universities because their brains were thought to be "too delicately poised to handle the rigors of academic work"(21), which would later hinder their natural disposition towards marriage and motherhood. From Walter's perspective, the black woman's "inferior" intelligence prevents her from understanding "visionary ideas;" therefore, she is not apt to disclose any intelligent criticism. In addition, black men are better not simply because they fulfill their family role as food and shelter providers. They are also superior because they have to carry out those tasks alone since black women fail even in one of their family tasks: supporting their husbands morally. Walter tells to Ruth: "That is just what is **wrong** with the colored woman in this world. . . . Don't understand about building up their men up and making 'em feel like they can do something" (*ARS* 1.1.34, my emphasis). Walter's use of the words "wrong" and "understand" in this context becomes significant and deserve a separate analysis before we keep exploring other aspects of his personality.

The way Walter uses the words "wrong" and "understand" contains the one-sided vision of the man of the 1950s. The word "wrong" is loaded with his perception of black women's role in society. According to Walter's mentality, women not only have to back up men; they must do it *always* , even when men keep judging them unsympathetically. For Derrida, Western mentality is built mainly on a series of binary operations that

highlight one specific construction of meaning, while they obscure many other possible readings of a text. (Bressler 124). In Hansberry's play, Walter embodies this mental construct. By considering black women's behavior towards black men as "wrong," Walter creates a binary opposition with "right": If black women are wrong, by default, black men are right. This places women at the margin and lets men occupy the center position, for they are "right."

Women, from Walter's point of view, need to correct this lack of solidarity but simply cannot do it because they lack self-knowledge: "*Walter (Looking at his wife and his sister from the door, very sadly)*: The world's most backward race of people, and that's a fact" (*ARS* 1.1.38). Thus, they need someone able to perceive the problem and to clearly point it out for them, as he does when talking to his wife: "See—I'm trying to talk to you 'bout myself—(*shaking his head with the repetition*)—and all you can say is eat them eggs and go to work" (*ARS* 1.1.34). This is why black women are for him urging for someone "superior" who can analyze their behavior and tell them what the problem is so that they can correct it. In summary, Walter's reasoning about considering himself superior to women frees him from the responsibility of justifying his acts.

Likewise, the way Walter Lee uses the word "understand" also deserves analysis in this context. "Understanding" refers to an intellectual act. It is the ability to analyze and internalize knowledge. In order to understand, the subject must first observe, then analyze. In other words, understanding is an active endeavor by which a person must make an intellectual effort involving observation, reasoning, and drawing conclusions, and Walter Lee's utterance highlights this idea. Black women are intellectually inferior just because they are mentally insufficient: they cannot observe their husband's needs,

think of possible solutions for their problems and act in consequence in order to help them. This is why the women in his family, from his perspective, are not entitled to question his judgment as a man.

Walter's idiosyncrasy, to sum up, exemplifies that of the man of the 1950s. The view of normality, along with a short-sighted vision and stubbornness, highlights the idea of a masculinity model that evidently exerted a negative influence in Walter. Nevertheless, the mentality of the man of the 1950s is but just one of the elements that turn Walter into a failed man. Along with it, Walter was deeply influenced by a much older masculine ideal: the self-made man.

ii. Walter's Failed Pursuit of the Self-Made Man

While Walter Lee embodies the man of the 1950s, the model of masculinity that he tries to pursue is a myth deeply rooted in white US culture: the self-made man. The idea of self-made man appeared since 1776 to the early 1800s (Kimmel 18). Kimmel defines this concept as "a model of manhood that derives identity entirely from a man's activities in the public sphere, measured by accumulated wealth and status, by geographic and social mobility" (16-17). According to this ideal, a man is not only exempted from accountability of action, but he also must be a winner. This construct, directly related to traditional manhood, is a model adopted by Walter Lee. For Walter, who comes from an unprivileged background and who is deeply aware of the poverty in which his family lives, being a winner is a goal that must be pursued constantly. As the most tangible perception of success is the acquisition of material goods, Walter's idea of

being a winner is directly related to money and material possessions. This fits undoubtedly the idea of success of the self-made man.

This concept is indeed more profound than simple materialism on Walter's part. His constant crave for money is deeply ingrained in his self-esteem and need of being recognized as a man. When talking to his son Travis, Walter says:

> You wouldn't understand yet, son, but your daddy is gonna make a transaction . . . a business transaction that's going to change our lives . . . And—and I'll say, alright son—it's your seventeenth birthday, what is it you've decided? . . . Just tell me where you want to go to school and you'll *go*. Just tell me,—what it is you want to be—and you'll *be* it . . . Whatever you want to be—Yessir! (*He holds his arms open for Travis)* You just name it, son . . . *(Travis leaps into them)* and I hand you the world! (*ARS* 2.2.108-109)

Walter is not just a shallow materialist; he only pursues the model of economic power he knows to become a man and, at the same time, to teach this model to his son, Travis. This is perceivable when Walter wants to present himself to Travis as a winner:

> *Walter: (To Ruth only)* What you tell the boy things like that for? (*Reaching down into his pants with a rather important gesture*) Here, son— (*He hands the boy the coin.…*) (*ARS* 1.1.31)

Even though Walter is aware that the family's economic situation is critical, he tries to exhibit in front of his son an opposite image, that of a successful father capable of making money easily.

Walter's question "What you tell the boy things like that for?" also has significant implications. The Youngers live poorly and money is scarce in the house; however, Walter Lee gives his son money without any hesitation. In fact, Walter's reprimand against Ruth implies that he disapproves the way in which Ruth is raising the boy. So Walter gives his son an extra coin with a defiant attitude towards Ruth (*ARS* 1.1.31). This second action implies what Walter thinks about Ruth as a mother. For him, she is establishing a negative example for the boy to follow because she has refused to give her son one coin, even though they could afford giving him two. However, this assumption is proven wrong to Walter himself very soon:

> (*Door opens. Walter walks in. He fumbles with his cap, starts to speak, clears throat, looks everywhere but at Ruth. Finally:) Walter* (*To Ruth*): I need some money for carfare. (*ARS* 1.1.39)

In other words, Walter's question "what you tell the boy things like that for?" and the action of giving him money are nothing but Walter's intentions to transmit an image of economic power and success to his son, an image that is false. However, this image is not pure pretense. Although Walter has not achieved his desired economic status, this goal keeps being indeed his most concrete embodiment of masculine achievement. In this light, trying to transmit this type of thinking to his son is vital to affirm his own masculinity as a father and build a sense of masculinity in his son as well.

Critics commonly assert that *A Raisin in the Sun* is a play about dreams. These aspirations turn themselves into powerful dramatic forces that sometimes collide and precipitate conflict in the play, but they are also centripetal forces that explain the

psychology of characters and their actions as cultural subjects[13]. For instance, one fundamental drive that becomes the core of all the Youngers is the American Dream: Beneatha wants to succeed as a doctor, Lena wants the best for her children and Ruth also longs for economic stability and prosperity. With the exception of Beneatha's, Walter also shares the aspirations of the women in the house, but, contrary to them, he is pursuing the dream in an isolated way. Walter believes that it is his responsibility as a man to attain the dream and his masculinity is questioned if he fails to do so. Consequently, he constructs himself using a discourse of self-affirmation and naturally envisions himself with the potential for achieving the "American Dream". His ego is boosted by the aspiration: he is convinced he has the capability to "save" his family and thus Walter conceptualizes himself as a self-made man. In this light, he searches for all possible means to make money but not as a pure materialistic need. Since he is a member of the working class and of a minority group, Walter Lee sees economic success of the mythic self-made man not simply as materialistic, a byproduct of a capitalist society, but the very essence of masculinity. Walter's constant allusions to money have actually become a burden too hard to bear for the family:

> *Walter*: You want to know what I was thinking 'bout in the bathroom or not!
>
> *Ruth*: I know what you thinking 'bout.
>
> *Walter*: (*ignoring her*) 'Bout what me and Willy Harris was talking about last night." (*ARS* 1.1.32)

[13] Cultural subjects are those who interiorize symbolic aspects present in their culture (Cros 24).

Evidently, Ruth is totally uninterested in Walter's ideas for making a fortune, but he keeps expressing them because they are part of his masculine ideal: he wants to be the successful provider that will lead the Youngers out of poverty. Money is, therefore, a masculine symbolic good. Walter notices her indifferent attitude, which makes him recriminate her about the chance of being successful that he has lost in the past:

> *Walter*: Anybody who talks to me has to be a good-for-nothing loudmouth, ain't he? And what you know about who is just a good-for-nothing loudmouth? Charlie Atkins was just a "good-for-nothing loudmouth" too, wasn't he! When he wanted me to go into the dry-cleaning business with him. And now—he's grossing a hundred thousand a year. A hundred thousand dollars a year! You still call *him* a loudmouth! (*ARS* 1.1.32)

Walter's words disclose not only his desire to enter into business, but also a deeper need: he wants his wife to see him as a "real" man and resents her for not perceiving his constant efforts to become "masculine" (that is, an emulation of the self-made man). Since Walter's idea of a "real" man corresponds precisely to the image of the self-made man, the business opportunity he has lost in the past increases his resentment and bitterness against Ruth, for she did not help him that time. Walter's masculine discourse, paradoxically, sets him as a victim of the lack of support that women have showed to his business ventures.

As a materialistic rhetoric merges with manhood, business becomes the wild West that the self-made must conquer. The acquisition of money rests as the ultimate proof of success, which prompts Walter Lee to view money as the quintessence of

masculinity and later makes him disregard more valuable sides of life, such as good family ties and self-fulfillment:

> *Mama*: I'm looking at you. You a good-looking boy. You got a job, a nice wife, a fine boy and—
>
> *Walter:* . . . Mama, that ain't no kind of job…that ain't nothing at all. *(Very quietly)* Mama, I don't know if I can make you understand. (*ARS* 1.2.73)

Walter's disregard of the aspects of life unrelated to money manifest his fixation with the idea of monetary success that is characteristic of the self-made mentality. Although Walter thinks he is trying to make his mother understand a deeper truth—that he hasn't achieved anything in life—in reality, his pursuit of the self-made masculine model has clouded his vision and does not let him perceive his current achievements in life. This myopic vision of achievement responds to the tension that generates as a result of the dynamics of marginalization in masculinity, as Connell argues:

> Marginalization is always relative to the authorization of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group. Thus, in the United States, particular black athletes may be exemplars for hegemonic masculinity. But the fame and wealth of individual stars has no trickle-down effect; it does not yield social authority to black men generally. The relation of marginalization and authorization may also exist between subordinated masculinities. (81)

Along with his lack of awareness concerning essential aspects of life, Walter Lee considers himself as one of the causes of his family's hardships. He knows his job is not

good enough or self-fulfilling to achieve success. Instead it places him in the position of a servant, and Walter's idea of masculinity, in accordance with the US myth, is that a man must make his own fortune out of nothing but hard work. But his materialization of so-called "American Dream," however, faces two big obstacles: his being a black individual with limited access to opportunities and his current job, which for him is not proof of masculinity.

Concerning this point, when analyzing the relationship of men and their work position during the Depression of the 1930s, Kimmel states that "the workplace was too unreliable to enable men to prove their manhood; in fact, it eroded their authority at home" (201). Walter Lee is a typical example of this emasculating effect caused by the Depression in many men. Unconsciously, he is struggling because his manhood is undermined by white hegemonic masculinity. His job does not let him "prove" his masculinity to his family by hindering access to monetary success. It places him in the position of a servant of a white man, which adds up to his feelings of despair and frustration. The impact of Walter's job undermines his masculinity so much that his despair and frustration evolve into resentment and bitterness:

> *George (Looking at him with distaste, a little above it all)*: You're all wacked up with bitterness, man.
>
> *Walter (Intently, almost quietly, between the teeth, glaring at the boy)* And you—ain't you bitter, man?
>
> Ain't you just about had it yet?" (*ARS* 2.1.85)

And later:

> *Walter*: . . . Don't you see no stars gleaming that you can't reach out and grab? You happy?—You contented son-of-a-bitch—you happy? You got it made? Bitter? Man, I'm a volcano. Bitter? (*ARS* 2.1.85)

Walter's utterance discloses his frustration as an "incomplete" man. He sees himself caught in a life that will not let him advance in search of his masculinity.

Walter's urgent need of becoming rich makes him confused, restless, and irritable. He expresses these feelings when he talks to his wife and pretends to guess her thoughts:

> *Walter: (Rising and coming to her and standing in front of her)* You tired, ain't you? Tired of everything. Me, the boy, the way we live—this beat-up hole—everything. Ain't you*? (She doesn't look up, doesn't answer)* So tired —moaning and groaning all the time . . . (*ARS* 1.1.32)

Although Walter's intention is to expose Ruth's alleged thinking, he actually discloses his own powerlessness as a man: "this beat-up hole." This expression unmistakably relates to the idea of failure, Walter's. So, instead of a self-made man who deserves the admiration of his family, Walter embodies the impact that the Depression had on many men's idea of masculinity. In fact, Kimmel mentions accounts of men feeling the same sadness, frustration, and sense of incompleteness during that period of time: "During the Depresssion I lost something. Maybe you call it self-respect, but in losing it I also lost the respect of my children, and I am afraid I am losing my wife" (qtd. in Kimmel 201).

Walter's idea of being a winner as the masculine model to follow is explicitly disclosed when he argues with George Murchinson, Beneatha's boyfriend:

> *Walter*: . . . Filling up your heads—*(counting with his fingers)*—with the sociology and the psychology—but they teaching you how to be a man? How to take over and run the world? They teaching you how to run a rubber plantation or a still mill? Naw—just to talk proper and read books and wear them faggoty-looking white shoes . . . (*ARS* 2.1.84-85)

Success equates with economic power. Since this is the meaning of manhood that Walter believes in, it becomes the model that he is following. In contrast, the word "faggoty" reveals his disdain towards other kinds of masculinities, which reinforces the idea that for him the only valid masculine model is that of the self-made man, even if this model is almost impossible for him to emulate. He is aware that his urgent need of becoming successful is too heavy a burden for his shoulders. He tells his mother about how troubled he has become due to his crave of material success: "I want so many things that they are driving me kind of crazy…Mama—look at me" (*ARS* 1.2.73). His wife complains: "Walter: This morning, I was lookin' in the mirror and thinking about it… I'm thirty-five years old; I been married eleven years and I got a boy who sleeps in the living room…" (*ARS* 1.1.34). But Walter knows only one type of masculinity, that of the self-made man; therefore, there is only one way to help his family and himself: becoming wealthy. When the check of his deceased father's insurance arrives, Walter picks it up and he tells his mother: "Do you know what this money means to me? Do you know what this money can do for us? *(Puts it back)* Mama—Mama—I want so many things…" (*ARS* 1.2.73). Money is success for Walter Lee. The check that he holds in his hand means to him his only chance to emulate the self-made man and, with that, his opportunity to become "a respectable man" in the eyes of his family.

iii. Walter Lee and the Last Man

As a cultural subject, Walter has internalized many white mainstream values as his own. Since Walter's social context promotes capitalism as the driving force that leads individuals out of poverty, Walter, who lacks education and is thus unaware of his own heritage, has nothing else but the white mainstream culture to create his own image. Walter's personality—haunted by a frenetic pursuit of the capitalist values of the self-made man and also following the ideology of the man of the 1950s—places him as a hopeless anti-tragic figure, just as the last man in Nietzsche's Zarathustra's sense. His clinging to normality, his one-sided vision of life, his lack of understanding of other individuals and of his own feelings, and his money-oriented view of success suggest that Walter's chances of evolving and overcoming himself are poor. In other words, Walter's view of life, like that of the last man, is far from approaching the Life-affirming view of the creator of new values.

Nietzsche derisively criticizes societies that cling to traditional values as to their supreme truth and affirms that such societies have a numbing effect on the human spirit. Lorraine Hansberry's drama, *A Raising in the Sun*, portrays this type of society. The mainstream attitude reflected on 1950s men emerges in the play in such a way, that it fits Nietzsche's model of a "dull society", where "No one thanks the witty man for the courtesy of adapting himself to a society in which it is not courteous to display wit" (*HATH* Man in Society 324). In Hansberry's play, Walter Lee is a typical victim of this numbing of traditional these values upon an individual. His interaction with the women of the household evidences these effects.

When Walter tries to persuade his sister that a woman who studies medicine is not socially appropriate, Walter is convinced that Beneatha's goal is abnormal. Thus, he tries to rectify her invoking the rules of society, the all-mighty status quo: "*Walter: (Defensively)* . . . Ain't many girls who decide— / *Walter and Beneatha: (In unison)* –'to be a doctor'" (*ARS* 1.1.36). By acting as an agent of a society that hinders intellectual and individual freedom, Walter Lee fits the standards of the last man. His compulsive adherence to normality—a feature typical of the man of the 1950s—, is one of the behaviors that will stop him from taking risks, like fading away from the establishment, in the Zarathustrian sense: "And he who would not languish amongst men, must learn to drink out of all glasses; and he who would keep clean amongst men, must know how to wash himself even with dirty water" (*TSZ* XLIII). From a Nietzschean perspective, the man of the 1950s would be a prisoner of his own limiting values, for he is metaphorically unable not just to "know how to wash himself even with dirty water" but also to transcend these conditions when literally life puts them in his way.

Walter Lee appears like the opposite of the model of a man beloved by Zarathustra: "I love him who is of a free spirit and a free heart" (*TSZ* Prologue 4). A close look at Walter reveals that his heart is not free. Walter's subjugation to the restrictions of the masculine model of the 1950s renders him incapable of speaking his mind. It took him three years to tell his sister how he felt about her decision to study! (*ARS* 1.1.38). Arrogance is another personality trait of the man of the 1950s that makes Walter fit the last man: "The arrogant man, that is, the one who wants to be more important than he is *or is thought to be,* always miscalculates" (*HATH* Man in Society

373). This arrogant, one-sided vision makes Walter Lee claim: “Here I am a giant—surrounded by ants! Ants who can’t even understand what the giant is talking about” (*ARS* 2.1.85). Walter's words reveal not just his self-perception but his perception of those surrounding him. In his eyes, he is a giant while the others are nothing but insects that lack the intelligence to understand his “bright” ideas. For the others, especially his family, Walter is either on the verge of craziness “Brother isn't really crazy—yet. He—he's an elaborate neurotic” (*ARS* 1.1.49) or he is a pathetic human being “You...you are a disgrace to your father's memory!” (ARS 1.2.75). The sharp contrast of these views shows that Walter's self-perception is tainted by arrogance, but not an arrogance that comes from merit or achievement: he is so blinded by his own self-image that he refuses to see the reality that the others perceive when they look at him.

Walter, like an anti-tragic image of the 1950s, from a Nietzschean perspective, displays a fixation with the monetary success of the self-made man, another trait of the last man. Walter is so focused in being successful and wealthy that he has no other conversation topic than money. His interest in Mama’s check, which he perceives as the hope to materialize his long-held dream of becoming a businessman and turning himself into a self-made man, makes him forget even the most basic manners for interacting with the family. He “greets” his mother by asking: “Did it come?” , which makes his mother react: *Mama (Quietly):* Can’t you give people a Christian greeting before you start asking about money?” (*ARS* 1.2.70). In fact, he is so involved with the idea of using his mother’s money that even when she manifests her discomfort towards his behavior, he ignores her remark and keeps asking about the check. (*ARS* 1.2.70).

Walter's constant illusory hope for money turns him into an empty materialistic man. He is so immersed in his capitalist values that he fails to understand that making money is simply a vain illusion. Walter is not capable of identifying his desperate need for new values because he is very busy devising plans to amass a fortune. In fact, Walter embodies one of the superfluous individuals produced by capitalism, a model type Zarathustra despises:

> Just see these superfluous ones! Wealth they acquire and become poorer thereby. Power they seek for, and above all, the lever of power, much money—these impotent ones!
>
> See them clamber, these nimble apes! They clamber over one another, and thus scuffle into the mud and the abyss.
>
> Towards the throne they all strive: it is their madness—as if happiness sat on the throne! Ofttimes sitteth filth on the throne.—and ofttimes also the throne on filth. (*TSZ* XI).

A prisoner of his own money-hungry madness, Walter does not realize that he is actually losing much more: "Verily, he who possesseth little is so much the less possessed: blessed be moderate poverty!" (*TSZ* XI), says Zarathusra. Walter has lost a real possession, his family's respect. At the end, his all-too capitalist values will drag him and his family into more than just a painful monetary loss.

To sum up, from the Nietzschean perspective of the last man, Walter Lee embodies the anti-tragic figure of the superfluous individual, one whose constant craving for money, resulting from his all-capitalist values of the self-made man, makes him adapt

to and never question the “normal” social order, while limiting his vision towards the more real values of the creator. All this in turn seems to suggest that Hansberry is undermining the image of the black man through her protagonist and other male characters in her play. A deeper analysis, however, challenges this assumption, as it will be seen in next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Aesthetics of the Play: Black Manhood and Life Affirmation

Although on a surface level, Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun*, seems to undermine black men, the fact of the matter is that, on a deeper level, it actually attempts to represent the gradual construction process of more self-affirming black masculinity models; in other words, through Hansberry's play, the audience assists to a process of breaking away from the traditional white masculinities of the self-made man, the playboy, and the man of the 1950s. Even though these emerging black masculinities still manifest characteristics similar to those of katabasis, the warrior, life-giving energy, and learning, categorized by white authors like Kimmel and Bly, they also exhibit a number of features specifically related to the black individual. In conjunction with these traits, the new, self-affirming black masculinity in Hansberry's play exhibits elements that black scholars and thinkers, like Madhubuti and hooks, have directly related to the cultural experience of black men and have seen as desirable; these elements are self-assessment, identity and pride, gender-free ideas of liberation, authority, and solidarity.

It is in this evolutionary process, where Nietzsche's aesthetic categories of the tragic phenomenon appear as appropriate. The tragic, emerging as the contest of the will to power of life mainly in the figure of the hero's fight, and Nietzsche's categories in his Zarathustra, the last man and the higher man, fit the evolutionary process of black masculinities depicted in this play.

A. Nietzschean Aesthetics and the Construction of Positive Masculinities through Tragic Affirmation

The fact that *A Raising in the Sun* is a play makes it appropriate to analyze it within Nietzsche's theory of tragedy as described in the *Birth of Tragedy*. In this light, the current masculinity crisis, the core of Hansberry's play, in which the breaking away from old masculine models in search of the construction of newer, more self-affirming ones, throws the tragic hero into an existential turmoil that establishes this play into the category of a *modern tragedy*. This study explores Hansberry's play from the point of view of the Nietzschean aesthetic categories of Dionysus and Apollo, embodied in the tragic hero, and the tragic phenomenon as the *eternal return* of the conflict of self-identity experienced by humans through history.

A Raisin in the Sun, is a dramatic piece that falls into the category of modern tragedy, in which a common individual confronts some type of existential conflict, very usually triggered by social conditions, such as the case of Walter Lee, Hansberry's tragic hero. As a modern tragedy, *A Raising in the Sun* can be said to portray Nietzschean aesthetic principles of Dionysus and Apollo that Nietzsche uses to describe the spirit of ancient tragedy: the setting, the plot, and especially the tragic hero, are aesthetic expressions (Apollonian), of the substance of Life (Dionysus). (*TBT*)

According to Nietzsche, Apollo is the cosmic principle of the empirical reality of order, beauty, wisdom and illusion, while Dionysus represents the opposite of Apollo, the chaotic reality of destruction, the “the tremendous awe which seizes a man when he

suddenly doubts his ways of comprehending illusion, when the principle of reason, in any one of its forms, appears to suffer from an exception" (*TBT* 1).

The way Hansberry describes the physical location of, for instance, the family's living room, can be said to transmit this Dionysian-Apollonian drive: "*The Younger living room would be a comfortable and well ordered room if it were not for a number of indestructible contradictions to this state of being*" (*ARS* 1.1.23). The house reveals Apollo in its order, while Dionysus is present in the inner contradictions struggling with the arranged pieces of furniture in the living room:

> *Now the once-loved pattern of the couch upholstery has to fight to show itself from under the acres of crocheted doilies and couch covers which have themselves finally come to be more important that the upholstery. And here a table or a chair has been moved to disguise the worn places in the carpet; but the carpet has fought back by showing its weariness, with depressing uniformity, elsewhere in its surface*. (*ARS* 1.1.23)

For Nietzsche, the principles of Dionysus and Apollo are vital elements in Tragedy. From this perspective, one can expect the aesthetic elements that include the setting, the plot and the characters, to blend in order to transmit a real life experience and so create the tragic phenomenon. This expectation is fulfilled by the dramatic action of the play, which reaches climatic moments of existential anguish until harmony is restored at the end.

In summary, both principles of Dionysus and Apollo hint to the internal anguish that modern men are currently experiencing. In Hansberry's play, as a manifestation of this universal dynamics, the male characters try to appear masculine but the illusory

models that they follow cause them pain, depression, and lead them into a chaotic inner state. Bly put it this way: “the amount of grief and anguish in these younger men was astounding to me” (4).

Along with the setting, the dialogue also reveals the Dionysian-Apollonian impulse, as it is seen when Ruth is talking to her husband: “Honey, you never say nothing new. I listen to you every day, every night and every morning, and you never say nothing new” (*ARS* 1.1.34). Ruth uses the word “honey” to address Walter. Although this word is usually associated with tenderness and care, Ruth actually uses it to conceal a truth that deeply hurts her husband: Walter's futile monotony. Also, by using the word “honey,” Ruth implies another painful remark with a soft, loving appearance: she is already tired of hearing about her husband's plans for the future.

Likewise, Walter Lee's words express an essentially Dionysian state of intense pain and frustration because of his marriage relationships:

> That's it. There you are. Men say to his woman: I got me a dream. His woman will say: Eat your eggs. Man say: I got to take hold of this here world, baby! And woman will say: Eat your eggs and go to work...Man will say: I got to change my life, I'm choking to death, baby! And his woman say—Your eggs is getting cold! (*ARS* 1.1.33-34)

These words reveal an inner Dionysian state of disturbance and suffering, derived from the impossibility to communicate with his wife.

The general atmosphere of the play also reveals traits of Dionysus and Apollo, for even though it seems to be calm, it hides tension and intense feelings, which are also disturbing. This is seen when Ruth asks Walter Lee, her husband, how he likes his eggs

for breakfast and starts to scramble them although he has just told her that he would not like them scrambled (*ARS* 1.1.26). This tension is also present in the environment due to everybody's expectation of the check that is coming that weekend. However, the tension is suppressed by each of the members of the family, including Travis, the young child, when he speaks to Ruth about the money: "*Travis*: Mama, this is Friday. Check coming tomorrow, huh?" (*ARS* 1.1.28). His mother immediately directs him to think about other issues: "You get your mind off money and eat your breakfast" (*ARS* 1.1.28). Tension is also felt among the characters, for Ruth argues with her husband while she prepares breakfast. Similarly, Beneatha and Walter Lee's very controlled fight— right after she has just gotten up in the morning—is perceived as they are hiding the real intensity of their emotions. The latent tensions that the characters' interaction shows, along with their controlled angry outbursts and fights, both reason and madness: a Dionysian-Apollonian substance that confers *A Raisin in the Sun*, as a modern-day tragedy, a Nietzschean aesthetic quality.

The aesthetic principles of Dionysus and Apollo are not only reflected through the setting, the dialogue, and the atmosphere in Hansberry's play; for the theme of current state of masculinities also emerges as order and chaos. As Connell notes, men presently experience both when trying to define their masculinity:

> The project of remaking the masculine self certainly, requires a good deal of willpower in the face of derision from other men, half-shared homophobia and ambivalence from feminists. More than willpower is involved, however. The project is embroiled with the relationships and emotions through which masculinity was initially formed. In these

> relationships and emotions are motives that support the new emotional work, and some reasons for its shape and limits. (135)

The Dionysian-Apollonian duality also provides insight to *see* the evolving nature of the masculinity process in *A Raisin in the Sun*. According to Cerf, *A Raisin in the Sun* "has to do with dignity...it is the story of blacks who have been oppressed, but the story of poor people who want more than they have. These characteristics are what give the play a universal appeal" (557). In the light of this, Nietzschean aesthetics, due to its dynamism and universality, helps to interpret determinant aspects of life in literature. A Nietzschean analysis of the characters reveals the human evolution in Hansberry's play through the aesthetic principles of Dionysus and Apollo appearing in the characters' profiles and the transformation of the tragic hero throughout the play.

B. Walter Lee as a Tragic Figure: The Quest for Life Affirmation

In the previous chapter, Walter Lee was seen as a negative masculine figure in the play. Like George Murchison, Walter embraces the behavior of a man of the 1950s and of the traditional white masculine model known as the self-made man. Both attitudes prevent him from going beyond the *last man's* existential state. However, Walter Lee is capable of redemption and evolution and in the constant quest of his inner self, Walter is able to grow and overcome himself as a real man.

Walter's evolution to a more positive masculine model can be understood from Bly's perspective, as well as from those of a number of black authors. Walter's quest for manhood goes through what Bly considers three necessary stages for building a healthy masculinity: contact with the wild man, *katabasis*, and the birth of the inner warrior.

From black authors like Madhubuti, Walter's evolution exhibits the awakening of his pride and love for his heritage because he becomes a man of awareness. He has what Madhubuti says black people lack: “one of the tragedies of Black life in America: Afrikan American people have little knowledge of themselves” (ii). Walter Lee, instead, acquires insight into his own existence. Even though Walter Lee makes serious misjudgments, he learns from his errors and finds his dignity as a black man, as it will be shown next in this study.

i. Walter as a Man on a Quest to Find Himself

A close observation of *A Raisin in the Sun* in terms of men’s studies discloses elements of a more positive construction of a black male model. Among these positive features, the most outstanding are those proposed by Robert Bly in his work *Iron John: A Book about Men* and a number of other features proposed by different authors, such as bell hooks and Haki R. Madhubuti, which are also related to a positive black male image.

Robert Bly outlines a series of features derived from myth and psychology that, according to him, must be present for a boy to become a man. From his perspective, being a man is more than being male, as it is perceived in his constant differentiation of the terms “boy” and “man.” This is evident when he discusses the flaws of what he calls *defective mythologies*, “we have defective mythologies that ignore masculine depth of feeling, assign men a place in the sky instead of earth, teach obedience to the wrong powers, work to keep men boys…” (x). For him, a boy is not a man unless he undergoes an initiatory path that he has outlined in eight stages (xi), but these stages do not necessarily follow a linear pattern. He acknowledges that his outlining may be

incomplete and leaves the door open for further contributions, “even though in this book I lay out an initiatory path of eight stages, other men may see a different order of those stages, or entirely different stages. We make the path by walking” (xi).

The first of these stages, which Bly labels “the Pillow and the Key,” offers one of the features promoting a construction of a positive black man image: awareness of the self. For Bly, this “self” is a rather primitive being: “what I’m suggesting, then, is that every modern male has, lying at the bottom of his psyche, a large, primitive being covered with hair down to his feet” (6). Since this creature does not offer a pleasant sight, realizing about this “self” or, “deep male,” brings about uneasiness:

> But when he approaches what I’ll call the “deep male,” he feels risk. Welcoming the Hairy Man *is* scary and risky, and it requires a different sort of courage. Contact with Iron John requires a willingness to descend into the male psyche and accept what’s dark down there, including the *nourishing* dark. (6)

A very important trait of this nourishing dark is that it differs greatly from current models of masculinity. Bly asserts that the Wild Man is not the same as patriarchal constructs: “the kind of wildness, or un-niceness, implied by the Wild Man image is not the same as macho energy, which men already know enough about. Wild Man energy, by contrast, leads to forceful action undertaken, not with cruelty, but with resolve” (8).

Thanks to feminism, women have realized that they have been forced to fit a feminine image constructed by men and have rejected it in pursuit of their own images (hooks *Yearning* 63). Likewise, traditionally speaking, men have depended on women to create their self image. But now, following the example of women, men need to undergo

an introspective analysis to start the construction of their own self-image, and the first step for this analysis is self awareness. Men who still resort to women, or material goods, or external sources to "tell" them who they are need to realize that they are individuals.

This need for a new, affirmative black masculinity model seems more urgent for black men. Black feminist writer bell hooks affirms:

> Right now, there is a generational divide between black males. Older black males often understand that embracing the cowboy masculinity of patriarchy dooms black men (they've seen the bodies fall down and not get up). They know cowboy culture makes black men kill or be killed, but younger black men are seduced by the politics of being a gangsta, whether a gangsta academic or a gangsta rapper or a gangsta pimp. (*We Real Cool* 156)

Due to the fact that traditional, white masculinities exert a harmful effect on black men, black males must construct their own model of masculinities but to do so, they must become self-aware first. According to hooks, healthy black men must turn away from patriarchal models to foster their self-awareness:

> Healthy black males in our society do not fall for the patriarchal hype. They attain emotional well-being by learning to love themselves and others. As responsible citizens they seek to do their part in the world of work to be economically self-sufficient, but they do not believe money is the key to happiness. (*We Real Cool* 157)

hooks notes that self-awareness leads to loving oneself and loving others. For her, this kind of awareness also lets men to steer away from harmful white values.

Self-awareness is thus closely related to personal and collective growth. As Madhubuti affirms:

> When a community loses its foundation (philosopher, writers, poets, visual artists, skilled workers, musicians, professionals, dancers, business people, teachers), there is little left on which to build. . . . There must be a renewed dedication to the values and principles that have enabled us to survive the worse holocaust ever to hit a people. . . . The rebuilding must start immediately in those areas that we have the capacity to change: family, leadership and community-based institutions. (27)

For Madhubuti, black men must never lose sight of their black values, that is, they must be always self-aware individually and collectively. This in turn will enable the construction of a new black masculinity.

Self awareness is perceivable in Walter Lee, even though his vision of his own self seems first hindered by his desire to obtain money. He gains consciousness of his existence as a full human being gradually. After being deceived by Willy Harris, Walter thinks he has understood who he is really:

> Talkin 'bout life, Mama. You always tell me to see life like it is. Well—I laid in there on my back today . . . and figured it out. Life just like it is. . . . Mama, you know, it's all divided up. Life is. Sure enough. Between the takers and the "tooken." *(He laughs)* I've figured it out finally. . . . Yeah, some of us always getting "tooken." (*ARS* 3.1.141)

However, this is just the starting point of Walter's true self awareness. He undergoes a process of reflection, and as a result he arrives to the conclusion that he belongs to a disadvantaged group and wants to do something to change his "destiny." This is his first attempt to define himself. When the women try to persuade him that he is wrong, he affirms his masculinity to them, "I tell you I am a *man*" (*ARS* 3.1.141). Similarly, when they learn about Walter's plan of obtaining money from Mr. Lindner, trading his pride and dignity, they question him, and again, he shows signs of self discovery: "*Mama*: Baby, how you going to feel in the inside? / *Walter*: Fine! … Going to feel fine…a man…" (*ARS* 3.1.144). In fact, Walter knows that he is deserting his family's pride and his own, and this causes him great anguish:

> Walter: . . . "Captain, Mistuh, Bossman . . . Great white—(*Voice breaking, he forces himself to go on*)—Father, just gi' ussen de money, fo' God's sake, and we's—we's ain't gwine come out deh and dirty up yo' white folks neighborhood…" (*He breaks down completely*) And I'll feel fine! Fine! FINE! (*ARS* 3.1.44)

Walter's words and attitude disclose his inner conflict. He has begun to realize his true manhood, which radically opposes his plan, so he struggles to keep up a false external appearance of self-confidence in front of the women. However, this façade crumbles when Walter's mother tells him to carry out his plan in front of Travis, Walter's son:

> *Mama*: . . . No. Travis, you stay right here. And you make him understand what you doing, Walter Lee. You teach him good. Like Willy Harris taught you. You show where our five generations done come to.

> (*Walter looks from her to the boy, who grins at him innocently*) Go ahead, son—(*She folds her arms and closes her eyes*) Go ahead. (*ARS* 3.1.147)

In this moment, Walter Lee fully realizes his manhood. He understands that, as a man, he has a responsibility to raise his child properly. He cannot teach his own son to humiliate himself.

Madhubuti says that black men must be "always in a process of growth and without a doubt" (17) and that black men must always believe "that our values and traditions are not negotiable" (17). From this perspective, although Walter has committed grave mistakes that have caused a serious loss to his family, he is able to learn from them and realizes that his value and pride as a black man are not negotiable. This is the moment in which Walter Lee becomes fully aware of his manhood. As a result, he declines Lindner's money offer and keeps his pride and dignity as a black man.

Bly also offers an important, unavoidable stage in the process of building modern masculinities that he defines as "the whirlpool, the sinking through the floor, the Drop, what the ancient Greeks called *katabasis*" (Bly 70):

> When "katabasis" happens, a man no longer feels like a special person. He is not. One day he is in college, being fed and housed—often on some one else's money—protected by brick walls men long dead have built, and the next day he is homeless, walking the streets, looking for some way to get a meal and a bed. People know immediately when you are falling or have fallen: doormen turn their backs, waiters sneer, no one holds the sub way car door for you. (70)

The stage of *katabasis* is painful and pride-shattering: Men do not want to undergo it and if they are experiencing it already, do not want to see it (Bly 70). This stage means total misfortune for men: "*katabasis* also carries with it the whole concept of disaster, perhaps bringing it into the man's life for the first time" (Bly 74). Bly carefully notes that *katabasis* does not necessarily mean poverty, hunger, or physical disability (73), and "does seem to require a fall from status, from a human being to a spider, from a middle-class person to a derelict" (Bly 73). The important feature of this painful stage is to be aware of the fall (73). Bly considers this painful period of time in men's lives vital for building their masculinities. This is suggested when he tells about Jung's visions of calamity:

> It is said that when a friend reported enthusiastically, "I have just been promoted!" Jung would say, "I'm very sorry to hear that; but if we all stick together, I think we will get through it." If a friend arrived depressed and ashamed, saying, "I've just been fired," Jung would say, "Let's open a bottle of wine; this is wonderful news; something good will happen now." (71)

In other words, *katabasis* serves as a bridge for a man to reach a new, positive insight. Bly says that, for one, it teaches men to shudder, which is connected to empathy:

> Gaining the ability to shudder means feeling how frail human beings are, and how awful it is to be a Titan. When one is shuddering, the shudder helps to take away the numbness we spoke of. When a man possesses empathy, it does not mean that he has developed the feminine feeling only; of course he has, and it is good to develop the feminine. But when

> he learns to shudder, he is developing a part of the masculine emotional body as well. (85)

Descending to the lowest existential level becomes, therefore, a necessary step for men to detach themselves from the numb, insensitive masculinities created under patriarchy and leads men toward the creation of a new, positive masculine model.

Walter Lee is an example of a man who descends into the stage of *katabasis*. When Walter learns from his friend Bobo that Willy Harris, who is also supposed to be their friend, took all the money they gave him to start their liquor store and ran away with it, his world, his dreams and his hopes crumble down. He realizes that he has not only failed as a businessman, but also as a father, husband, son, and man. His mother, who has trusted him initially, starts hitting him on the face (*ARS* 2.3.129). His sister Beneatha, who has saved him from their mother's anger, later sums up his lowly state when she cries “Oh, God! Where is the bottom! Where is the real honest-to-God bottom so he can't go any farther!” (*ARS* 3.1.142). Walter's mother also acknowledges his current disgraceful state:

> Son—I come from five generations of people who was slaves and sharecroppers—but ain't nobody in my family never let nobody pay 'em no money that was a way of telling us we wasn't fit to walk the earth. We ain't never been that poor. (*Raising her eyes and looking at him*) We ain't never been that—dead inside.(*ARS* 3.1.143)

Just as Mama says, Walter's inner state is a complete death. This condition goes along with the idea of death in *katabasis*: “We surmise, then that when a man accepts the Descent as a way to move to the father's house, he learns to look at the death [sic] side of

things, he glances down to the rat's hole, which is also the snake's hole, and accepts the snake rather than the bird as his animal" (Bly 90). Walter Lee experiences this look at death, accepting the cruelty and awfulness of the world: "I'll say one thing for old Willy Harris . . . he's taught me something. He's taught me to keep my eye on what counts in this world. Yeah—(*shouting out a little*) Thanks, Willy!" (*ARS* 3.1.142).

To sum up, Walter experiences the stage of *katabasis* and as a result, his dreams and hopes shatter while the female members of his family see him as a worthless being. However, this painful stage in his life lets Walter realize that money is not the solution to the family's problems and that his worth as a man does not depend on material goods. In this light, *katabasis* has served him to raise both his empathy and self-awareness. Walter is not a hopeless man anymore, but one who is struggling to find himself.

Besides self-awareness and *katabasis*, Bly states that in order to build a healthy masculinity, men must embrace their inner warrior. Bly thinks that current US men are experiencing a state of internal weakness due to their lack of fostering the warrior within:

> The warriors inside American men have become weak in recent years, and their weakness contributes to a lack of boundaries, a condition which earlier in this book we spoke of as naiveté. A grown man six feet tall will allow another person to cross his boundaries, enter his psychic house, verbally abuse him, carry away his treasures, and slam the door behind; the invaded man will stand these with and ingratiating, confused smile on his face. (146)

For him, becoming able to prevent such abuses is what he calls being a warrior[14]: "The inner warriors I speak of do not cross the boundary aggressively; they exist to defend the boundary" (Bly 147). The warrior within is actually part of every man's psyche and other thinkers agree with the idea:

> Robert Moore, the psychologist and theologian, has thought cogently and intensely about the warrior, and we'll sum up a few of his ideas. He emphasizes that for men the warrior is "hard-wired." It is not software. He may say to men: "You have plenty of warrior in you—don't worry about it—more than you'll need. The question is whether you will honor it: whether you will have it consciously or unconsciously." (150)

According to both Bly and Moore, any man has the potential of becoming a true warrior. However, men are not behaving like warriors any longer because men have lost contact with their inner warrior: "We can say, then, that knowledge of what warriorhood is, and how to deal with its dark side and how to admire its positive side, has been lost. Simultaneously, the warrior himself, or our image of him, has suffered a collapse," says Bly (154).

Walter Lee, in spite of his many flaws, is fully aware of the warrior he has within: "in my heart of hearts—(*he thumps his chest*)—I am much warrior!" (ARS 2.1.78). His sister Beneatha perceives his inner warrior as well:

> *Walter*: . . . (*He is suddenly in possession of an imaginary spear and actively spearing enemies all over the room*) OCOMOGOSIAY . . .

[14] This study treats Bly's ideas as processes. In this light, the warrior represents a process of growth and maturation that involves assertiveness and courage along with self-control.

> Beneatha (*To encourage Walter, thoroughly caught up with this side of him*): OCOMOGOSIAY, FLAMING SPEAR!
>
> . . .
>
> *Walter*: . . . OH, DO YOU HEAR, MY BLACK BROTHERS!
>
> *Beneatha*: (*Completely gone*) We hear you, Flaming Spear— (*ARS* 2.1.78-79)

Beneatha, who is most of the times utterly against anything Walter does, is actually able to see the warrior in her hopeless brother and encourages him. Beneatha does not feel threatened or oppressed by the warrior energy that, as Bly describes it, is actually positive.

Another aspect of Walter's warrior energy is deeply focused on his black heritage and pride. hooks affirms that for black males, turning away from patriarchy becomes a rewarding masculine experience: "As black males turn away from patriarchal notions of coolness, they will turn in the direction of a legacy of black male cool that remains life-enhancing. A legacy of grace" (158). Walter is totally unaware of this, but while he "becomes" a warrior, he is utterly in contact with his people and their traditions. The "regular" Walter, conversely, is so focused on making money that he disregards everything else. In fact, when Walter gives away the money that his mother has entrusted him, he plans to get it back by bargaining with his pride and his dignity. However, the inner warrior in him awakens and fights against white oppression when he speaks to Mr. Lindner, the representative of the white community whose members do not want the Youngers to become their neighbors: "*Walter*: Yeah. Well—what I mean is that we come from people who had a lot of *pride*. I mean, we are very proud people.

And that's my sister over there and she's going to be a doctor—and we are very proud—" (*ARS* 3.1.148).

The "inner warrior" growing in Walter reflects in his beginning to choose his pride and dignity over material goods. Instead of oppressing Beneatha, as the old Walter always did, this "inner warrior" in Walter encourages her and feels proud of her goals without patronizing her, which discloses the evolutionary process that Walter is undergoing. Walter is growing up as a man.

ii. Walter as an Example of the Nietzschean Evolution toward the Higher Man

According to Bennet Cerf, "Walter . . . like poor people everywhere, wants to succeed, get ahead . . . Walter wants much from life than he has had. True, he defines success in terms of making money, but only because money is a concrete symbol of success (557). His poverty causes him intense frustration, pain, and, above all, chaos in his inner self. This condition increases when he sees some of his friends succeed in their enterprises which once were opportunities for him: "Charlie Atkins was just a 'good-for-nothing loud mouth' too, wasn't he! When he wanted me to go in the dry-cleaning business with him. And now he's grossing a hundred thousand a year" (*ARS* 1.1.32). His family's lack of understanding and, especially his wife's disrespect for his ideas, increase his pain. His wife never pays attention to his ideas: "See—I'm trying to talk to you 'bout myself—and all you can say is eat them eggs and go to work" (*ARS* 1.1.34). His sister Beneatha makes him the target of her insults and cruel mockery: "you know, biology is the greatest. I dissected something that looked just like you yesterday." (*ARS* 1.1.36), and later: "You—you are a nut. Thee is mad, boy" (*ARS* 1.1.38).

Deep down, Walter knows he deserves this disrespect, but he keeps compensating himself, deluding himself: “In my heart of hearts—I am much warrior!” (*ARS* 2.1.78). Because his mind is centered on the future, Walter fails to face life as it is: “Sometimes it's like I can see the future stretched out in front of me—just plain as day. The future, Mama. Hanging over there at the edge of my days. Just waiting for me—a big, looming blank space—full of nothing. Just waiting for me” (*ARS* 1.2.73). His lack of self-knowledge and fear to face reality prevent him from directing all the energy of his will to power towards his self-overcoming; instead, his actions turn against him affecting everybody in the family.

When Walter Lee gives his mother's money away and considers accepting Mr. Lindner's humiliating money offer, so that they do not come to live in his white neighborhood, Walter not just loses the money of his family, but his dignity as a person. Beneatha's words are more than eloquent: “Oh God! Where is the bottom! Where is the honest-to-God bottom so he can't go any farther!” (*ARS* 3.1.142). And his mother's calling him a disgrace to his father's memory (*ARS* 1.2.75) triggers more and more an inner suffering and sense of a failure both as a brother and as a son, that Walter has disguised for a long time.

According to Zarathustra, “The evil is man's best force” (*TSZ* LXIII 5). In this sense, Walter Lee has also the seed of self-overcoming. Therefore, when he tells Lindner that the Youngers have decided to occupy their new house in the white neighborhood, he proves a superior kind of man. He finds a new strength, courage, and pride transcending his previous last man's morality of most basic capitalist values, towards his pride of a man who accepts life as it is heartily. From a Zarathustran perspective, Walter would be

in the way of the higher man who has known fear but has conquered it: “He has seen the abyss, but with pride” (*TSZ* LXIII 4).

The Lindner experience makes Walter Lee use his will to power to overcome himself, to grow up as a person, reverting the negative energies towards him among the family members:

> *Mama*: He finally come into his manhood today, didn't he? Kind of like a rainbow after the rain...
>
> *Ruth*: Yes, Lena. (*ARS* 3.1.151)

The new way in which the women perceive Walter is highly significant aesthetically; this utterance by the women resembles the role of the chorus in Greek tragedy, which reinforces in turn the idea that Walter, as a tragic hero, has evolved.

As a tragedy based on the Dionysian-Apollonian aesthetics, Hansberry's play contains tragic elements like that of the eternal return of life. Walter's embracing his evil to overcome himself, beside other dramatic elements, significant in this context, shows the substance of the life-affirming principle of the Eternal Return. For example, Walter's father, also named Walter, was also a poor man and a dreamer. Like his father, Walter, as a man, has the potential to reach the level of respect that his deceased father always inspired in the family. In this light, it is no surprise that Walter Lee ended up rejecting Lindner's offer, just as Big Walter, as everybody called his father, would have done. Because, like his father, Walter Lee is proud of himself as a man, but unlike Big Walter, he still does not know the meaning of this concept. This process of self-overcoming becomes evident when Walter Lee explains to Lindner his reasons to reject his offering: “My father almost beat a man to death once because this man called him a bad name or

something" (*ARS* 3.1.147). While Big Walter used to be deeply proud and would not anyone belittle him or his family, Walter Lee seems totally assimilated into white, oppressive culture. Although the difference between Big Walter and Walter Lee seems abysmal at a first glance, the Eternal Return manifests itself when Walter evolves and rejects Lindner's offering. This action earns him the respect of his family and the title of being a man in their eyes. Beneatha, who has rejected and disrespected him the most, also changes her perception of him after Walter's self-affirming transformation. Therefore, to her eyes the "toothless rat" (*ARS* 3.1.144), turns into a real man (*ARS* 3.1.148).

To sum up, Walter Lee, viewed both in the light of men's studies (Bly, Madhubuti, and hooks) and from a Nietzschean perspective discloses the construction of an affirmative, though incipient, black masculinity that starts to detach itself from the dominant white, patriarchal masculinities, in search of a more self-affirming one. The emerging masculinity that Walter begins to display is characterized by his self-awareness and proud dignity, which, in turn, become the mark of self-overcoming and his affirmation of life with *Amor Fati*.

C. Joseph Asagai: A Model of an Affirmative Masculinity and Higher Man

Another self-affirming model of black masculinity and higher man in Hansberry's play seems to be Joseph Asagai. Asagai is an African young man who studies in the same university as Beneatha. He considers himself an idealist and dreams of great development for his country. An analysis of Asagai's personality from the several

perspectives explored here reveals a complex and highly developed character in Hansberry's play, even if he has not faced the difficulties that Walter Lee has.

Bly's perspective of masculinity reveals that Asagai, in spite of his privileged position, has apparently had contact with his internal *wild man* and has developed his inner warrior and self-awareness to a certain extent. He also possesses those traits black theoreticians consider valuable for the construction of a healthy evolving black masculinity, that is, constructive working relationships with other human beings, especially women and a life-affirming attitude in face of duties and responsibilities. From a Nietzschean point of view, Asagai displays traits closer to those of Zarathustra's higher man in terms of constant self-overcoming. From all these traits, Asagai's self-awareness is the highest, since in turn, it makes him capable of establishing egalitarian and empathetic relationships with others, especially black women, breaking, in this way, the pattern of gender oppression.

i. Joseph Asagai: A Model of an Emerging Positive Masculinity

Asagai responds to the hypothetical profile of a superior black man that hooks envisions:

> We need to hear from black men who are interrogating sexism, who are striving to create different and oppositional visions of masculinity. Their experience is the concrete practice that may influence others. Progressive black liberation struggle must take seriously feminist movement to end sexism and sexist oppression . . . (*Yearning* 77)

hooks depicts masculinities that break free from patriarchal values and standards. These masculinities also include a sense of solidarity among black men and black women that, according to hooks, has diminished (*Yearning* 76). Asagai represents that type of human being. Even if he is too idealistic due to his social status, he is a man who is not afraid of commitment to socio-political causes, and therefore, approaches women free from suspicion or superiority. In this light, Asagai becomes the most outstanding example of an emerging positive black masculinity.

Another trait that turns Asagai into a model of an affirmative black masculinity is his previous contact with his inner Wild Man, in Bly's terms. Bly considers this condition as primitive and unpleasant but highly necessary to foster a healthy masculinity. He says:

> What I'm suggesting, then, is that every modern male has, lying at the bottom of his psyche, a large, primitive being covered with hair down to his feet. Making contact with this Wild Man is the step the Eighties male or the Nineties male has yet to take. (6)

For him, men in current times still lack this level of contact with their primitive selves. Although men have increasingly established contact with their soft, receptive side, they are still away from their inner masculinity.

Bly constrasts the process that men take to get in touch with their soft, “feminine” side with that of meeting the Wild Man:

> . . . there's more than little fear around this hairy man, and there is around all change. When a man begins to develop the receptive side of himself and gets over his initial skittishness, he usually finds the experience to be

> wonderful. He gets to write poetry and go out and sit by the ocean, he doesn't have to be on top all the time in sex anymore, he becomes empathetic—it's a new, humming, surprising world. But going down through the water to touch the Wild Man at the bottom of the pond is quite a different matter. (6)

In this light, Bly highlights that contact with the Wild Man, first, needs a great deal of effort (men must go down through the water to reach the bottom of their own psyche) and then, he cautions that meeting this primitive creature will not be a pleasant experience as fostering one's receptive side usually is. He explains that the Wild Man is a fearful creature:

> The being who stands up is frightening, and seems even more so now, when the corporations do so much work to produce the sanitized, hairless, shallow man. When a man welcomes his responsiveness, or what we sometimes call his internal woman, he often feels warmer, more companionable, more alive. But when he approaches what I'll call the "deep male," he feels risk. (6)

For Bly, men who are able to overcome their fear and who finally establish contact with Iron John—the Wild Man from within themselves—become more self aware: "these powerful energies inside men are lying, like Iron John, in ponds we haven't walked past yet" (26).

Asagai is a man fully aware of himself; he does not fear expressing his feelings, as when he criticizes Beneatha for her overemphasis on liberation: "It's just that every American girl I have known has said that to me. White—black—in this you are all the

same. And the same speech, too! . . . It's how you can be sure that the world's most liberated women are not liberated at all. You all talk about it too much! (*ARS* 1.2.64). Still, his comment is not bitter or vengeful; he is just being honest about his feelings and expresses them openly to her, which Beneatha appreciates, as when he explains to her why he calls her Alaiyo (One for Whom Bread—Food—Is Not Enough) (*ARS* 1.2.65). Asagai is, to sum up, a man who has apparently had previous contact with his Wild Man and this has raised his self-awareness in a way that makes him able to express his emotions openly. Asagai contrasts with the Youngers in this sense: Walter has been unable to express his opposition to Beneatha's school for three years (*ARS* 1.1.38), Ruth is afraid of revealing her pregnancy to the family (*ARS* 1.2.57), and Beneatha cannot rebel against her Mother's religious authority (*ARS* 1.1.51).

Asagai has also been able to free his warrior energy, a self-affirming trait of a positive new masculine model. Citing Moore, Bly describes the purpose of the inner warrior and contrasts it with the idea of a soldier:

> Moore emphasizes that the quality of a true warrior is that he is in service to a pure pose greater than himself: that is, to a transcendent cause. Mythologically, he is in service to a True King. If the King he serves is corrupt, as in Ollie North's case, or if there is no King at all, and he is serving greed, or power, then he is no longer a warrior, but a soldier. (150)

That is, the warrior within needs a strong, noble cause to fight for in order to exist. Serving a true cause brings about the best mental and physical effort of men:

> When a warrior is in service, however, to a True King—that is, to a

> transcendent cause—he does well, and his body becomes a hardworking servant, which he requires to endure the cold, heat, pain, wounds, scarring, hunger, lack of sleep, hardship of all kinds. The body usually responds well. The person in touch with warrior energy can work long hours, ignore fatigue, do what is necessary, . . . (151)

Once again, the warrior energy, according to Bly, is used to become productive and to reach the higher goals men have set up for themselves. Similarly, this warrior energy exists to fight against men's internal obstacles, not to attack others aggressively (Bly 147).

The process of maturity that Bly calls "warrior" is evident in Asagai, for he has set clear goals for his life and possesses high ideals that, even if they mean frustration or danger, he is willing to strive for them:

> I will go home and much of what I will have to say will seem strange to the people of my village. But I will teach and work and things will happen, slowly and swiftly. At times it will seem that nothing changes at all . . . and then again the sudden dramatic events which make history leap into the future. And then quiet again. Retrogression even. Guns, murder, revolution. (*ARS* 3.1.135)

Asagai is apparently conscious of the problems ailing his country and his people. As a warrior, he wants to dedicate his life to the cause of informing and educating them to cause a positive change, an idea that is crucial in the process of building an affirmative black masculinity.

Asagai's desire to educate his people, in this sense, serves as a fictional example of an attitude that black theoreticians urge to foster in black men, especially to raise black men's self-awareness in a world where the lack of information about black men is a fact:

> Much of the current Black studies have focused on either the Black family, Black women, Afrika, the Black homosexual community or Europe's and America's influence on the Black world. Few Black scholars or activists have given serious attention to the condition of Black men. (Madhubuti 60)

Among the reasons for the little publication of studies about black men, he mentions one that is very important: “much of the published scholarly work on Black people is by Black men and many of them do not see the importance of public self-analysis” (Madhubuti 60). This is indeed connected to one of the most acute problems of black men according to him, which is the lack of self-awareness that black men seem to have (Madhubuti ii). For Madhubuti, blacks do not understand their own culture:

> As a people, our understanding of culture is severely limited. Black culture, as a force for survival and development, is given very little attention in the education of our young. However, the education that is transmitted (or not transmitted?) is a product of the dominant white culture. (5)

Madhubuti perceives a double problem that affects black people culturally: for one part, their children are being trained by white standards and for the other, black people are neglecting their vital role in transmitting their own culture to the younger generations.

For Madhubuti, culture equals “shared understanding” (6), and he defines it as “the medium in which values are transmitted from generation to generation” (6). He affirms that culture shapes a people consciousness, that is, the way in which they view and operate in the world” (6), and notes that the consciousness of black people is neither collectively structured not optimistic:

> The most prevailing consciousness among Black people today is one of survival. And this survival is not of a collective nature, in which individuals, communities and institutes work together to solve problems. Black survival, especially in the urban areas, is more Darwinian, a “survival of the fittest” attitude. Its proponents will use whatever means at their disposal to achieve their ends, regardless of the cost and pain to others. (6)

For Madhubuti, this pessimistic sense of surviving consciousness must be countered by a commitment to the culture and traditions of black people as a group. Madhubuti considers cultural understanding a pivotal feature for black masculinities when he outlines the traits that black men must foster: “Your people first. . . . Able to recognize the war we are in and in doing anything to take care of family so long as it doesn't harm or negatively affect other Black people. . . . A quiet strength. . . . Properly positioning oneself in the context of our people . . . ” (16). Asagai may exemplify a model of a black man who possesses cultural understanding and full commitment to the black cause.

Asagai's conviction serves a hint that he has realized about his role in life. He is fully aware of his active role as a contributor to promote awareness through struggle. This is perceived when he discusses with Beneatha about her bitterness:

> *Asagai*: Your brother made a mistake and you are grateful to him so that now you can give up the ailing human race on account of it! You talk about what good is struggle, what good is anything! Where are all we going and why we are bothering!
>
> *Beneatha*: AND YOU CANNOT ANSWER IT!
>
> *Asagai*: *(Shouting over her)* I LIVE THE ANSWER! (*ARS* 3.1.135)

Asagai does not hesitate to answer Beneatha, revealing that he has apparently found a reason for his existence and is willing to struggle as a warrior. He knows that he is in the world for a purpose, and he is glad to be fulfilling it: "But I will teach and work and things will happen, slowly and swiftly" (*ARS* 3.1.135). This may seem the product of an over idealistic mind that is prompt to acting without thinking, partly caused by his accomodated social position. Still, Asagai has undergone reflection to an extent and considers careful thinking as a very important action, as it is noticed when he advises Beneatha to do it: "Just sit awhile and think…Never be afraid to sit awhile and think" (*ARS* 3.1.137). He is courageous and is willing to work for his ideals but he is also reflexive about the costs and sacrifices, which highlights his level of self-awareness and his warrior attitude in life.

Besides his self-awareness and his warrior attitude in life, Asagai becomes an example of another trait that an emerging, positive black masculinity should have according to Madhubuti and hooks. Asagai is able to establish fully committed relationships with women that are not based on patriarchal premises. He seems, at a first glance, a very romantic full of dreams young man. However, his apparently soft personality is accompanied by a firm and courageous spirit. Besides, he is well

conscious of himself, a remarkable difference with Walter Lee. This is perceivable from his first appearance in the play, and in his first conversation with Beneatha:

> *Beneatha: (looking at him)* Asagai, I'm very glad you're back.
>
> *Asagai: (Looking back at her in turn)* Are you really?
>
> *Beneatha*: Yes—very.
>
> *Asagai*: Why?—You were quite happy when I went away. What happened?
>
> *Beneatha*: You went away.
>
> *Asagai*: Ahhhhhhhhh.
>
> *Beneatha*: Before—You wanted to be so serious before there was time.
>
> *Asagai*: How much time must there be before one knows what one feels? (*ARS* 1.2.61)

Asagai's last words above reveal that he is willing to commit himself to a relationship with Beneatha, which has been the cause for Beneatha's uneasiness and the fast pace concerning his romance. Unlike Beneatha, Asagai is certain of his feelings and does not hesitate to disclose them openly: "*Asagai*: Between a man and a woman there need be only one kind of feeling. I have that for you…Now even…right this moment" (*ARS* 1.2.63). When Beneatha criticizes his position and compares it to fiction written by men, Asagai reveals to her without embarrassment or remorse that all the women who he has met in the US, regardless of their ethnicity, have told him the same (ARS 1.2.64). Asagai's total confidence to speak about his feelings reveals that he views women as equals, not as simple playthings. He treats Beneatha with respect and does not oppress her, which she understands when she realizes that he has proposed her not only to marry

him but also to become a promoter of change in Nigeria through her medical practice (*ARS* 3.1.150). Madhubuti, in his outlining of black men's traits to be fostered, includes relationships with women: “Sensitive to Black women's needs and aspirations, realizing that it is not necessary for them to completely absorb themselves into us but that nothing separates communication between us. . . . ” (16). Asagai's personality seems to have achieved this trait.

ii. Joseph Asagai: a Model of the Higher Man

From a Nietzschean perspective, Asagai may be the closest to a higher man in the play. The higher man is the disciple Nietzsche's Zarathustra is looking for to teach his gospel for he is the only one ready to grasp his truth that man is but a bridge between the beast and the Overman, and therefore, he must embrace his destiny of self-annihilation. The higher man must possess the seed of a superior morality that goes beyond good and evil. In summary, the higher man is one through which the will to power of life emerges is this new “morality” of self-overcoming, which implies constant struggle and life affirmation.

One of the traits of Hansberry's character that resembles a Nietzschean higher man leading to the overman, is Asagai's appreciation of a childlike heart. When Beneatha complains about herself saying that she sometimes acts like a child, Asagai says: “Children see things very well sometimes” (*ARS* 3.1.133).

Like a higher man, Asagai also seems to embrace the present, the only true life that exists. When Beneatha asks him what is going to happen when his country reaches independence, he answers that that would be the problem for another time because he

must get there (*ARS* 3.1.134). In the edition of the play included in Bennet Cerf's *Six American Plays for Today*, Asagai and Beneatha display ideas about religion that do not appear in the complete original version used for this study[15] and which are worth including in the present context. In the conversation that Beneatha and Asagai hold there appears another trait of life and human affirmation in Asagai, that depicts him as a potential higher man: he thinks **this life** as eternal and sees the human race as godly: "Yes...I think I have the religion of doing what is necessary in the world—and worshiping man—because he is so marvelous, you see" (*ARS* Cerf 3.1.608-609). Nietzsche states that "a discerning one might easily regard himself at present as the animalisation of God" (*BGE* 79). Asagai is, from this perspective, a discerning person, for man, not God, has become his object of reverence, which highlights his profound affirmation of the will to power of life.

Another important element of a higher man that Asagai seems to display is self-overcoming and self-enhancing through life-affirmation, Zarathustra's perspective to achieve the overman. During the conversation that Asagai has with Beneatha, contained in the edition of the play compiled by Cerf, Asagai utters his rejection to go along with defeat and embrace life instead:

> *Beneatha*: Man is foul! And the human race deserves its misery!

[15] Robert Nemiroff, Hansberry's literary executor, states that the cuts have been the result of purely technical reasons:

> Not one of these cuts, it should be emphasized, was made to dilute or censor the play or to "soften" its statement . . . Some cuts were similarly the result of happenstance or unpredictables of the kind that occur in any production: difficulties with a scene, the "processes" of actors, the dynamics of staging,etc. But most were related to the length of the play: running time. (x)

> *Asagai*: You see: you have become that religious one in the old sense. Already, and rather such a small defeat, you are worshiping despair.
>
> *Beneatha*: From now on, I worship the truth—and the truth is that people are puny, small and selfish...
>
> *Asagai*: Truth? Why is that you despairing ones always think that only you have the truth? . . . (*ARS* Cerf 3.1.609)

In terms of dramatic action, the tension created by the argument over religion between Beneatha and Asagai displays two different types of forces clashing against each other. First, Beneatha's tension initially seems to overpower Asagai's resolution. Her argument that humans are utterly flawed and therefore deserving pain is apparently insurmountable. However, Asagai is not impressed by the strength of her argument and, by linking her attitude to traditional religion, he shows her that her defeat is not as final as she thinks. He shows her that her idea of truth is partial and thus biased. The strength in Asagai's attitude actually subdues Beneatha's tension and takes it to a point in which she is forced to face her lack of courage. She attacks his resolute attitude, which makes the tension escalate to the point of both of them shouting (*ARS* 3.1.135), which actually serves a very definite dramatic and philosophical purposes, making the will to power of life emerge from both characters visible and unmistakable. As a higher man, Asagai's passionate life affirmation goes to the point of annihilation, disregarding his destiny. Even though Asagai knows that because of his ideals he might be killed by the Colonialists, he is happy with his destiny, whatever it may be: "Perhaps I will be a great man...I mean, perhaps I will hold on to the substance of truth and find my way always with the right course...and perhaps I will be butchered in my bed some night by the

servants of the empire...or perhaps I shall live to be a very old man, respected and esteemed in my new nation" (*ARS* 3.1.135-136). Asagai's words reveal full acceptance of his life, but his acceptance is not mere resignation, but a profound will to live Life as it is.

Asagai's life affirmation is expressed in the affirmation of the will to power of Life and the very essence of this affirmation, according to Zarathustra, embracing the eternal return of everything. Asagai says:

> Perhaps the things I believe now for my country will be wrong and outmoded, and I will not understand and do terrible things to have things my way or merely to keep my power. Don't you see that there will be young men and women...my own black countrymen...to step out of the shadows some evening and slit my then useless throat? . . . And that such a thing as my own death will be an advance? They who might kill me even . . . actually replenish all that I was. (*ARS* 3.1.136)

Here, Asagai reveals that if he becomes a tyrant, other young people, just as he is doing it now will fight against him to end his tyranny, which is Asagai's personal fight. Similarly, Asagai's words, while manifesting the Zarathustrian Eternal Return, clearly suggest that man is a bridge to the Overman, which emphazises the image of Asagai as a higher man who embodies the principle of *Amor Fati*. For Nietzsche, *Amor Fati* is his "formula for greatness in a human being . . . that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity" (*EH* Why I Am so Clever 10).

While Asagai is still a model of a higher man, it is important to consider that he embodies an idealized representation of black males. Unlike Walter, Asagai, as a

cultural subject, has not faced the enslaving and oppressive class struggle that Walter Lee lives in and which prevents him to escape from poverty. Asagai, thinking about struggle, says: “Retrogression even. Guns, murder, revolution. And I even will have moments when I wonder if the quiet was not better than all the death and hatred” (*ARS* 3.1.135). His words reveal that for him, life has been “quiet” and that political and social conflicts are merely projections in the future. For Walter Lee, however, these conflicts have been everyday battles, which at the end makes Walter a more realistic model of black masculinity.

Conclusion

Men's studies are at a fairly early stage and black masculinities are consequently at an even earlier developmental phase; for this reason, it was vital, for the purpose of this work, to consider all potentially useful theoretical sources for the construction of these new black masculinity models rather than dismissing theories *a priori*. This is why an eclectic perspective, both by men and women, that included and compared different views of masculinities, were taken into consideration in this study. The experience was more profitable in terms of a broader source for a theoretical input, at the time that allowed me to obtain a broader understanding to "construct" a development of black masculinities. Nietzsche becomes an outstanding example in this sense. For some, his gender and philosophical views may seem incongruent with today's times, but it has been precisely his iconoclast views on every aspect of life, which gave way to a more relativistic view of things, the essence of the reader response paradigm, the inspiration for authors like Foucault and Derrida, and therefore, the essence of a broader hermeneutics.

Readers of *A Raisin in the Sun* can easily perceive *manhood* as one of the drives in the play; male readers will notice that Hansberry's play—a text written by a woman—is "portraying" and questioning the behavior of black males. Consequently, it is expected that female readers can also find material to re-construct their own images of black men in *A Raisin in the Sun.* From a surface level, Hansberry's play becomes an instance of what Hutchinson calls "the assassination of the black male" because it apparently depicts

black males as inherently flawed human beings, and thus seems to promote a negative image of the black man. However, a deeper analysis of Hansberry's work discloses the formation of new stereotype-free black masculinities. In this light, *A Raisin in the Sun* manifests the incipient construction of self-affirming, patriarchy-free models of black masculinities.

Based on the essential complexity of the central theme in this study, the several approaches proposed here to analyze masculinities, in general, provided invaluable help. Kimmel's views threw light on the socio historical dynamics of masculinities, while Bly's contributed by means of his more mythical, individual perspective of manhood. Black authors, who have been working to outline more specific theories for black masculinities to a lesser extent, were also of great help. hooks, for instance, acknowledges the need for promoting black masculinities totally detached from patriarchal premises, and Madhubuti highlights valuable personal and psychological traits that, according to him, black males should possess to acquire full masculinity. As for F. Nietzsche, his aesthetic view of tragedy provided me with hints to analyze those setting and characterization elements linked to the construction of masculinities from a broader perspective.

Such an inclusive theoretical perspective is necessary due to a number of shortcomings in the current approaches to masculinity. Connell has observed, for example, that the different approaches to defining masculinity fall within several categories. He speaks of essentialist definitions, which pick a feature that defines the core of masculinity (68). For Connell, however, the problem of essentialist masculinities is that in such approaches “the choice of the essence is quite arbitrary” (69). Besides essentialist masculinities, Connell also mentions “positivist” masculinities, which

“objectively” describe “what men actually are” (69). In spite of their apparently factual orientation, Connell perceives several problems with positivist approaches; the most outstanding among these are the facts that “there is no description without a standpoint” and that “to list what men and women do requires that people be already sorted into the categories 'men' and 'women'” (69).

Along with the essentialist and the positivist approaches to masculinity, Connell also mentions the normative definitions of masculinity, which he defines as those that “offer a standard: masculinity is what men ought to be” (70). Both the black masculinity models proposed by hooks and Madhubuti—the former asking for a patriarchy-free black male image and the latter proposing a highly positive, heritage conscious, nurturing black male—belong to this category. For Connell, the problem with normative masculinities lies in the fact that “not many men actually meet the normative standards” (79). In the specific case of hooks and Madhubuti, their masculinity standards seem rather Utopian when one contrasts them with the enormous influence that current patriarchal models of black masculinity exert upon men and boys across the world.

One more approach to masculinities is that of Kimmel. Kimmel's depiction of different masculinities in US history becomes an example of social constructivism applied to masculinities. While Kimmel's socio historical approach is greatly useful to describe the construction of different masculine models through US history, it lacks the resources to explain why sometimes men display traits of diverse masculine models that sometimes are situated in very distant time contexts. One of the most evident examples is the persistent belief in the American Dream and the self-made man that accompanied it; it is not unusual to hear men refer to those two ideas even today. Bly's mythical

approach to masculinity may serve to explain this apparent connection between masculinities and myth, along with explaining why other men seem to believe in masculinity as a process and seek ways to reach higher masculinity stages, but it fails to acknowledge cultural and sociological differences. This lacking may be filled by observing the contribution of cultural subjects to masculinity. Cross stresses the fact that cultural subjects include cultural elements as part of themselves (24); since myth becomes a strong cultural symbolic value, it becomes part of the fabric that cultural subjects use to construct their ideas and ideals of masculinity.

From this perspective, this study's originality rests upon its holistic view of masculinities. Instead of resorting to one of all the approaches aforementioned in isolation, as most pieces of criticism do, this study uses an eclectic analysis of *A Raisin in the Sun* using in conjunction some of the theoretical contributions of Kimmel, Bly, hooks, Madhubuti, Nietzsche, Connell, and others. This in turn follows Derrida's view of multiple meanings against simple binary oppositions; instead of simply highlighting one meaning—provided by a single approach—while obscuring all the others, the analysis of multiple approaches to masculinity in this study has served better to disclose the way in which Hansberry's play becomes a manifestation and an exemplification of the incipient construction of an affirmative model of black masculinity.

A Raisin in the Sun exemplifies the construction of a new black masculinity that slowly detaches itself from patriarchy. It does so mainly through its characters, although elements in the setting and the dramatic action also depict these new black masculine models. Again the Nietzschean aesthetics was illuminating in this sense. For instance, the setting of the play conveys the principles of Dionysus and of Apollo, which enables

the perception of the work as a modern tragedy. At the same time, “Tragedy” in the Nietzschean sense seems related to the mythic idea of *katabasis* that Bly highlights as a vital component for his conceptualization of masculinity. The principle of Apollo, which stands for appearances and forms, can also be linked to the different masculinity models that Kimmel describes. The self-made man, the playboy, and the man of the 1950s might exemplify in the play a society order, and its men's pursuit of these models, a means to give shape to their inner chaos and uncertainty. The only observation is that there is nothing *tragic* or *Dionysian* in this order, except for the unhappiness and total lack of fulfillment that its pursuit provokes in human beings who feel forced to adopt it and ultimately get conscious of this.

The Dionysian-Apollonian duality may be perceived as well in the current construction of black masculinities. Black theoreticians like Mandhubuti and hooks have proposed traits that the new black male should perceive as desirable, but along with these, the issues of race, heritage, assimilation, and patriarchy seem to provoke recalcitrance in the construction of these new masculinities. Should the new black man view race and heritage as part of his identity? If the answer is YES, will this new black male model be segmented and discriminatory by excluding those black men who do not feel represented accurately by those values? This reveals a *Dionysian* conflict surfaced through *Apollonian* solutions to black masculinities that urge for constant revision and analysis of the new black masculinity proposals.

The dramatic action in the play also becomes a useful exemplification of the process of revision and construction that black masculinities are presently undergoing. The tension present when male characters interact with female characters discloses,

besides gender disparities, a lack of self-knowledge on the men's part, in many cases. Similarly, the tensions triggered when two male characters interact with each other reveal the incongruities caused by their adoption of white masculine models, as well as their failure to fully function according to the frame of such models. For example, Murchison, as a wealthy man, has fully assimilated the ideology of the playboy and that of the man of the 1950s, but he still is unable to stand against the embodiment of the 1950s represented by Walter Lee. The reason behind Murchison's failure as a positive black male image, especially in contrast with the equally flawed Walter Lee—who even pursues the image of the self-made man as the only valid embodiment of masculinity—, lies in the fact that Murchison's inner self is inauthentic, as opposed to Walter's; Walter is open to growth and is fully aware of his responsibilities. Joseph Asagai, for his part, seems to be the most positive black masculine model in Hansberry's play. However, it is necessary to observe that he represents somehow an idealization by the author while Walter Lee becomes a more faithful represantation of a black cultural subject. While Asagai has been free from social and economic oppression, Walter Lee has had to struggle with these forms of oppression and has made mistakes because of his initial assimilation of enslaving, dominant values. In spite of this, Walter has also been able to start constructing a positive self-image as a black man. This highlights the importance of authenticity, self-growth, and commitment as valuable traits for the construction of a new black masculinity model. As Madhubuti states: “It is time for Black people to retake the responsibility of Afrikan American cultural design. We have the capacity and the resources (mental and economic) to do what we want to do. We need to rearrange our lives around values and principles that are best for Black people” (112). His words,

besides being a direct call to action, imply the value of accountability, commitment, authenticity, and growth, as important traits in black men.

Likewise, the characters in *A Raisin in the Sun* become the most evident manifestation of both the failure of white masculine standards to define black people and the emergence of more affirmative black masculinity models. The conformist, patriarchal Murchison and the money-hungry Walter Lee exemplify the incongruity and inner struggle of men who follow white masculine models, while Asagai and an open-to-growth Walter Lee embody the incipient creation of positive black masculinities. Walter Lee is of special attention because at a first glimpse he may seem, as Murchison is, an utterly flawed man. Walter is a failure as a husband because he cannot see the needs of his wife, and he is a failure as a parent because he teaches undesirable values to his son. Similarly, he fails as a black man because he is willing to trade the pride, dignity, and freedom of his family—and himself—for money, which he envisions as the only valid measure of success. However, a closer analysis of Walter from the perspective of Bly, Kimmel, hooks, Madhubuti, and Nietzsche's tragic hero reveals the intensity of the inner struggle that he is experiencing and discloses as well his slow, but certain process of self-discovery and personal growth. The female characters in the play, who appear more like an ancient *chorus* to openly express the lack of manhood in Walter, also witness at the end Walter's transformation and evolution. This clever dramatic strategy allows the readers, males and females, to attend to Walter's transformation as an example of an emerging model of black masculinity, that although not exempt of flaws, neither oppresses women nor threatens them. In this light, *A Raisin in the Sun* becomes a

manifestation of the current direction toward models of black masculinities that do not share the oppressive, discriminatory nature of patriarchal notions of manhood.

Finally, this study also opens the door for further research, both in the fields of gender studies and cultural studies. For example, the interaction among men and women in the construction of black masculinities represents a field to explore in more detail. Another relevant issue for further analysis may be the influence of cultural identity in developing and keeping one's gender identity. The question of power in the characters of Hansberry's play is yet another fruitful field for exploration: Why is Walter Lee a powerless figure even if he tries to embody patriarchal standards? Are power relationships among the female characters in the play even? What is the relationship between one's cultural identity and the gain or loss of social power? All these issues may be further analyzed using the present study as a departing point.

Bibliography

Abreu, Jose M., et al. "Ethnic Belonging and Traditional Masculinity Ideology among African Americans, European Americans, and Latinos." *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*. July 2000: 75-86. Print.

Altman, Jan. *VCU*. 27 Aug. 2005. Web. <http://www.students.vcu.edu/counsel/safezone/trans_flyer_ncod.html>

Amin, Samir. *Eurocentrism*. New York: Montly Review Press, 1989. Print.

Amazon.com: A New Psychology of Men. Editorial Reviews. 15 Sept. 2007. Web. <http://www.amazon.com/New-Psychology-Men-Ronald-Levant/dp/0465039162/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1283365651&sr=1-1>

Aristotle. *Poetics*. Trans. S.H. Butcher. *E-Books@Adelaide*. The University of Adelaide. 2012. Web. 10 July 2012. <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/a/aristotle/poetics/>

Axelrod, Steven. "The Vital Relationship between Work and Masculinity: A Psychoanalytic Perspective." *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*. July 2001: 117-123. Print.

Baldwin, James. *Sweet Lorraine, introduction to Hansberry, Lorraine, To Be Young, Gifted and Black: An Informal Autobiography*. New York: Signet Paperback. 1970. Print.

Barnes, Clive. "Stage: Capitol's 'Raisin'." *The New York Times*. May 31, 1973: 49. Print.

Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author", *Image, Music, Text.* 1977. Web. 4 November, 2007 <http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/barthes06.htm>

Baym, Nina. *Woman's Fiction*. London: Cornell University Press, 2nd edition,1979. Print.

Bennett, Lerone Jr. and Margaret G. Burroughs, "A Lorraine Hansberry Rap," *Freedomways: A Quarterly Review of the Freedom Movement* 19 (1979): 232. Print.

Bergman, Stephen. “Men’s Psychological Development: A Relational Perspective.” *A New Psychology of Men*. Levant, Ronald F., and William Pollack, eds. New York: Basic Books, 1995. Print.

Bly, Robert. *Iron John: A Book about Men*. 1st edition. New York: Vintage Books,1992. Print.

---. *The Light around the Body*. New York: Harper and Row, 1959. Print.

---. James Hillman & Michael Meade. Eds. *The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart: Poems for Men*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1992. Print.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *La Dominación Masculina*. Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2000. Print.

Bressler, Charles E. *Literary Criticism.* 2nd ed. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1999. Print.

Brod, Harry. *The Making of Masculinities The New Men’s Studies*. New York: Routledge,1987. Print.

Brooks, Marcus. “Blacks and Single Parenting”. *Helium*. 2002. Web. 1 September 2010.

<http://www.helium.com/items/976111-blacks-and-single-parenting>

Carter, Stephen R. *Commitment Amid Complexity: Lorraine Hansberry's Life in Action.* MELUS 1980: 7: 3. 39-41. Print.

Carbado, Devon. Ed. *Black Men on Race, Gender, and Sexuality*. New York: New York University Press, 1999. Print.

Carlyle, Thomas. *On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History*. Nebraska: Bison Books, 1966. Print.

Cerf, Bennet. "Lorraine Hansberry. A Study in Courage." *Six American Plays for Today*. 3rd edition. New York: The Modern Library, 1961. Print.

Chase, Richard. *The Quest for Myth*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1949. Print.

Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. *Signs* 1.4 (1976): 875-93. Print.

Cleveland, Grover. "The Evolution of the Self-Made Man." *Success.* July 1902: 411. Web. 3 Feb. 2007. <http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/magic/news/cleveland.html>

Cohen, Stanley. "The Failure of the Melting Pot." *The Great Fear. Race in the mind of America*. Eds. Gary Nash and Richard Weiss. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970. Print.

Connell, R. W. *Masculinities.* California: University of California Press. 2005. Print.

Conrad, Earl. *The Invention of the Negro*. New York: Paul S. Eriksson, Inc. 1996. Print.

Cools Janice. "The (Re) Construction of African-American Masculinity—Homosexuality." *African American Male Research Online Magazine*. Web. 18 July, 2000. <www.pressroom.com/~afrimale/cools>

Cros, Edmond. *El Sujeto Cultural: Sociocrítica y psicoanálisis*. Medellín: EAFIT. 2003. Print.

Degler, Carl N. "Slavery and the Genesis of American Race Prejudice." *The Origins of American Slavery and Racism*. ed. Donald Noel. Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1972. Print.

Deida, David. *The Way of the Superior Man: A Spiritual Guide to Mastering the Challenges of Women, Work, and Sexual Desire*. Chicago: Sounds True Books, 2004. Print.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978. Web. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/derrida.htm>

---. *Positions*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981. Print.

Engenderhealth. Web. 5 Aug. 2003. <http://www.engenderhealth.org/wh/sg/egwhat.html>

Fasteau, Marc. *The Male Machine*. New York: Delta Books, 1975. Print.

Fish, Stanley. *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive communities*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1980. Print.

Flood, Michael. "Men, Masculinity and Violence." Speech. Black launch, Canberra, Australia. 21 October 1993. Web. 17 July 2009. <http://www.xyonline.net/speechmascyviolence.shtml>

Focault, Michel. "The Work of Representation." *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices.* Ed. Stuart Hall. London: Sage, 1997. Print.

Fredrickson, George. *The Arrogance of Race: Historical Perspectives on Slavery, Racism, and Social Inequality*. Middletown: Weyslean University Press, 1988. Print.

Freund, Elizabeth. *The Return of the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism*. London: Methuen, 1987. Print.

Goldberg, Gary, dir. *Dad*. 1984. Film.

Gutierrez, Claudio. "Las Especies Humanas." 15 August , 1999. Web. 22 Feb. 2001. < http://claudiogutierrez.com/Las_especies_humanas.html>

Handlin, Oscar and Mary. "The Origins of Negro Slavery." *The Origins of American Slavery and Racism*. ed. Donald Noel. Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1972. Print.

Hansberry Lorraine. *A Raisin in the Sun*. New York: Signet, 1988. Print.

---. *A Raisin in the Sun*. *Six American Plays for Today*. Ed. Bennet Cerf. 3rd edition. New York: The Modern Library, 1961. Print.

---. *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black.* Ed. Robert Nemiroff. New York: Signet. 1970. Print.

Harris, Luke. "The Challenge and Possibility for Black Males to Embrace Feminism." *Black Men on Race, Gender, and Sexuality*. Carbado, Devon. Ed. New York: New York University Press, 1999. Print.

Hine, Darlene and Earnestine Jenkins, eds. *A Question of Manhood. A Reader in US Black Men's History and Masculinity. Volume 1*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999. Print.

Hodge, Francis. *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style*. 3rd. Edition. New Jersey:Prentice Hall, 1987. Print.

Hoffman, Daniel. Ed. *Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing*. London: Harvard University Press, 1979. Print.

hooks, Bell. "Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center" Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press 1984. Print.

---. *Yearning; race, gender, and cultural politics*. Boston: South end Press, 1990. Print.

---. *We Real Cool. Black Men and Masculinity*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Hutchinson, Earl. *The Assassination of the Black Male Image*. New York: Touchstone,1997. Print.

Internet Movie Database (IMDb). *A Raisin in the Sun (1965).* 20 Feb 2011. Web.

----. *A Raisin in the Sun (TV 1989).* 20 Feb 2011. Web.

----. *A Raisin in the Sun (TV 2008).* 20 Feb 2011. Web.

Jensen, Robert. "Men Being Men Is a Bad Deal." *San Francisco Chronicle*. 8 October 2006: F-3. Print.

Johnson, Charles. *Africans in America*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998. Print.

Katz, Jonathan Ned. *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the USA.* NY: Crowell, 1976. 425. Print.

Kimmel, Michael. *Manhood in America*. New York: The Free Press, 1996. Print.

---. "The Cult of Masculinity: American Social Character and the Legacy of the Cowboy." *Beyond patriarchy: Essays by men on pleasure, power, and change*. Ed. M. Kaufman. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1987. 235-249. Print.

Kyriazi, Paul. *The Complete James Bond Lifestyle Seminar*. New York: Ronin Books, 2002. Print.

Levant, Ronald F., and William Pollack, eds. *A New Psychology of Men*. New York: Basic Books, 1995. Print.

---. "Towards the Reconstruction of Masculinity." *Journal of Family Psychology*. March-June 1992: 379-402 Print.

Madhubuti, Haki. *Black Men. Obsolete, Single, Dangerous? The Afrikan American Family in Transition*. Chicago: Third World Press, 1991. Print.

May, Charles E., ed. *The New Short Story Theories*. Athens: Ohio UP, 1994. Midwest Book Review. Web. June 2007 <http:///www.amazon.com>

Moore, Robert, and Douglas Gillette. *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover. Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1990. Print.

Murray, George. "'Raisin in Sun' Terrific Theater," *Chicago American*, 27 Feb. 1959, 19. Print.

Nash, Gary. "Red, White, and Black. The Origins of Racism in Colonial America." *The Great Fear. Race in the mind of America*. Eds. Gary Nash and Richard Weiss. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.,1970. Print.

Nemiroff, Robert. “Introduction”. A Raisin in the Sun, by Lorraine Hansberry. New York: Signet, 1988. Print.

---., ed. *Lorraine Hansberry. The Collected Last Plays*. Westford: Plume, 1983. Print.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. 5th edition. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1955. Print.

---. *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is.* NY: Oxford University Press. 2007. Print.

---. *Human, All Too Human: A Book of Free Spirits. Nietzsche's Features*. 1 January, 2002. Web. 15 April, 2010. <http://nietzsche.holtof.com/Nietzsche_human_all_too_human/index.htm>

---. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Vancouver Island University. January, 2009. 10 April, 2000. Web. < http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/Nietzsche/tragedy_all.htm>

---. *The Will to Power*. *Athenaeum Library of Philosophy*. 1999. Web. 15 April, 2010. <http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/nietzsche_wtp01.htm>

---. *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. *The Free Library.com.* 2010. Web. 15 April 2010. <http://nietzsche.thefreelibrary.com/Thus-Spake-Zarathustra>

Noel, Donald. *The Origins of American Slavery and Racism*. Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1972. Print.

Pawlik, Amber. “Feminism's Assault on Masculinity.” *Amber’s Site*. Web. 11 February 2005. <http://www.amberpawlik.com/masculinity.html>

---. “Defining Masculinity and Femininity.” *Amber’s Site*. Web. 11 February 2005. <http://www.amberpawlik.com/gender.html>

Pieplow, John, dir. *Strangeland*. 1998. Film.

Tiger, Lionel. *The Decline of Males: The First Look at the Unexpected New World of Men and Women*. New York: Golden Guides of St. Martin's Press, 2000. Print.

Tompkins, Jane, ed. *Reader-Response Criticism*. 8th Edition. Baltimore: The Johns HopkinsUniversity Press, 1994. Print.

Real, Terrence. *I Don't Want to Talk about It: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression*. New York: Fireside, 1997. Print.

Resh, Richard W. *Black America*. Missouri: Raytheon Education Company, 1969. Print.

Ressner, Jeffrey. "Brand New Bodies". *Time*. September 13, 1999. Print.

"Sing 'Em All! The Tony Awards Songbook". Tony Awards. www.tonyawards.com. 2008 . 12 Apr. 2011. Web.

Sinnot, Susan. *Lorraine Hansberry Award-Winning Playwright and Civil Rights Activist*. Berkeley: Conari Press, 1999. Print.

Schneider, Monique. *Genealogía de lo Masculino*. Primera edición. Buenos Aires: Paidos, 2003. Print.

Voices from the Gaps. "Lorraine Hansberry." *University of Minnessota*. 2009. Web. 13 May, 2010. <http://voices.cla.umn.edu/artistpages/hansberryLorraine.php>

Weiss, Richard. "Racism in the Era of Industrialization." *The Great Fear. Race in the mind of America*. Eds. Gary Nash and Richard Weiss. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970. Print

Wilkerson, Margaret B. "Introduction". *Lorraine Hansberry, the Collected Last Plays*. Ed. Robert Nemiroff. Westford: Plume, 1983. Print.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.* 1792. Web. 13 May, 2010. <http://www.bartleby.com/144/>

Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of the United States: 1492—Present*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1995. Print.