

Spring 2017

Representing Ruth: An Actress's Plan for A Raisin in the Sun

Rachel Hillebrand
College of DuPage

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.cod.edu/essai>

Recommended Citation

Hillebrand, Rachel (2017) "Representing Ruth: An Actress's Plan for A Raisin in the Sun," *ESSAI*: Vol. 15 , Article 22.
Available at: <https://dc.cod.edu/essai/vol15/iss1/22>

This Selection is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at DigitalCommons@COD. It has been accepted for inclusion in ESSAI by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@COD. For more information, please contact orenick@cod.edu.

Representing Ruth: An Actress's Plan for *A Raisin in the Sun*

by Rachel Hillebrand

(English 1153)

Being selected to play the character Ruth Younger in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* is the greatest honor of my acting career. Because I believe her role is crucial to the play, I want to do the best job I can to represent Ruth accurately. Ruth is one of the most hard-working, perseverant, and stout-hearted characters I have ever discovered. Through my portrayal of Ruth's mannerisms, appearance, and interactions with the other characters, I hope to transform myself into a faithful, forgiving wife; a weary but reliable mother; and a simple, good-hearted woman who is faced with hardship and heartbreak but truly *endures*.

My interpretation of *A Raisin in the Sun* shows Ruth as a fighter who has grown tired of fighting, a strong but worn-out woman. She appears as an African American woman in her thirties, with a face that once was quite pretty, but shows the wear and tear of her difficult life. In a way, Ruth's appearance is similar to the family's apartment in that "weariness has...won" (487). Ruth should dress simply, in a plain dress of dark blue or gray, with her hair in an orderly bun. She is a thin, small woman, and her disappointment with the world must be portrayed on stage with a kind of tired pride, keeping her chin up but allowing her shoulders to slump with despair. Through her posture and way of speaking, Ruth should at times display despair and discouragement, such as heavy, tired steps after she has found out she is with child (519), weary expressions and a subdued posture when arguing with Walter, and absolute defeat when the money has vanished (569).

When Ruth decides to fight, her mannerisms should change, revealing her deep-rooted strength and her determination to *choose* happiness. There should be a lightness in her step and an erectness to her posture, so that she almost looks "real young again" (490). Her gestures should be a hint carefree and girlish when she is falling back in love with Walter (550). Her effort to be positive and cheerful during the packing and planning for the house should be portrayed through facial expressions, a change in her laughter, and how she treats the other characters.

Communication and character interplay is complicated for Ruth, since she is a mother, a wife, a daughter, and a sister, all at the same time. In the beginning, Ruth seems to harbor hostility and displeasure toward her husband, for she is tired of his talking and his dreams (490). The audience must catch the sense that Ruth and Walter were in love once, but that their marriage is in trouble because of their difficult lives, and that the two are starting to lose hope. Ruth's discouragement with her husband should be expressed in her dejection when she shares her feelings with Mama that Walter "needs something I can't give him any more" (508). But after the house is purchased, when the couple's interactions begin to change in scene III, Ruth must transform into a blushing bride, looking at her husband with bright eyes and fresh love (549). Then, when Walter loses the money, Ruth's happiness must dissolve into cold, unforgiving anger toward her husband (570).

Regarding Travis, Ruth seems to sometimes overlook or ignore her son, treating him as a child and not trusting him with real family matters. She is always telling him to go play outside or "go downstairs" (574), but now and then, the audience must catch a glimpse of the loving mother Ruth truly is. When she gently teases Travis before sending him to school, Ruth must emanate warmth, caring, and teasing, and a hint of the mockery of a mother who is truly fond of her son. Her pent-up love and tenderness must be clear when Ruth asks Travis, "Now whose little old angry man are you?" (492). Through these interactions, Ruth shows that she loves and cares for her son, but she is so overwhelmed by her trials that she doesn't always make time for him.

With Beneatha, Ruth should have a kind of indifference. Now and then she might roll her eyes at Beneatha's unusual actions, but overall, she should seem disinterested in what her sister-in-law is doing. During Beneatha's African dance scene, Ruth should do some housework in the background, shaking her head a little at Beneatha's antics and scolding Walter to "stop acting like a fool" (526). Ruth doesn't care for the deep questions or adventures of the times; she focuses only on work that needs to be done and how to do it.

With Mama, Ruth should be courteous and respectful. Ruth seems to be able to relate to Mama, especially when Walter is concerned. Even Walter senses this, telling Ruth, "You know she [Mama] listen to you more than...me and Bennie" (494). Ruth also appears to want Mama's respect and trust in return, telling Travis to "stop asking your grandmother for money" (491). In a way, the two should appear as kindred spirits, two weary women who married Younger men, fostered dreams and plans, but later experienced disappointment and sadness as life unfolded. Perhaps the most important line that Ruth must deliver is in Act III, when Walter has lost the money and it looks as if the family will stay in the apartment after all. This is when Ruth protests against Mama's calm decision, insisting, "We got to get OUT OF HERE!!!" (569). This emotional line should be delivered with a mix of determination and desperation. This is when Ruth's world is falling apart, when her hope is running out. Her raw emotions must be conveyed in her wild eyes, her unwavering tone, and her powerful, erect posture. She knows the family's only hope is leaving the apartment, and this is her final fight.

I hope that my interpretation of Ruth reveals how important Ruth is to the play. I believe Ruth is the most vital character in the story, since she is the one the audience must understand. In some ways, Ruth represents the average person, who was dealt a challenging hand in life but chooses to persevere through it anyway. Her discouragement, her breakdown, and finally her rise back to confidence must be clearly portrayed, so that her emotions can be felt by the crowd and stir them within. They must understand how Ruth fights through her suffering with bravery and courage; maintains her honor and dignity; keeps her family together; and stands up for what she believes. Ruth is a model for every woman who hopes to overcome the challenges of life and emerge with joy and success.

Works Cited

Hansberry, Lorraine. *A Raisin in the Sun*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994. 486-577. Print.