# Lorraine Hansberry, 34, Dies; Author of 'A Raisin in the Sun'

## Playwright Won Critics Prize for First Work - Wrote 'Brustein's Window'

Lorraine Hansberry, one of the most promising young American playwrights, died of cancer yesterday at University Hospital. She was 34 years old.

Miss Hansberry, author of "A Raisin in the Sun" and the current "The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window," had been in and out of the hospital over the last two years. She was unable to help fashion the last play as it took shape in rehearsals.

She left the hospital occasionally to watch its progress and to attend its opening on Oct. 15 at the Longacre Theater. She returned to the hospital two days later, however, and remained there until her death.

The play drew mixed notices from the critics, but many theatrical people, clergy and others who were impressed with the work rallied to its support. They formed committee, a raised money and have kept the production going on a week-toweek basis.

Last night's performance of the play, which is now at Henry Miller's Theater, was canceled. The play's future is uncertain.



Lorraine Hansberry

projects, some of them near completion, that occupied her at her death. There was a musical adaptation of Oliver La Farge's novel "Laughing Boy" and a study of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the despotic liberator of Haiti. And there was also a drama entitled "Les Blancs." which was to deal with the contrasting and conflicting reactions of Negroes and whites living in an African land emerging from colonialism. Miss Hansberry began by writing plays that were read solely by her husband and intimate friends. She wrote three that she never finished, and some short stories, and then came "A Raisin in the Sun." "I wrote it between my 26th and 27th birthdays," she said. "One night, after seeing a play I won't mention, I suddenly became disgusted with a whole body of material about Negroes. Cardboard characters. Cute dialect bits. Or hip-swinging musicals from exotic scores." Her play, dealing with the aspirations, dreams and frustrations of the Younger family, was likened by one critic to Chekhov's "Cherry Orchard" in that "the knowledge of how character is controlled by environment and the alternation of humor and pathos is similar."

"The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window" was Miss Hansberry's second venture into "big-time" theater.

On March 11, 1959, the slim, cheery, talkative young woman with a gay, flashing smile took on the Broadway stage with "A Raisin in the Sun" and won an unexpected victory.

28-year-old Miss For the Hansberry, who had never had a play produced, the premiere at the Ethel Barrymore was more than a personal triumph.

The work was described not as a Negro play but one about people who happen to be Negroes. And its author, too, insisted throughout her short lifetime that she was not a Negro playwright but a writer who happened to be a Negro.

Miss Hansberry's works and her often eloquent statements attested to the energy with which she resisted stereotypes on the stage and in her workaday life.

### Her Philosophy

her most recent work, In "The Sign in Sidney Brustin's Window," the leading character, an idealistic Greenwich Village newspaper publisher, makes a comment that a friend of Miss Hansberry's said summed up her philosophy.

The character says:

"Yes, I care. I care about it all. It takes too much energy not to care. Yesterday I counted 26 gray hairs on the top of my head, all from not trying to care. The 'why' of why we are here is an intrigue for adolescents; the 'how' is what must concern the living."

This involvement, coupled with a catholic awareness, reflected itself repeatedly in Miss Hansberry's life and work. In discussing her last play, which stars Rita Moreno and Gabriel Dell, she wrote: "The silhouette of the Western intellectual poised in hesitation before the flames of inan accurate volvement was my closest symbolism of friends." Perhaps it was true of her friends, but not of Miss Hansberry. She sided unequivocably with involvement. She spoke before civil rights groups and peace groups. One friend recalled that she was a shy person who was nervous about facing audiences, "but when it came out it was all articulate."

#### Won Critics' Award

The play, which was later adapted for a motion picture, won for Miss Hansberry the New York Drama Critics Circle Award as the best American play of the 1959 season.

"A Raisin in the Sun" ran for 19 months in New York and changed some opinions that had previously considered all plays about Negroes as box-office poison.

"The thing I tried to show," she said, "was the many gradations on even one Negro family, the clash of the old and the new, but most of all, the unbelievable courage of the Negro people."

The title comes from Langston Hughes's poem "Harlem."

#### Grew Up in Chicago

Her commitment to the civil rights fight had its roots in the comfortable middle class, but segregated life she led as a youngster in Chicago.

Once, speaking of her father, Carl A. Hansberry, a wealthy real estate broker and banker, the playwright said:

"He died in 1945 at the age of 51 — of a cerebral hemorrhage, supposedly, but American racism helped kill him."

She then told how her father had fought a civil rights case on restricted real estate covenants all the way to the Supreme Court, where it was won.

"Daddy felt that this country was hopeless in its treatment of Negroes. So he became a refugee from America. He bought a house in Polanco, a suburb of Mexico City and we were planning to move there when he died. I was 14 at the time."

Her literary involvement was

What happens to a dream deferred

Does it dry up, like a raisin in the sun,

Does it fester like a sore and then run . . . or Does it explode?

Hansberry Lorraine Vivian was born in Chicago on May 19, 1930. She attended what she called "Jim Crow schools, on the South Side, which meant half-day schools."

When she was 8 her father bought a house in a white neighborhood.

She was first drawn to the theater while at Chicago's Englewood High School. But it was painting she studied at Chicago's Art Institute, the University of Wisconsin and in Guadalajara, Mexico.

In 1950 she moved to New York, where for a while she studied at the New School for Social Research. She worked intermittently as a department store clerk and as a producer's helper. She also was a waitress in a Greenwich Village restaurant operated by the family of Robert Nemiroff, a music publisher, to whom she was married in 1953.

Miss Hansberry divided her time between an apartment on Bleecker Street above a laundry and a home in Croton, N. Y., where she enjoyed walking in the woods.

Eesides her husband, she is survived by her mother, who lives in Los Angeles; two brothers. Perry of Los Angeles and Carl of Chicago, and her sister, Mrs. Mamie Tubbs of Los Angeles.

A funeral service will be held on Saturday at 11 A.M. at the Presbyterian Church of the Master, 86 Morningside Avenue,

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