

## A Raisin in the Sun #8

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### **Symbolism**

#### **Beer – Liquor Store – Green Hat – Walter**

In A Raisin in the Sun, beer creates a subtext throughout the story. Walter's obsession with beer leads to his desires to start a liquor business. He finds relief at the Green Hat, and his pursuit of liquor creates his identity which changes at the end of the story when he abandons beer for his family.

#### Liquor Store

**Walter: "Yeah, you see, this little liquor store we got in mind cost seventy five thousand and we figured the initial investment on the place be about thirty thousand, see. That be ten thousand each. Course, there's a couple of hundred you got to pay so you don't spend your life just waitin' for them clowns to let your license get approved-"**

This is Walter's first mention of beer/ambitions in the story (1633 for 5th edition, 1461 for 6th edition) -- Act 1 Scene 1. From this quote we can see how he thinks that his future lies in liquor.

**(Walter enters with great excitement) Walter: "Did it come?"**

**Mama: (Quietly) Can't you give people a Christian greeting before you start asking about money?**

**Walter: Old Willy Harris put everything on paper.**

We can see Walter's excitement for money and his liquor store; and the idea of beer itself. (Act 1 Scene 2) Christian people aren't supposed to drink beer, and yet, Walter is very concerned with beer. His drive for business outweighs his moral beliefs.

**Mama: I'm waiting to see you stand up and look like your daddy and say we done give up one baby to poverty and that we ain't going to give up nary another one. . . I'm waiting.**

Walter has dedicated his life to the money and prioritized it above all things, and when he hears about Ruth's abortion, he ignores the fact and leaves the house. (Act 1 Scene 2) His liquor business is his first priority. If he did not have the business, then he would respond to Mama's comments.

**Mama: You are a disgrace to your father's memory. Somebody get me my hat!**

The hat symbolizes humiliation, or embarrassment. (Act 1 Scene 2)

## Beer

***(Walter comes in during this performance; he has obviously been drinking. He leans against the door heavily and watches his sister, at first with distaste. Then his eyes look off-- "Back to the past"-- as he lifts both his fists to the roof, screaming)***

This immediately follows Act 1 Scene 2, after the big scene with Mama. He shouts about the "FLAMING SPEAR", etc as he unleashes his strange drunk character here throughout the play. We see the effect of beer on Walter. He is able to connect with his past self. When Walter is drunk, he is irrational. He doesn't think clearly and becomes very primitive. (Act 2 Scene 1)

***(And now the lighting shifts subtly to suggest the world of Walter's imagination, and the mood shifts from pure comedy. It is the inner Walter speaking: The Southside chauffeur has assumed an unexpected majesty)***

This is the implied response that Walter reveals his way of feeling superior, feeling himself and his own character without inhibitions or self-conscious. This scene shows his transformation to the primitive past with the help of beer. (Act 2 Scene 1)

**George: Oh you've been?**

**Walter: Plenty of times.**

**Ruth (shocked at the lie): Walter Lee Younger!**

**Walter (staring her down): Plenty! (pause) What we got to drink in this house? Why don't you offer this man some refreshment (To George) They don't know how to entertain people in this house, man.**

Walter believes in being a benevolent man, talking about a peace offering with the beer. (Act 2 Scene 1). He offers beer to people as a greeting in hopes of gaining anything he desires from the person. He wants financial support from George.

## Walter's Identity with Beer

**Walter: (He finds a beer in the refrigerator, wanders over to Murchinson, sipping and wiping his lips with the back of his hand, and straddling a chair backwards to talk to the other man)**

**Walter: ...Big Invest big, gamble big, hell, lose big if you have to, you know what I mean.**

Links greeting with the beer to asking George for help in investing for the liquor store, also he brings out the beer to show it's a maturity and "man-to-man" or the image that "big business men drink beer." This relates to his philosophy of how everything has to be gambled in life in order to have success. (Act 2 Scene 1)

**Walter (bitterly, hurt): I know ain't nothing in this world as busy as you colored college boys with your fraternity pins and white shoes . . .**

Another link to the fraternity and how Walter's not included in the "brotherhood", it's "ironic" because he calls George "my black brother" (while he was drunk performing the "Flaming Spear") but now he's saying a non-familiar saying like "I can't join you" after he mentions the fraternity and white shoes. Fraternity = brother in Latin. (Act 2 scene 1)

**Walter (intently, almost quietly, between the teeth, glaring at the boy): ...Man, I'm a volcano. Bitter? Here I am a giant--surrounded by ants! Ants who can't even understand what it is the giant is talking about.**

Shows the uninhibited character of Walter and the effects of liquor on his system: he has no regard to anyone for their feelings (if he were sober he wouldn't have said this to anyone) but the alcohol in his bloodstream eliminated all inhibitions. Once again, Walter prioritizes beer above all else. (Act 2 scene 1)

**Ruth (passionately, suddenly): Oh, Walter--ain't you with nobody!**

**Walter (violently): No! 'Cause ain't nobody with me! Not even my own mother!**

Beer makes Walter lonely because he constantly believes that beer leads to the future, not family. He is desperate to even suggest that his own mother would not be by his side in times of hardship. (Act 2 scene 1)

**Ruth: You want some hot milk?**

Ruth offers egg, hot milk, and coffee as a replacement for beer but he refuses to accept them.

**Ruth: 'Cause after all that liquor you come home with you ought to have something hot in your stomach.**

Beer is a part of Walter that makes up who he is, but Ruth is trying to get him to eat and consume other things. "You are what you eat."

In the end of Act 1, Ruth tells Walter she's pregnant, and Walter just leaves... but the beginning of Act 2 ("later in the same day"), Walter returns drunk. So rather returning to his family to empathize and suffer together, he goes and drinks to find his haven. -- Beginning of Act II.

Green Hat (further explained in archetypal criticism)

**Walter: ...Then I drove back and I went to the Green Hat. (Pause) ... I just drove and looked at the farms. Then I drove back and I went to the Green Hat. (Pause) .. And today-- today I didn't get the car. Today I just walked. ..And then I went to the Green Hat. You all sad? You all depressed?**

**Walter: ...You can just sit there and drink and listen o them three men play and you realize that don't nothing matter worth a damn, but just being there--**

The Green Hat represents his haven. He doesn't have to worry about life or anything else once he's at the Green Hat. When he is in the "Green" Hat, he becomes younger and carefree. (Green Hat is further explained in archetypal criticism)

**\*\*Walter invests all of his money into the liquor store = he invests it all in hopes it goes to be like the Green Hat, a place to forget who he is, a place where he can be young again.**

### Beer

**Walter: That's right. Care for something to drink? Ruth, get Mr. Lindner a beer.**

**Lindner (upset for some reason): Oh--no, really. I mean thank you very much, but no thank you.**

Lindner knows what Walter is doing. Beer exchanged usually means to having good times together. He doesn't want to have a good time, he just wants to get down to business and not fool around with beer. (Act 2 Scene 3)

**Mama (to Walter): I'm sorry 'bout your liquor store, son. It just wasn't the thing for us to do. That's what I want to tell you about---**

Description of the Liquor store and its negative effects. We see beer as a negative stage prop because Mama (the moral center) disapproves it.

**Walter: (*sweetly, more sweetly than we have ever known him*): No, Daddy ain't drunk. Daddy ain't going to never be drunk again ...**

Walter's personality changes at the end of the story because he abandons beer for his family. He realizes that not everything is about beer. When he loses all his money (his chances for a successful beer business), he suddenly cares for the family more. There is no longer anything between him and his family.

**Willy Harris is the deceitful, misfortune personified.**

### White Shoes

**Walter (to Ruth): Well, they look crazy as hell -- white shoes, cold as it is.**

Walter is saying that George isn't where he's supposed to be: and basically talking that George has left the black heritage. As "cold as it is" is sort of an indication to say he's out of place. A black man should be wearing black shoes. (Act 2 Scene 1)

### Black Knee Socks

**Walter: They look funny as them black knee socks Beneatha wears out of here all the time.**

**Ruth: It's the college *style*, Walter**

**Walter: Style, hell. She looks like she got burnt legs or something.**

Now Walter criticizes Beneatha TOO immersed in African-American culture. Notice the contrast between Beneatha (super black) and George (assimilated white). Beneatha embodies so much black culture that she has “burnt legs.” (Act 2 Scene 1)

### **Walter's Job**

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

This description of Walter's job symbolizes that he is not free, because cars are supposed to symbolize freedom and independence and the American dream. Walter's trapped driving another person's car.

### **The New House**

**Ruth: "I'll work twenty hours a day in all the kitchens in Chicago...I'll strap my baby on my back if I have to and scrub all the floors in America and wash all the sheets in America if I have to- but we got to MOVE!"**

Shows that the new house is breakaway from their current life -- a new beginning.

### **A Raisin in the Sun (Further explained in Book Question 11)**

A raisin is already dried up – a finished product to be eaten or sold, so why is the raisin back in the sun again? Literally, the already dry raisin in the sun would eventually dry up to a point that it can no longer be called a raisin. In Langston Hughes's poem, dream is being compared to a raisin. “dream deferred” = dream delayed/strays a different path. “Or fester like a sore – And then run?” = dreams that cannot be fulfilled “fester like a sore” and eventually we are forced to “run” along with it. “Does it stink like rotten meat?” = dreams that you put down. “Or crust and sugar over – Like a syrupy sweet?” = Or does it mask over your objectives so that they are enjoyable? What is under the crust of the dream? What is under the crust cannot be known until the crust is broken; it can be good or bad. “Maybe it just sags Like a heavy load.” = a burden to carry. “Or does it explode?” = leaves the dreamer crippled.

### **Pot of Plants: perseverance, love, nurture**

At first, we thought the plant meant perseverance, but as we further analyze the plant, we noticed that the plant does not grow and is living off Mama's hands. Unlike most stories where the plant is a symbol for perseverance, Mama displays perseverance by nurturing a plant that does not grow. The character that best fits the position of the pot of plants is Walter Lee. Like the plant, Walter does not bear fruits and requires Mama's attention to keep him from cracking.

**“Lord, if this little old plant don't get more sun than it's been getting it ain't never going to see spring again.”**

Walter was setting up illegal liquor business. The plant needs more “sun.”

***“(she draws her chair up to the table on which she has put her plant and some sticks and some cord)”***

This scene occurs after Mama gives Walter the insurance money. The sticks and cord means that Walter needs direction and restraints.

***“(She goes to her plant, which has remained on the table, looks at it, picks it up and takes it to the window sill and sets it outside, and she stands and looks at it a long moment.”***

The pot of plants is taken into the house since Walter is in the house for an extended amount of time. Mama puts the plant back out the window when Walter finds Lindner's contact card and leaves the house. At the end of the play when everyone has left the house, Mama ***“comes back in, grabs her plant, and goes out for the last time.”***

### **Prometheus**

**George: Thanks. Goodnight. (Half out the door he reopens it. To Walter) Goodnight, Prometheus!**

“PROMETHEUS was the Titan god of forethought and crafty counsel who was entrusted with the task of moulding mankind out of clay. His attempts to better the lives of his creation brought him into direct conflict with Zeus. Firstly he tricked the gods out of the best portion of the sacrificial feast, acquiring the meat for the feasting of man. Then, when Zeus withheld fire, he stole it from heaven and delivered it to mortal kind hidden inside a fennel-stalk. As punishment for these rebellious acts, Zeus ordered the creation of Pandora (the first woman) as a means to deliver misfortune into the house of man, or as a way to cheat mankind of the company of the good spirits. Prometheus meanwhile, was arrested and bound to a stake on Mount Kaukasos where an eagle was set to feed upon his ever-regenerating liver (or, some say, heart). Generations later the great hero Herakles came along and released the old Titan from his torture. [www.theoi.com]”

**Analysis:** Like Prometheus who stole fire for the better of mankind, Walter believes that for the benefit of his family he should invest all the money in a liquor store. Although he wants to help his family prosper, he was also selfish for lying to his family and investing all the money instead of saving some for his sister's college tuition. In the end, like Prometheus, Walter is punished as he eventually is scammed by Willy Harris (as Prometheus is punished by Zeus).

### **Younger, the Family Name**

The family name is Younger because they represent the new African Americans splitting away from the old way. Their neighbor Johnson, **“a rather squeaky wide-eyed lady of no particular age,”** contrasts with the Youngers. She tells them that they will be bombed if they moved to Clybourne Park. Her way of thinking is old and the way the Younger family thinks is new. They sought opportunities that are to be found.

**Benetha: Talk about --- oldddddd-fashioneddddd – Negroes!**

**Walter: What kind of Negroes?**

**Benetha: Old-fashioned.**

Walter: You know, when these *New Negroes* have their convention...

### Irony

#### Fifty Cents

Walter: "In fact, here's another fifty cents..."

Walter: "I need some money for carfare"

Walter gives Travis one dollar, to take a taxicab/buy some fruit, but in the end Walter does not have any money himself.

#### Walter Repeats Lindner

Lindner: Well-- you see our community is made up of people who've worked hard as the dickens for years to build u that little community. They're not rich and fancy people; just hard-working, honest people who don't really have much but those little homes and a dream of the kind of community they want to raise their children in.

*(Fast forward to the end of the play)*

Walter: Well, Mr. Lindner, we called you--because, well, me and my family well-- we are very plain people...

This scene is ironic because Lindner tells Walter that he doesn't belong in Clybourne Park because its inhabitants are "hard-working, honest" people. In return, Walter tells Lindner that his family is very "plain" and belongs in Clybourne Park. He uses the same (or similar) words Mr. Lindner says. This part can be interpreted, in two ways which in return creates the ironic effect.

-the first impression: Walter coming up with an excuse to get the money back for the house.

-the second impression: We found this as we read closely between the text.

Walter: And we have all thought about your offer –

Lindner: Well, good ... good –

Walter: And we have decided to move into our house because...

At first we thought this statement was des ex machine, but was we read closer. In Walter's first lines of the conversation with Lindner, he said that his family is very "plain" and hardworking. If we read the conversation with Walter's intention to move into the new home, then his conclusion to move in is not surprising at all. It is the misunderstanding by Lindner and by us that creates the ironic effect.

#### Walter's realization (Climax of the Story)

The whole play leads us to expect Walter to sell the house back to Mr. Lindner.

**"Mama (*opening her eyes and looking into Walter's*): 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 hands and closes her eyes*) Go ahead."**

Mama reinforces the idea that Walter will sell the house, but Walter's objective changed (this is explained in the point before this one). This change in objective fooled everyone in the play. He takes hold of Travis and says: **"And we have decided to move into our house because my father – my father – he earned it for us brick by brick."** Walter came to realize that he will go nowhere by staying where he is.

### Money

**"Walter: No – it was always money, Mama. We just didn't know about it."**

Money has been a big concern for the family since the start of the play. Even the youngest of the family (Travis) has concern for money. **Ruth: No! And I want you to stop asking your grandmother for money, you hear me?** Throughout the play, money continues to corrupt Walter. He shouts, **"WILL SOMEBODY PLEASE LISTEN TO ME TODAY!"** When he finally gets the money from Mama, he loses it. Ironically, when he has no money at the end of the play, his personality and philosophy changes.

### **Johnson's statement (verbal irony)**

Johnson gives Ruth newspaper with an article about "colored people" getting bombed. Following that comment, she suggests that the Youngers would also be attacked, and the front page will say: **"NEGROES INVADE CLYBOURNE PARK – BOMBED!"** Johnson is an ironic character. She **"bets"** that blacks who move into white society will be killed even though she herself is black.

### **Willy Harris**

Walter and Bobo believe that Willy Harris is going to help them make a new business, he treats them like friends and they fall into his scam.

Audience is not aware of Willy Harris's true character until Bobo comes to Walter with the news that he cannot find Willy.

### **Welcoming Committee**

Mr. Lindner came to the Youngers as the representative from the Welcoming Committee. Rather than welcoming the new house owners, he offers to **"buy the house...at a financial gain to [the] family."** The name "welcoming committee" is ironic because their motive is to make the family leave their neighborhood

### **Beneatha, Walter, & Lindner**

Irony = Sarcasm – Beneatha and Walter jokes about Lindner's offer. Walter tells Mama that the white community **"can't hardly wait."** **"Mama: Did he threaten us?"** **"Beneatha: Oh – Mama – they don't do it like that any more. He talked Brotherhood. He said everybody ought to learn how to sit down and hate each other with good Christian fellowship."** Following her comment, ***"(She and Walter shake hands to ridicule the remark)."***

### **Moving into Clybourne Park**

Family wants to move into a neighborhood that consists of all white people who does not want them. They are so eager to move to a place that has many people who may want to kill them.

### **Ruth's Characterization**

**Ruth is about thirty. We can see that she was a pretty girl, even exceptionally so, but now it is apparent that life has been little that she expected, and disappointment has already begun to hang in her face. In a few years, before thirty-five even, she will be known among her people as a "settled woman".**

Direct characterization of Ruth is depicted in the action before the play even starts, in hopes of revealing a character that has been too stressed, or shaped to have that "stressed" outlook on life. With this, we can explain the whole "Travis situation" where she refuses to give Travis money. She loves her son and yet deprives of him what he wants and gives him a hug in return. She is stressed out because the family doesn't have enough money to spare, and yet, Walter gives him money, creating more stress and disappointment.



### Ruth's Baby

**"I – I'm sorry about this new baby, Walter. I guess maybe I better go on and do what I started..."** The baby is Ruth's dream. She plans on replacing her dream even though she will break her own heart.

**Ruth: Yes I would too, Walter. (Pause) I gave her a five-dollar down payment.**

**Ruth (To Mama): Ain't nothing' can tear at you like losin' your baby. (Page 1882 in black 6<sup>th</sup> edition)**

This shows how much Ruth is willing to sacrifice, as "nothing can tear you like losin' your baby", but still chooses to abort her baby in helping out her family, or keeping Walter happy. It displays her mental strength, just like the Ruth in the bible willing to abandon anything for Mama. She believes that the baby will be too troubling at this time of the year and is willing to abandon it.

### Ruth Teasing Travis

**Ruth (mocking; as she thinks he would say it): Oh, Mama makes me so mad sometimes, I don't know what to do! (She waits and continues to his back as he stands stock-still in front of the door) I wouldn't kiss that woman good-bye for nothing in this world this morning!**

This shows Ruth's feminine side, with the motherly figure over Travis and how she perceives her own child. She is serious and yet casual at times with Travis.

### Naomi & Ruth: Why does Ruth not support Walter?

Ruth does not support Walter because of the biblical allusion – Naomi & Ruth. Both in the Bible and A Raisin in the Sun, Ruth is a daughter-in-law. Since Mama is the moral center, everything that Ruth agrees upon is morally correct. Like in the Bible, Ruth never denies Mama even on things that she cannot perfectly agree on. When Mama told the family that the new house is in Clybourne Park, Ruth was at first reluctant but rejoiced. ***"(struck senseless with the news, in its various degrees of goodness and trouble, she sits a moment, her fists propping her chin in thought, and then she starts to rise, bringing her fists down with vigor, the radiance spreading from cheek to cheek again)... HALLELUJAH!"***

**Walter: Mama would listen to you. You know she listen to you more than she do me and Bennie. She think more of you.**

This pertains to the rhetorical question as well as evidence to the biblical allusion (Ruth/Naomi). Mama and Ruth are very close together. When everyone was shocked by the news of moving into a white neighborhood, Ruth was the first one to recover and rejoice despite her previous thoughts.

**Walter: 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, but you wouldn't do nothing to help, would you? You couldn't be on my side that long for nothing, could you?**

This shows that Ruth is on Mama's side and not Walter's.

### Ruth Playing It Cool

**Ruth: Eat your eggs, Walter.**

**Walter (slams the table and jumps up): --DAMN MY EGGS--DAMN ALL THE EGGS THAT EVER WAS!**

**Ruth: Then go to work.**

Here, we can see that Ruth keeps herself cool and collected even when Walter throws fits. She has a strong mental mindset.

**Walter (looking up at her):** See-- I'm trying to talk to you 'bout myself and all you can say is eat them eggs and go to work.

**Ruth (wearily) :** Honey, you never say nothing new. I listen to you every day, every night and every morning, and you never say anything new. So you would rather be Mr. Arnold than be his chauffeur. So--I would rather be living in Buckingham Palace.

**Walter:** That is just what is wrong with the colored women in this world... Don't understand about building their men up and making 'em feel like they somebody.

**Ruth (drily, but to hurt):** There are colored men who do things.

**Ruth:** Well being a colored woman, I guess I can't help myself none.

We can see that Ruth is supportive, yet, has no tolerance for Walter and sees no point in arguing. While Walter is irrational, Ruth tries her best to stay rational and calm in every situation.

**Walter (to Ruth) -** See--did you hear? Did you hear!

**Ruth:** Honey, please go to work.

**Ruth:** Bennie, why you always gotta be pickin' on your brother? Can't you be a little sweeter sometimes?

Ruth is doing what Mama would do, in accordance to the biblical allusion. Mama is also the central moral that the characters all revolve around and base themselves off of.

### **Ruth's Education**

**Beneatha:** Because I hate assimilationist Negroes!

**Ruth:** Will somebody please tell me what assimila-who-ever means!

Because she does not know what these terms of assimilation mean, this scene displays Ruth's education level. She obviously didn't attend school enough for a blue-collar job.

### **Ruth Helping Walter**

**Mama (frowning deeply):** But liquor, honey...

**Ruth:** Well--like Walter say-- I spec people going to always be drinking themselves some liquor.

Previously, Walter asked Ruth to convince Mama, and now she's actually following through on his request. This shows that Ruth is faithful to Walter no matter how much Walter thinks against it. Although she does agree with Mama's decision of not having a liquor store, she remains faithful to Walter.

### **Ruth, A Conservative**

**Ruth (touching Beneatha's hair):** Girl, you done lost your natural mind?! Look at your head!

**George:** What have you done to your head--I mean your hair!

**Beneatha:** Nothing--except cut it off.

**Ruth:** Now that's the truth-- it's what ain't been done to it! You expect this boy to go out with you and our head all nappy like that?

Characterizes Ruth as a more conservative person, as Beneatha is the raging liberal of the family.

### **Ruth's Ideal**

**Ruth:** "I'll work twenty hours a day in all the kitchens in Chicago...I'll strap my baby on my back if I have to and scrub all the floors in America and wash all the sheets in America if I have to- but we got to MOVE!"

The desire Ruth has to leave and start somewhere new is passionate. In this quote, as we see all of her hopes and dreams in the new house. She understands that a new house means a new beginning.

### **Ruth and Money**

**Ruth: Shallow-what do you mean he's shallow? He's RICH!**

**Ruth: Well--what other qualities a man got to have to satisfy you, little girl?**

This ultimately displays the view on money from Ruth, and how she perceives it as something irreplaceable, and something that needs to be gained in order to survive.

### **Ruth, A Settled Woman**

**Ruth (crosses mechanically to the bedroom door and opens it and lets it swing open freely and slowly as the lights come up on Walter within, still in his coat, sitting at the far corner of the room. He looks up and out through the room to Lindner)**

This here is a description of Ruth at the end of the story; this relates to the opening description of Ruth being someone too stressed out, a "settled woman". If Walter had not changed at the end of the play, she would have stayed "mechanically" and "passively."

### **Ruth, A Flat Character**

**Ruth (looking around and coming to life): Well, for God's sake--if the moving men are here--LET'S GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE!**

This shows the flat characterization of Ruth. Ruth mentions in the beginning of the play that she hates living in the old apartment and at the end of the story, she rejoices to move. Since her motives did not change, she is a flat character.

## **Asagai's Characterization**

### **Difference Between Asagai and George**

**Beneatha (wearily): Oh, I just mean I couldn't ever really be serious about George. He's--He's so shallow.**

**Beneatha: "Oh-Mama-This is Mr. Asagai."**

Compared to the description of George, Beneatha shows more respect and liking toward Asagai. This is a very formal introduction from Beneatha. She ultimately respects him and holds him in high regard.

### **Insightful Asagai**

**Asagai: 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!**

**(Later on in the story)**

**Asagai: How often I have looked at you and said, "Ah-so this is what the New World hath finally wrought."**

This is Asagai's view on the weakness of America; more specifically his values and philosophies. He sees the deeper meaning in humanity and their understandings.

### **Marcus Garvey**

**Asagai: That when it is all over- that you come home with me... I mean across the ocean: home-to Africa...**

Asagai is a "Back to Africa" activist and advocate.

### **I LIVE THE ANSWER**

**Asagai:** You talk about what good is struggle, what good is anything! Where are we all going and why are we bothering!

**Beneatha:** AND YOU CANNOT ANSWER IT!

**Asagai (shouting over her):** I LIVE THE ANSWER!

This scene portrays Asagai's background as he continues to show the weakness of the generation of African Americans in America. Because he's been through so much more, he thinks that Beneatha shouldn't be so held back. Asagai has endured greater hardships.

### **Idealist**

Asagai is an idealist

**Asagai:** They who might kill me even...actually replenish all that I was.

He's sacrificing himself for the greater good and is all for justice. He is all for looking ahead in time and seeing the bigger picture. He is very insightful.

### **Polar Opposite of George**

**Asagai:** Yes.. we have a great deal to talk about. I mean about identity and time and all that.

**Beneatha:** Time?

**Asagai:** Yes, about how much time one needs to know what one feels.

(Later on)

**Asagai:** Never be afraid to sit awhile and think.

Asagai is the opposite of George, who thinks all about himself. Asagai is a philosopher who looks at society as a whole and how it can be improved, rather than individual advancement and pleasure.

## **George Murchinson's Characterization**

### **Murchinson = Materialism.**

**George's wealth also shows us how poor the Youngers are. Ruth tells Beneatha "Shallow – what do you mean he's shallow? He's *Rich!*"**

This shows that George is wealth (material goods) personified. If Beneatha marries George, the Youngers would be wealthy by material means but not necessarily have generosity.

### **The White African American Man**

George Murchinson is the equivalent male of a white man, who happens to be black. He is described as a **"faggoty boy wearing white shoes."**

according to Walter, as they are in Act II, Scene 1 after the African dance.

**George:** "Because this is stupid! I don't go out with you to discuss the nature of "quiet desperation" or to hear all about your thoughts-- because the world will go on thinking what it thinks regardless---"

**George (with artificial patience, counting on 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.

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

George Murchinson is the epitome of an "assimilated white male" in African-American form. As a college student, he is representing the typical white male and we can see his character as a dominant, forceful, and "animal-like" character in the play; seeing how he cannot control his

hormones as a college student. This also contrasts with Asagai who is calm and does not rush Beneatha.

### **Beneatha and George**

**Beneatha: George Murchinson! I wouldn't marry him if he was Adam and I was Eve!**

**Beneatha: O, I probably will... but first I'm going to be a doctor, and George, for one, still thinks that's pretty funny. I couldn't be bothered with that.**

George's character is displayed as a unpleasant, unfriendly person. Beneatha wouldn't marry him over anyone else, and these two quotes define George's character from Beneatha's viewpoint. George is described as self-centered man and thoughtless man.

**Beneatha: Oh, Mama-- the Murchinsons are honest-to-God-real-live-rich colored people, and the only people in the world who are more snobbish than rich white people are rich colored people. I thought everybody knew that. I've met Mrs. Murchinson. She's a scene!**

- Beneatha's outlook on the whole Murchinson family and their attitude.

**Beneatha: O, I probably will... but first I'm going to be a doctor, and George, for one, still thinks that's pretty funny. I couldn't be bothered with that. I am going to be a doctor and everybody around here better understand that!**

- Beneatha's viewpoint on George and his insensitivity to understanding.

### **"Murchinson"**

**Murchinson (with boredom): Yeah-- sometimes we'll have to do that, Walter.**

George Murchinson touches on being the character who does not seek to be a beneficiary towards the rest of the characters. He is a character who has little to no regard towards any of the characters' emotions, and seeks his own betterment as it is explained here. George is referred to as "Murchinson" in this part of the play a couple of times. In this scene, Walter is trying to win Murchinson's support for his liquor store. George responds from a "material" point of view and waves off the offer.

### **Body Language**

**George (looking at him with distaste a little above it all)**

We don't need the text to explain, his emotions and his body language is enough to display that he looks down on the Younger family, except for Beneatha, only because he seeks other ulterior motives with her. That's all he wants from the family, Beneatha's beauty.

### **Goodnight, Prometheus**

**George: Goodnight, Prometheus!**

George is an educated, smart aleck, as he refers to Walter when he leaves in Act 2 Scene 1. He means to poke fun because he knows that he is intellectually superior. He's just flaunting his intelligence.

### **Grass Huts**

**George: Oh, dear, dear, dear! Here we go! A lecture on the African past! On our Great West African Heritage! In one second we will hear all about the great Ashanti empires; the great Songhay civilizations; and the great sculpture of Benin!.....Let's face it baby, your heritage is nothing but a bunch of raggedy-assed spirituals and some grass huts!"**

Murchinson seems to have no regard for his cultural roots. Again, he displays his spoiled rich black American side. He models himself against his race as we can hear his sarcastic tone

speaking against the African Heritage:

### **Purpose of George – A Foil**

George's naïve perceptions serve as a foil to other characters. Without George, we cannot fully appreciate Asagai. We watch his selfish treatment of Beneatha and contrast that with the considerate thoughts of Asagai.

### **Book Questions**

7. The plant pot, and beer. Already explained in symbolism.

11. A Raisin in the Sun: A raisin is already dried up – a finished product to be eaten or sold, so why is the raisin back in the sun again? Literally, the already dry raisin in the sun would eventually dry up to a point that it can no longer be called a raisin. In Langston Hughes's poem, dream is being compared to a raisin.

#### **Analysis of Langston Hughes's Poem**

"dream deferred" = dream delayed.

"Or fester like a sore – And then run?" = dreams that cannot be fulfilled

"fester like a sore" and eventually we are forced to "run" along with it.

"Does it stink like rotten meat?" = dreams that you put down.

"Or crust and sugar over – Like a syrupy sweet?" = does it mask over your objectives so that they are enjoyable? What is under the crust of the dream? What is under the crust cannot be known until the crust is broken; it can be good or bad.

"Maybe it just sags Like a heavy load." = a burden to carry.

"Or does it explode?" = leaves the dreamer crippled like Walter losing the money and feeling extremely depressed.

Each character is each type that is talked about in the poem;

"Fester like a sore and then" = Ruth, her dreams of the baby and the house

"Does it stink like rotten meat?" = Walter Senior, his death

"Like a syrupy sweet?" = Beneatha, her dreams about black empowerment

"Sags like a heavy load" = Walter, his job

"Or does it explode?" = Walter, him losing the money to Willy Harris

### **Archetypes/Mythological Criticism**

#### **Mama – The Good Mother**

Mama is associated with the "life principle" in that throughout the story Mama provides the moral center for the household. She also represents warmth, nourishment, protection, fertility, growth and abundance.

Mama: "There is *a*lways something left to love. And if you ain't learned that, you ain't learned nothing."

“Now- you say after me, in my mother’s house there is still God.”

She is also described as having white hair, which represents the purity and positive aspects of life that Mama brings to the household.

“Her dark-brown face is surrounded by the total whiteness of her hair, and, being a woman who adjusted to many things in life and overcome many more, her face is full of strength She has, we can see, with and faith of a kind that keep her eyes lit and full of interest and expectancy. She is, in a word, a beautiful woman.”

### **Walter – Initiation**

Walter undergoes three distinct phases, 1) Separation 2) transformation 3) return

He shows a transformation from immaturity to adulthood.

separation: there are s multiple times when Walter separates from his family physically and emotionally.

Walter: “I’m a grown man, Mama.”

Throughout the story, Walter is detached from his family, his main priority is money and he puts his family second. Although Walter believes he’s a grown man who can make his own decisions, he is contradicting himself because his drive for money shows immaturity. He displays this when Ruth attempts to talk to him about their baby, but he has no response and leaves the house.

Mama: “ If you a son of mine, tell her! (*Walter picks up his keys and his coat and walks out. She continues, bitterly*) You ...you are a disgrace to your father’s memory. Somebody get me my hat!”

Walter: “What’s dangerous?” Mama: “When a man goes outside his home to look for peace”

After he tells the family that he lost all of their money, Walter leaves and returns to the house stating that he “made a call” to Mr. Lindner. It is when Mr. Lindner arrives at the apartment that we see Walter’s true transformation.

Walter: “Well-what I mean is that we come from a family who had a lot of *pride*. I mean- we are very proud people.”

Walter: “And we have decided to move into our house...”

From this point we see that Walter has finally prioritized his family first before money/liquor store.

### **The Green Hat**

The color green represents sensation and hope. He feels that the Green Hat is his second home, because it provides him comfort and makes him feel younger. In actuality, he should not

have to go the Green Hat to feel at home and relaxed. When he goes to the Green Hat, is able to relax and engulf himself in the music and atmosphere of the bar.

"I just drove and looked at the farms. Then I drove back and I went to the Green Hat.  
(Pause) And today- today I didn't get the car. Today I just walked. All over the Southside.  
And I looked at the Negroes and they looked at me and finally I just sat down on the curb  
at Thirty-ninth and South Parkway and I just sat there and watched the Negroes go by.  
And then I went to the Green Hat."

### **Mama's Garden**

The garden represents paradise, innocence, and fertility.

Mama: "Well, I always wanted me a garden like I used to see sometimes at the back of the houses down home."

The garden is located in the new house, and embodies a positive light. Mama especially looks forward to the garden, which is emphasized with a positive connotation of "paradise" where the family will be at peace in their new home.

### **"Blue slice of Paper"**

The insurance check is blue, which is "highly positive" and represents security for the family.

*"(Mama finally makes a good strong tear and pulls out the thin blue slice of paper and inspects it closely. The boy and his mother study it rapidly over Mama's shoulders.)"*

### **Fall (season)**

The story takes place during fall, which represents tragedy. This season is mentioned in the beginning of the story, which shows the beginning of a tragedy (the family losing all their money).

Mama: "I ain't meddling- (Underbreath; busy bodyish) I just noticed all last week he had cold cereal, and when it starts getting this chilly in the fall a child ought to have some hot grits or something when he goes out in the cold"

### **Flaming Spear**

sun/fire represents the passage of time and life. The color red, displays blood, sacrifice, violent passion, and disorder.

Beneatha: "We hear you, Flaming Spear"

Walter: "Telling us to prepare for the GREATNESS OF THE TIME!"

### **Psychological Criticism**

Some parts of this criticism are described in other parts of this analysis already.



**Walter:** Walter's thoughts revolve around the investment of money in hope to improve the family condition. He believes that his motives are for the benefits of his whole family, but in reality, they are driven by selfish and unmoral reasons.

**Travis:** He wants to work because like Walter, he thinks money equates to success. His innocence helps the characters realize their selfish desires. (ex. Mama holds onto Travis when she thinks that Walter is going to sell back the house like Willy Harris.)

**Ruth:** Her motives are driven by the biblical allusion.

**Mama:** She is the moral center of the family. Her thoughts revolve around pride, strength, and love that she derived from her past. Many of her decisions are driven by these moral values. (ex. Not approving the liquor store investment.)

**Beneatha:** Beneatha is filled with ambition and individuality. Her desires to be independent from everyone else drive her to seek Western medical education and yet keep her African heritage. She wants to prove herself in life.

**Younger Family:** The triumph of the family over racial equality reflects the author's own commitment to "Black struggle for equality and human rights." ([www.csutan.edu](http://www.csutan.edu)). The hard struggle for equality is displayed through the many obstacles that the Younger family faces – economical, racial, and social barriers. (ex. welcoming committee, Willy Harris, living in a rundown apartment, etc.)