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A detailed still-life composition featuring a quill pen as the central element. The quill is positioned diagonally, with its tip resting on a scroll of aged parchment. The scroll is tied with a red ribbon and a wax seal. In the background, a lit candle in a brass holder provides a warm, ambient light. In the foreground, a glass inkwell with a quill inside and a red wax seal are visible. The entire scene is set on a dark wooden surface.

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Ideological Confrontations in Multiethnic and Multicultural American Society: a Study of Lorraine Hansberry's *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*

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Abstract

The United States of America has a racially and ethnically diverse population. The United States of America recognizes various ethnic and racial categories: White American (Native American and Alaska Native), Asian American, Black or African American, Irish-American, Jewish American, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and people of more races. Each ethnic group varies in myths, ideas, beliefs, thoughts, and culture with the other, because every group possesses different social, economic and cultural background. That is why they have ideological conflicts. The present paper attempts to capture these ideological confrontations in Hansberry's *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*.

Key Words: Ideological Confrontations, Multiethnic, Multicultural, American Society

The range of ethnic backgrounds is tremendous in *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*. The play focuses on Sidney Brustein, a Greenwich Village intellectual. Sidney himself is Jewish; his wife, Iris, is Greco-Gallic-Indian; his friends and acquaintances include Alton Scales – a cream colored black; Wally O' Hara – an Irish-American reform politician who needs to be reformed; and Sal Peretti – an Italian-American juvenile Junkie who works for Sidney and who dies of an overdose of American oppression. The range of social and cultural background is similarly striking: Iris's sister, Mavis is a middle class; her another sister, Gloria is a call girl; Sidney's brother Mammy is a successful businessman; Brustein's upstairs neighbor is a struggling, sponging, homosexual, bohemian playwright – David Ragin and their friend Max is a primitive painter who is

not quite sure whether he prefers food or sex. Sidney Brustein, through his new and struggling newspaper, supports a local politician's campaign. However, Braine affirms "the play becomes Sidney Brustein's personal odyssey of discovery, a confrontation with others in the process of which he discovers himself." (Steven, 1991:82) As the dramatic center of the play, Sidney is also the ethnical center. This does not mean that all of his decisions are wise ones or that they set the standard for those of the other characters. Similarly, Sidney is the cultural center of the play. The play sets in a homogeneous culture, but many cultures collide in Greenwich Village. The people who enter Sidney's apartment represent an astonishingly wide variety of backgrounds.

The range of the characters' cultural attitudes varies as widely as that of their backgrounds. Max insists on art for art's

sake. Alton, an ex-communist, retains his belief in the ideals of Marxism. He insists exclusively on art as an instrument of class struggle. Mavis believes that there is too much pain in real life and wants art to offer a peaceful escape. David strives for an art that presents only the agonizing part of life. Wally urges the need for activist reforms. Alton actually believes in such reforms and works for them until a personal crisis reveals his feet of ground. David believes in the futility of all activity although he remains actively committed to his writing. Mavis believes in middle-class values and in the businessman. David is convinced that prostitutes are the heirs to the wisdom of the ages. Gloria, the prostitute sacrificed on the altar of business, knows the folly of both views but has no wisdom to offer in their place. Mavis suspects in her heart that racism is probably wrong and tries with varying degree of success, to conceal their willfully hold on her. Alton loudly proclaims his identification with all the oppressed and his overwhelming sympathy for them. He is filled with a loathing for homosexuals and unable to forgive the woman he loves for having allowed herself to be victimized as a prostitute. Iris, although vocally tolerant of everybody, offers all sexual deviants, outcasts, radicals, and weirdoes little compassion and even less understanding.

Sidney is the chief connection among all of these cultural interests and between ethnic culture and national or world culture, aesthetic concerns and political commitment, humanistic tragedians and absurdist playwrights, hipsters and squares, artists and common people. One

fundamental reason for Sidney's ability to perform this linking role is suggested by Ellen Schiff:

In making Burstein the axis of her play and the magnet that attracts its outsiders, Hansberry draws on the historical experience of the Jew. Her protagonist personifies an alien factor that has earned a degree of acceptance in society. Having accomplished that, he tends to regard race, creed and previous conditions of servitude largely as bothersome clichés and to devote himself to other pressing concerns. (Steven, 1991:83)

Schiff also argues that Sidney is "one of the most successful characterizations of the Jew on the post -1945 stage" and that "a notably sensitive concept of the Jewish experience as archetypal furnishes the subtext of Hansberry's play." (Steven, 1991:83)

The play deals with the conjugal relationship. Sidney's relationship with his wife, Iris, is strained, because he refuses to recognize the reality of the world but chooses rather to remold it, and her to suit his own personal vision. Sidney has been having a bad time with his wife, "a feather weight who wants to be an actress but is willing to leave him to do television commercials." (Sharon, 1981:184) Sidney tends to lapse into a romantic dream of man as an innocent and free spirit suitably removed from the conventional corruption of the city. In this mood, he takes Huck Finn as an archetype of noble dissociation and sees Iris as a mountain nymph. There is a bitter desperation in Iris's demand to know which role she would play — Margaret Mead or Barbara Allen. Her life is lived as a

counterpart to her husband and his sudden and impractical enthusiasms thrown an increasing strain on their relationship. The crisis between Sidney and his wife is ultimately a crisis of Sydney's liberalism. Iris rebels against the sterility of life which gravitates around idealistic dreams and facile crusades. A life of philosophical speculation and meaningless activity entirely lacking in a commitment means anything more than an irresponsible game. This game achieves nothing more than the exchange of one corruption for another. Iris is the primary woman in Sydney's life. She tolerates the "Pygmalion-like relationship," (Margaret, 1972:65) that initially attracts and continues to hold her husband. Despite his progressive outlook on society, Sidney's views on women are nearly degraded. He demeans Iris's attempts at intellectual discourse and reinforces a girl-child image, complete with flowing hair and idyllic ignorance. When Iris begins to rebel against this image by cutting off her long hair, Sidney is shocked. In an attempt to gain some independent status and to compensate for her failures as an actress, she settles for television commercials whose products make unjustifiable claims. However, Iris's desire for the tinsel of stardom does not blind her to the truth about the progressive politician whom Sidney is supporting. She realizes that Sidney is a stooge of the political bosses who have always fostered dope traffic and other criminal activities in the area. She notices that Sidney, with all his erudite intellectuality, has not seen through a cheap politician.

The political subplot of *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* borders on Wally

O'Hara, a candidate for an unspecified office. He decides to run for office. He plants to undercut the corrupt political machine, to stand up for the little man. He gains grassroots' support of old ladies, truck drivers, businessmen and intellectuals. He wins and discovers to be a part of the political machine. The involvement of Sidney Brustein, the floundering intellectual, gives this political cliché freshness and vitality. Sidney is taken by Wally's argument that he wants to get rid of the community of crime, narcotics, and the machine. As Wally explains, "we're not talking about the world; we're talking about this community . . . your own little ailing neighborhood." (Hansberry, 1964: 22-3) Wally himself is an attractive candidate. He is a successful lawyer with a sense of humor. Aware of women's movement, he engages in a little coterie wit, a "Woman's place is in the oven." (Hansberry, 1964: 24) Sidney mistakes his glibness for sincerity and devotes himself without reservation to the campaign. Sidney belongs to committees, "To save, To Abolish: prohibit, Preserve, Reserve, Conserve," (Hansberry, 1964: 23) since he was eighteen. But he made the mistake of letting his defenses down, of trusting Wally completely. Iris has the grim duty of telling Sidney that Wally is owned by the political bosses, he is ostensibly fighting. "Don't you hear me? . . . They own Wally . . . The people you've been fighting . . . own him completely, the house he lives in, the clothes on his back, the toothpaste he uses." (Hansberry, 1964: 116)

Wally O' Hara is a reformist politician. He desires that Sidney should work for him.

Sidney's newspaper should contain Wally's campaign's poster that is "Vote O' Hara for Reform". (Hansberry, 1964: 20) Sidney is a pure, non-corrupt intellectual. He rejects to publish Wally's campaign poster. His title artsy-crafty newspaper is clear of politics. And he wishes it should be remained clear of politics forever, because he is not interested in politics. Wally persuades him to work for him. Wally intends to bring reform in society. He thinks that current politics is a disease. This disease is destroying the social commitment and environment. He says, "Politics are blight on the natural spirit of man. Politics are a cancer of the soul. Politics are dirty, fetid, compromise ridden exercises in futility." (Hansberry, 1964: 21) Through the politics, Wally is confronting with the great disease of the modern bourgeois campaign. He hangs the poster which says "CLEAN UP COMMUNITY POLITICS Wipe out Bossism VOTE REFORM". (Hansberry, 1964: 34)

After learning of Wally's deception, Sidney could easily revert to his apathetic, cynical state. When Sidney discovers the duplicity and corruption of his politician friend, he has every reason to return to his posture of intellectual apathy. And his odyssey through the maze of human suffering has changed him. Wally enters making direct threats, telling Sidney that he plans to erect stop signs but to ignore the narcotics traffic, warning him that his news paper will be destroyed. But Sidney can no longer accept corruption or the cruelties of man against man. Sidney removes the sign from the window. At the end of the play, Sidney tells Wally:

Every time we say "Live and Let Live" — death triumphs I am going to fight you, Wally You have forced to take a position...the one thing I never wanted to do and what you have to worry about is the fact that some of us will be back out in those streets today. Only this time — thanks to you — we shall be more seasoned, more cynical, tougher, harder to fool. (Hansberry, 1964: 140-1)

The essence of this commitment lies not in facile dreams of political revolution, but in a more fundamental belief in redemption. The belief is that, in Sidney's words:

Death is waste and love is sweet . . . and that flowers smell good and that hurt terribly today and that hurt is desperation and desperation is energy and energy can move things. (Hansberry, 1964: 142)

At the beginning of the play, Sidney has just admitted to the failure of one of his impractical schemes. He throws himself with naive faith into political activism. He is prevailed upon to use a newspaper which has bought to support a reform candidate in a local election. He accepts the campaign as a further diversion. The sign which he puts in his window is a sign pledging support for the reform candidate. The sign is less evidence of his faith in the possibility of change than of a self justifying sense of the righteousness of protest. He tells Mavis, his sister-in-law, that to change one politician for another "is to participate in some expression of the people about the way things are". (Hansberry, 1964: 60) The act of protest is sufficient and when his candidate is elected, he is genuinely amazed for.

Sidney's liberalism is the exercise of conscience with attendant responsibility. He remains unaware, until informed by his wife, that he has secured the election of a candidate who has sold out to the machine.

It is notable as the drama in which Hansberry introduces a homosexual character. Through David Ragin, a gay playwright, Hansberry recognizes the pain connected with having to conceal one's sexuality. But she also indicates impatience with special pleading when Sidney remarks:

David, Please get over the notion that your particular sexuality is something that only the deepest, saddest, the most nobly tortured can know about. It ain't – it's just one kind of sex – that's all. (Hansberry, 1964: 66)

Her handling of the homosexual character in the play exemplifies her ability to use material without regard to her personal experience or preference. It also exposes ignorance and pretentiousness, wherever she found it. David, a playwright in *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* is a homosexual. He embodies many of the characteristics personally detested by Hansberry. He is a whining, self-indulgent character who wears his sexual preference like a chip on his shoulder, daring anyone to knock it off. He writes absurdist plays – as one for which he has won a prize – about two men who are married. The entire action takes place in a refrigerator. David accuses Alton of persecuting him and suggests that he might be a closet homosexual. Hansberry puts these words in Sidney's mouth, "oh, no . . . come on. David! Don't start that jazz with me tonight." David reacts, "it seems to have

conveniently escaped your attention that I am the insulted party here", Sidney replies sharply:

If somebody insults you – sock 'em in the Jaw. If you don't like the sex laws attack 'em. I think they're silly. You wanna get up a petition? I'll sign one. Love little fishes if you want. (Hansberry, 1964: 65-6)

So Hansberry grants David his humanity and complexity by exposing his painful sojourn through his life as a homosexual. Sidney asserts that David's attitude toward his homosexuality is a bore and that his sexuality is not very awesome, although he states before that David's is just one kind of sex. Sidney's advice about how to deal with insults and archaic sex laws sound aggressive. It seems to express his similar approach to such problem. Because, he offers to sign any petition David chooses to write. His comments seem fairer on the self-pitying and self-aggrandizing attitude that some homosexuals and presumably David, have adopted.

The painter, Max, is a minor character whose presence on stage is short. He has no sense of history. His free form paintings lack a real sense of color or design. He is casual about his work. As the art consultant for Sidney's newspaper he is useless. He wants to use three-point type at the bottom of the page for the masthead. An aging macho type, he is torn between eating dinner with Iris, Sidney, and Alton and meeting a click at the Black Knight Tavern. He is not quite sure whether he prefers food or sex. Sex is victorious here. Alton says, "The loins triumph! See, Max, you are not a true

primitive or you would have put food first! You only paint like a savage". (Hansberry, 1964: 38) Max leaves for the Black Knight Tavern and does not return.

The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window constitutes one of the most complete disavowals of absurdist drama. Sidney attacks on the callow prophesy of Golding and Becket. The play represents a dramatist who believes in the validity of insurgence and the redeemable nature of man. The play is the voice of social protest. It is a protest against the suffocating actuality of existence inside a colored skin and against a defeatism ingrained in post-war man. Hansberry is in rebellion against a vision of man which destroys hope and which asserts that moral regression is as inevitable as physical and mental advance. She is in rebellion against a vision of

the savage soul of man from whence sprang, in the first place, the lord of the flies, Beelzebub himself! Man dark gutted creature of ancestral cannibalism and mysterious all consuming evil!
(Hansberry, 1964: 59)

Hansberry continues in Gloria's words, "Things as they are, are as they and have been and will be that way because they got that way because things were as they were in the first place". (Hansberry, 1964: 131) Hansberry makes Sidney mock the standard premises of the absurd, "progress is an illusion and the only reality is nothing". (Hansberry, 1964: 82) Hansberry's complete revulsion from the absurd is summed up finally in the words which she gives to David, as the successful dramatist of the 1960, "Any profession of concern with

decency is the most indecent of all human affectations." (Hansberry, 1964: 133) To Hansberry, therefore,

It is the debate which is, for all human purposes, beside the point the debate which is absurd. The "why" of the why we are here is an intrigue for adolescents: the "how" is what must command the living. (Hansberry, 1964: 82)

Thus, her attack on the absurd is not the conventional Marxist complaint that it fails to concern itself with the social situation or that it lacks real contact with the proletariat. It is an attack on the lack of humanity. When Mavis explains what she had expected of art, it is clear that she emphasizes the need for compassion and hope.

Large portions of *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* contain a continuing argument between the protagonist Sidney Brustein, and the absurdist playwright, David. They discuss over the significance of political activity, the meaning of life, and the proper form of artistic expression. David presents the absurdist view which Sidney counters with Hansberry's brand of humanism. The climactic scene occurs when Sidney is disillusioned by the breakdown of his marriage and the defeat of his hopes for political reform. He abandons his humanism and social commitment and turns his life into a drama of absurdist despair. At this point, the play shifts from realism to that of the theatre of the absurd. After that Sidney returns to a strengthened belief in the virtues of humanism and the struggle for social change and again the play returns to realism.

Gloria's guilt causes her to try suicide four times. She has accepted her father's death bed proclamation. She is a tramp. She chooses Alton as a fiancé, who is attractive, intelligent, and compassionate. She, perhaps, could have averted Alton's rejection of her, if she had told him the truth before he learned it from someone else; she had given up her business. She planned to lead a new life. But she felt she could not escape her past. She was doomed by her father. As a call girl recruited for her innocence, Gloria has been paid to let men make her part of their warped sexual fantasies. She has suffered such mental and physical abuse that she begins taking drugs to escape. After being severely beaten by one of her clients, she decides to break free from the life by marrying Alton. Alton has been told about her profession. He is so appalled by the destruction of his idealized conception of her that he is unwilling even to talk to her. Reeling with shock from this, she is approached by another of Sidney's friends-David. He wants her to aid him in a perverted sexual fantasy. She deliberately takes an overdose of drugs. After learning from a note that Alton will not marry her, Gloria begins drinking and taking pills. After much drinking and singing, she plants a long, wet kiss on David's mouth. As Sidney lays drunk and self absorbed on the couch, she goes in to the bathroom and kills herself. Gloria's suicide is a form of non-commitment to herself. Gloria is the most tragic victim, in the oppression of women. For Gloria there is no new beginning at least not in this life. She had become trapped in a role that her world made attractive, a role that she continued to accept and to which

she became addicted. Her end is inevitable self-destruction. Hansberry places in the hands of Gloria, the true education of Sidney and reveals the varied permutations of women's victimization.

The racial issue is a minor theme of *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* set in 1964, certainly a time of racial turmoil, the play basically reflects harmony and acceptance between blacks and whites, Jews and Christians and people of varied backgrounds. Representative of the middle class, Mavis is not a hopeless racist. Iris and Sidney tell her of Gloria's engagement to Alton in a taunting insensitive manner. Then she becomes more accepting Sidney's Jewish heritage. She will eventually understand Alton's blackness and David's sexuality. Set in Greenwich Village, the vanguard of social and artistic growth, the play beckons a society aware of rich ethnic backgrounds but free of racial strife. Alton Scales epitomizes black identity and pride. When Iris playfully accuses him of being a "white boy playing black boy," he replies,

I am black boy. I didn't make up the game, and as long as a lot of people think there is something wrong with the fact that I am a Negro, I am going to make a point out of being one. (Hansberry, 1964: 41)

For this reason, he has no choice but to reject Gloria after he learns of her tawdry past. Alton declares that he would have forgiven Gloria, if she were a black. Hansberry explains, "Alton . . . could not consciously have known the day before that he would have made such an assessment of the woman he loved." (Cheney, 1984:87) The hour for the unequivocal dignity of the

black man had arrived and prevented his taking white man's leftovers. He could not, in his life depended on it, transplant his decision. He, himself is guilty of racism when he admits that he could accept and forgive a past of prostitution if the woman he loved were black. Likewise, Gloria bitterly condemns Alton when she declares that other prostitutes deliberately sleep with black men, because these men cannot look down on them. She is, however, speaking of the man, she loved and who rejected her only minutes before. Their love was a causality of the white man's oppression of the black — a history which Alton could not forgive.

Sidney knows too well that the forced relationship between ethnic groups can be vicious and humiliating, as in the case of white plantation owners and black slaves. As Alton laments bitterly "I got this color from my grandmother being used as commodity, man. The buying and the selling in this country began with me." (Hansberry, 1964: 101) However, Sidney also knows that voluntary contact between members of different groups may be highly fruitful. Hansberry's involvement with the plight of the Negro is subsumed in a more general concern here. The human failure is evidenced in the hardening of prejudice in racial matters. It becomes for her indicative of a more fundamental failure which underlies the capricious enthusiasm of Sidney Brustein and the disaffiliation of Iris. The commitment which Hansberry urges is a devotion to the humanity which goes beyond a desire for political and moral freedom. All the characters in the play fail in this commitment.

Mavis tells Sidney that her father changed their surname from Parodopoulos to parodous — a Greek chorus,

No matter what is happening in the main action of the play — the chorus is always there commenting, watching We were like that the family at the edge of life not changing anything. Just watching and being. (Hansberry, 1964: 107)

The three Parodous sisters function as a modern day Greek chorus in Sidney Brustein commenting upon and watching life around them. The Parodous women serve individually and collectively to remind him that fate offers him choice. The proper choice is for Sidney to abandon his retreat and to become once again a leader in the cause of justice. The parodous sisters also change and influence events and they have small victories. Iris secures a job as a Golden Girl permanent model. Gloria has the fortitude to quit being hooker, even if she cannot cope with the outside world. Mavis questions Sidney's business deals and Gloria's way of life.

At first seeing Fred as having a touch of the poet, Mavis was happy before they were married. Fred drove forty miles to see her and then drove forty miles back home in a decrepit car. But after their marriage Fred became steady and ordinary. Their sexual appeal for each other faded and Fred took a mistress. Mavis is still grateful that he married her: "there was no rush at home to marry Mavis Parodous." (Hansberry, 1964: 109) So Mavis is trapped. "I take care of my boys. I shop and I worry about my sisters, it's a life." (Hansberry, 1964: 111) She lacks a sense of self worth. Mavis is portrayed as a

bourgeois matron. She is the stereotype of the uptight gentile whose racial prejudice and provincialism come through in the simplest of conversations. Sidney and his friends enjoy many laughs at her expense. Yet it is Mavis who teaches him about courage. She has lived with the secret that her husband has supported a young mistress and illegitimate son for years. And she has made peace with the knowledge. Noting Sidney's shock, Mavis comments on his innocence:

Sometimes I think you kids down here [Greenwich] village] believe your own notions of what the rest of the human race like. There are no squares, Sidney. Believe me when I tell you, everybody is his own hipster. (Hansberry, 1964: 108)

Sidney can only salute this woman whose humanity and intellect he has ridiculed.

For Sidney organized religion satisfies no thirst in his spiritual and moral wasteland. His Jewish background mainly serves as a source of humour. He makes stock reference to his Jewish mother. Wally teases him about being a "nice middle class Jewish boy". (Hansberry, 1964: 26) Mavis seems to need organized religion, as she bitterly says to Sidney and his guest, "where indeed might we look for it [understanding] . . . in this quite dreadful world, since you have got rid of god for us." (Hansberry, 1964: 64) Sidney has come full circle in his search for meaning. He finds no solace in drinking, superficial philosophizing and making poor business deals. Politics provides an outward sign of inner commitment. But he cannot control the evils of Wally and his machine. Drawing strength from his friendship with

Alton, Sidney knows that Mavis's racism typifies middle class insularity which intensifies man's isolation from his fellow man. Organized religion offers Sidney no real solution. The answer then lies within man himself. The man must explore the depths and heights of his own soul and mind to find meaning. Hansberry has involvement with other oppressed people also. Nemiroff argued "Sidney's Jewishness is in no sense accidental" since,

Lorraine, who had a tremendous emotional identity with the Jewish radical and intellectual tradition on many levels . . . deliberately, chose him as the personification of the things he represents in the play. (Steven, 1991: 84)

Sidney has a strong sense of the richness of his Jewish heritage and its links to the struggle against of all forms of oppression. In a speech to Wally, he vigorously affirms: In the ancient times, the good men among my ancestors, when they heard of evil, strapped a sword to their loins and strode into the desert; and when they found it, they cut it down — or were cut down and bloodied the earth with purifying death. (Hansberry, 1964: 96)

Thus, when he is finally able to take a heroic stance and fight the evil around him he becomes inextricably linked to the tradition of these Jewish ancestors. He is also willing to face up the second alternative of being cut down in a purifying death.

Sidney's Jewish background enables Hansberry to express through him her admiration for the Jew's historical resilience in oppression and adversity and for the sensitivity, courage and insight that many

derived from this. Sidney is clearly a worthy descendent of the sensitivity. He is concerned and ultimately deeply committed to eliminating the injustice he sees immediately before him. He wants to fight against the injustices like the drug traffic in his neighborhood and its support by corrupt politicians like Wally. Hansberry approves the special bond between Jews and blacks. She also foresaw that the bond between any two ethnic groups could present problems if it becomes exclusive. Sidney often appears to exhibit a special feeling for Alton, based on a close identification of Jews with Blacks. It seems to be a positive relationship. However, Sidney fails to see his sister-in-law, Mavis, as anything other than “the mother middle class itself,” (Hansberry, 1964: 63) or to discover any positive traits in her. It is his righteous anger at her obvious prejudice toward both Blacks and Jews, but especially toward Blacks. Sidney plays upon her well-known prejudice by telling her about a new suitor for her call girl sister, Gloria. He does not reveal the suitor’s race until Mavis is greatly excited over the prospective groom. Our sympathy is with Sidney because Mavis’s racism deserves such a blow. When he introduces her to Alton, the suitor, who appears to be white and then chooses the most embarrassing moment to reveal his race. He clearly portrayed as having gone too far for Sidney’s own prejudice arises in justifiable repugnance of racism. But it becomes distorted when it leads him to mistake this particular flaw in a person for the whole person. Sidney makes his embarrassing revelation to Mavis that; he, Alton, and Iris “variously concentrate on the food and

exchange superior and rather childish glances, letting her live through the moment of discomfort.”(Hansberry, 1964: 62-3)

Sidney is himself a deliberately flawed protagonist. He displays prejudices and character weaknesses similar to those he attacks in other. He too can be vicious and unreasonable and highly unjust. He is distinguished from other characters by his greater awareness, sensitivity, integrity and capacity for growth. These qualities enable Sidney to comprehend any meaningful change he can bring about in society. He must also include a change in himself. These qualities also make Sidney finally see beyond the stereotype in which he has encased Mavis. He realizes that she too has a measure of awareness, sensitivity and integrity and would like to improve herself. He realizes that her ideals and goals are not as different from his own as he had previously believed. One new perception that enables him to draw nearer to her is his awareness that she too has come from a rich ethnic background. Mavis reveals to Sidney that when she was young, her father staged Greek tragedies in their home with all the family taking part. She reveals her sensitive awareness of many of her weaknesses and limitations. She also reveals her courage in facing her husband’s infidelity and the fact that he has an illegitimate son and her yearning to reach a highest level of thinking than she believes she is capable of. These revelations help in changing Sidney’s view about Mavis. He increases his respect for her and by his pain that she remains unable to transcend her limitations. His realization is a step on his tortuous and often tormenting path toward self-discovery and a fuller

understanding of the world around him .The realization helps him to make his final assertion that “the earth turns and men change every day and that rivers run and people wanna be better than they are.”(Hansberry, 1964: 142) His ability to make this assertion is his triumph. Hansberry assesses the problems involved in overcoming inter-ethnic hostilities and creating a workable multi-ethnic society. She knew the complexity and agony in such a struggle.

Sidney appreciates the beauty and values of each ethnic tradition such as his own and Mavis’s. He also recognizes the extraordinary achievements that may be reached by intertwining traditions. Sidney’s favorite musical recording is described as,

A white blues out of the Scotland; a lyrical lament whose Isles more than one century ago and has crossed the ocean to be touched by the throb of black folk blues and then, finally, by the soul of black country crackers. It is in a world old, haunting, American and infinitely beautiful. (Hansberry, 1964: 11)

He is also enchanted by his wife, Iris’s cheekily cosmic performance of a dance that illustrates her mixed ethnic background:

She snakes out promptly, hissing, in the dance steps of the Greek Miserlou which turns into a jig and then into the usual stereotyped notion of some Indian war dance concluding with a Marilyn Monroe Freeze. (Hansberry, 1964: 28-9)

Sidney thoroughly remains respectful toward his own Jewish tradition. He demonstrates a profound appreciation for other cultures. He makes detailed and accurate references to the great creators and creations from around the world, including Plutarch, Euripides, Thoreau, Shakespeare, Goethe, Camus, Strindberg, Japanese painting and Yiddish melodies. In addition to these he sits up cross legged in Buddhist fashion. These references and poses strongly emphasize Sydney’s refusal to restrict his thinking and understanding of the world to one tradition. Thus, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window* is essentially not about the racism but about the multiethnic and multicultural ideologies.

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