The Changing Roles Of Women In A Raisin In The Sun Essay, Research Paper

A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry presents many themes that are found in everyday life. Some of these themes include the search for identity and self-respect, the real meaning of money, and the changing roles of women. The changing roles of women are portrayed through the differences between Lena and Beneatha. Lena represents the old woman, while Beneatha represents the new. This is shown through the differences in opinion about religion, marriage, and their dreams.

Lena and Beneatha have very different opinions about religion. Lena typifies traditional blacks that found personal fulfillment and courage for political and social action in God. Beneatha, however, does not find solace in God. Instead, she believes that man deserves credit for his own efforts. In Act I, Beneatha says, “How much cleaning can a house need, for Christ’s sakes.” (p. 34) Lena gets mad and Ruth says that Beneatha is “fresh as salt.” (p. 34) Beneatha retorts, “Well- if the salt loses its savor.” (p.

34) Lena gets offended even at this mild sacrilege. Later, Lena says, “You going to be a doctor, honey, God willing.” (p. 38) Beneatha replies, “God hasn’t got a thing to do with it.” (p. 38) She goes on to say, “God is just one idea I don’t accept I get tired of Him getting credit for all the things the human race achieves through its own stubborn effort. There simply is no God- there is only man and it is who makes miracles.” (p. 39) Lena rises across the room and slaps Beneatha in the face. She is so intolerant of Beneatha’s beliefs that she makes her say, “In my mother’s house there is still God.” (39) In a sense, she is right. Lena is so demanding and intolerant; she is the God of the house.

Lena and Beneatha also disagree about marriage. Beneatha says, “Mama, Asagai-asked me to marry him today and go to Africa-.”(p. 129) “You ain’t old enough to marry nobody,” Lena said. Beneatha seems to agree with her. Lena thinks of a more traditional marriage, with the husband ruling the roost. When Beneatha thought of marriage, she thought of a duo. Because of this, she wouldn’t marry George Murchison. He thought that she would be better if she did not talk. Asagai liked her for her mind and whom she was inside. Yet, still, she did not want to think of marriage until Yet, Lena still thought she was too young, and therefore, Beneatha and Lena had very different opinions on marriage.

Lena and Beneatha also have contrasting dreams. Having grown up in a racist South, Lena is content to live simply in Chicago where she and her family could survive with some dignity. She is disturbed by Walter Lee’s dream of owning a liquor store because she has seen too many Southern black men drown their troubles with liquor. Lena looks inward, towards her family and her home. This is shown when she uses $3,500 of her late husband’s insurance money to buy a house for the family. Beneatha, by contrast, looks outward towards college and medical school. Lena is very proud of Beneatha’s plans to become a doctor. Beneatha knows that a doctor helps people and therefore wants to become one. She is committed to blacks improving themselves and society through education, professions, social and political action, and a proud awareness of their African heritage. More sophisticated that the other Youngers, she speaks in a more cultivated manner and is first to realize the hypocrisy of Karl Lindner. Lindner was a white man who offered them money in exchange for not “corrupting” the all-white neighborhood that the house that Lena bought was in.

Lena never lost her faith in God or the family in her quest for understanding her daughter. Even though they were different, Beneatha and Lena begin to accept one another’s beliefs on religion marriage, and dreams.